



Deliberations
on
The Life Divine

Volume - II

Book - I : Chapters VII - XII

Ananda Reddy

Deliberations on
The Life Divine
(Chapterwise Summary Talks)

Volume Two

MP3 Audio DVDs

on all the chapters of *The Life Divine* are available.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine*
(Chapterwise Summary Talks)
Volume Two

Book One: Chapters VII-XII

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Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research
Puducherry, India



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*To the loving memory
of my Bapu,
V. Madhusudan Reddy
One who inspired me to
walk on the Sunlit Path...*

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Author's Note

This book is an edited version of the transcriptions of my summary talks on *The Life Divine*, delivered in the early years of the previous decade. These talks were delivered at SACAR during the February and August Darshans at Pondicherry.

The whole idea was to reach out to the non-philosophic audience the major arguments of each chapter of *The Life Divine*. I have therefore tried to use simple language, without much philosophic jargon, and give ample examples. These homely and simple examples often clicked the main idea I was trying to develop and did their work!

Sometimes, carried away by the beauty and intensity of the ideas in a particular paragraph, I used to become eloquent and quote something from the Mother or Sri Aurobindo which, however, may not have been exact, for I could not immediately lay my hands on the exact quotation. So, I seek the indulgence of the reader to be excused for any inaccurate quotes. Sometimes, it may even have happened that inadvertently, while recollecting an incident or an event from the lives of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, I may have been inaccurate, but conveyed the meaning in essence.

I have tried to keep in this book the oral tone of my talks. The transcriptions have been edited to suit the purpose of a book. Sometimes the reader may find a 'recap' of some ideas in a particular chapter, because that was how I used to maintain the continuity from one class to another during the ten-day sessions. The reader may also come across references to various 'points' or arguments. These are the points given in the Lecture Notes added at the end of each chapter.

I would advise the interested reader to read the original chapter from *The Life Divine* before reading my explanations and comments. And then re-read the original chapter.

The reader will enjoy these talks if he or she reads this book with an open mind, throwing overboard the unsympathetic critical lens of a self-appointed scholar or expert in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy—for in reality none at present can claim such a distinction.

Let this book serve the reader as the first small steps towards those Himalayan peaks of vision and knowledge that is Sri Aurobindo.

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Acknowledgments

It is now more than four years since the first volume of *Deliberations on The Life Divine* was published. Because of the pressing works of administration and teaching at the Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research (SACAR), and my frequent lecture tours in India and abroad, I could not fulfill my promise of bringing out the second volume of this book in a 'short span of time'. I thank the patient reader for his indulgence.

This volume too underwent a couple of stages of editing. First it was Dr Palani who had typed the original manuscript from listening to my audio talks on *The Life Divine*. In the second stage, it was Douglas McElheny who contributed perceptive editorial comments bringing in greater order in the text keeping alive the general tone of the talks. I am deeply indebted to his labour of love and kindness.

However, the book would have taken longer time to appear had it not been for Dr Larry Seidlitz who took it up in all earnestness and brought into these chapters, vii to xii, a critical editorial refinement. He also provided some invaluable and insightful suggestions that have enriched the text of this book. My deep and sincere thanks to him.

Others of the SACAR team made their contribution in bringing out this second volume. Deepshikha added her meticulous proof-reading of the manuscript and I am thankful to her in seeing that the book comes out without any typos!

I am much obliged to Shri Rammohan Reddy and his daughter Ms Pavani Reddy for part-contribution in publication of this volume. The major amount towards the publication is offered by my friend and well wisher Ms Isa Wagner. I am deeply indebted to her for her sincere gesture of love and good will.

I feel a deep satisfaction in placing this volume in the hands of the readers who I hope will be encouraged to read the original magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo and drink deep from the nectarine spring—*The Life Divine*.

This book is a form of expressing my gratitude to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for all that They mean to my inner and outer life.

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Guiding Words

1. Which of Sri Aurobindo's books should I start with?

The Life Divine.

The Mother

(*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 12, p. 217)

2. We have decided to read paragraph by paragraph so that we can go into certain detailed explanations, but this method has one drawback: as I have already told you, it is that Sri Aurobindo takes up all the theories and expounds them in all their details, with all their arguments, in order to show later what their defects are and their inability to solve the problem, and to present his own solution; but (laughing), when we stop in the middle of an argument and take a single paragraph, if we read this paragraph without going on to the very end, we may very well imagine or believe that he is giving his own opinion.

In fact there are some unscrupulous people who have done that, and when they wanted to prove that their own theories were correct, they quoted

paragraphs from Sri Aurobindo without saying what went before or what came after, in support of their own theory. They said, “You see, Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* has written that.” He has written that, but that does not mean that it was his own way of seeing. And now we are facing the same difficulty. For the last two lessons, I think, I have been reading the detailed demonstration of one of the modern theories of life, evolution, the purpose of existence—or the purposelessness of existence—and Sri Aurobindo presents this in quite a... conclusive way, as if it were his own theory and own way of seeing. We stop in the middle and are left with a kind of uneasiness and the feeling, “But that is not what he told us! How is it that he is expounding that to us now?...” It is quite a big drawback. But if I were to read to you the whole argument, when we came to the end you wouldn’t remember the beginning and you wouldn’t be able to follow! So the best thing is to go on quietly, one paragraph at a time, trying to understand what he is saying, but without thinking that he wants to prove to us that it is true. He simply wants to expound the theories with everything that supports them, without telling us that this is the best way of seeing things.

In reality, you should take this reading as an opportunity to develop the philosophical mind in yourself and the capacity to arrange ideas in a logical order and establish an argument on a sound basis. You must take this like dumb-bell exercises for developing muscles: these are dumb-bell exercises for the mind to develop one’s brain. And you must not jump to hasty conclusions. If we wait with patience, at the end of the chapter he will tell us—and tell us on a basis of irrefutable argument—why he has come to the conclusion he arrives at. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9, pp. 249-250)

3. It is as though Sri Aurobindo were putting himself at the centre of a kind of sphere, at the centre of a wheel the spokes of which end in a circumference. And he always goes back to his starting-point and goes all the way out to the surface, and so on, which gives the impression that he repeats the same thing several times, but it is simply the exposition of the thought so that one can follow it. One must have a very clear memory for ideas to really understand what he says.

I am emphasising this because, unless you proceed system-atically, you won’t derive much benefit from this reading; it will appear to you like a

maze where it is very difficult to find one's way... All the ideas are joined at the centre, and at the circumference they go in altogether different directions. (*Collected Works of the Mother*, Vol. 9, p. 232)

The Ego and the Dualities

Today we will discuss Chapter VII, ‘The Ego and the Dualities’. The opening quotation from the Swetaswatara Upanishad reads:

The soul seated on the same tree of Nature is absorbed and deluded and has sorrow because it is not the Lord, but when it sees and is in union with that other self and greatness of it which is the Lord, then sorrow passes away from it.¹

This quote gives us the main idea of this chapter. In fact, if you remember, in Chapter VI (Volume I) we were talking about the universal and the individual being, their relation and interdependence on each other. So we know that it is important for the individual to regain his universality in order to arrive at the Transcendent or the realisation of the Brahman.

It is, I feel, this loss of the universal consciousness that is symbolised in the story of Adam and Eve. We spoke of this before, but here in the opening paragraph of Chapter VII, Sri Aurobindo refers to this story from the Bible and links it to what he means by the loss of universality. The poetic parable of the Hebrew Genesis typifies the fall of man. That fall is his deviation from the full and pure acceptance of God and himself to a dividing consciousness which brings with it the train of all the dualities—life and death, good and evil, etc. Looking at this parable from a different angle, we could say that the Purusha, here represented by Adam, gives in to the allurements by Prakriti, here represented by Eve. In a way, this is the alluring of the soul by Nature which brings the separative consciousness, represented in the parable by the fruit of the tree of knowledge partaken by Eve and later by Adam.

How is it that the Purusha gets tempted by or attracted to Nature? Is he not aware of what will happen if he gets attracted to Prakriti? Well, it is not the case that he does not know; on the contrary, the Purusha sees the potentialities of his own Nature, Being sees the potentialities of Becoming. After all, this Becoming, this Nature or Prakriti, is an aspect of himself; Brahman brings forth his own consciousness and asks it to create these myriad universes! Prakriti is thus inseparable from the Purusha. So, it is not that Purusha is taken by surprise or is lured, that is only in the superficial sense; in the philosophic sense it is his own consent to become.

So the story of Adam and Eve seems to be nothing but the story of Being and Becoming. In the beginning, Adam and Eve were living in the garden of Eden, living in paradise. Paradise symbolises a consciousness in which unity and oneness are predominant. Paradise is not 'a place' to go to have the best entertainment. This idea which is given in most of the scriptures is only to attract the sensuous man, the vital man, because the scriptures were also written according to the times. Sri Aurobindo points out that every scripture has both temporal aspects and eternal aspects. He says that the temporal aspect is present in every scripture, though in the Bhagavad Gita it is less prominent. However, in the Koran or the Bible we see these temporal aspects in great proportion. So the description of paradise in these scriptures is all that a man who lives in a desert and is thirsty for a sip of water could hope for. You can imagine what an attraction such a paradise was to a nomad of those times!

Philosophically, however, paradise is the consciousness of unity, of universality, and the fall is the fall from that universality into an individual consciousness. Here the sense of 'I', the sense of ego comes in. That is why Adam and Eve were ashamed to be naked in front of God; they think that they are separate; they have the sense of otherness. As long as they had the consciousness of oneness with God, the sense of shame and nakedness did not come into their mind. But now it comes and as a result they cover themselves with fig leaves. This is symbolic of hiding myself, the so-called 'I', from the universal consciousness which is God. And redemption is not through any kind of penance. It is not a question of sin, but rather a question of regaining this universality. If there are any means given to us, such as *pujas* or sacrifices, they are not themselves the redemption. They are rather symbolic ceremonies and gestures which help us to go beyond our individual, selfish, ego-centred consciousness and regain a universal consciousness. This is the basic idea with which Sri Aurobindo starts off this chapter.

It is this fall into the false individual consciousness (as opposed to the true individual which is one with the Divine) that results in ego consciousness. This false individual feels separate. And with this falsity comes the dualities—life and death, pain and suffering, etc. So the question is: How do we regain the universal consciousness?

The first point we have seen till now is how the recovery of a higher knowledge can reconcile the opposition between the lower and the higher. This requires obviously an exceeding of human consciousness, and this is what we have now to look into. Is it at all possible to exceed the human consciousness and if it is done what are the results from the recovery of a higher knowledge?

Sri Aurobindo provides us with beautiful and apt examples. He tells us to take the senses for example. Judging by our external senses, we say that something is true because I am seeing it, or I am touching it, or I am smelling it, or I am tasting it, or I am hearing it. These are the main parameters of knowledge for us. But is this sense-knowledge the ultimate knowledge? If I hear a carpenter hammering away, it is my ear which has given me the awareness that someone is working. But there may be somebody in the next street who is making a similar sound and I cannot hear it. A dog, however, could hear both sounds. How? Because a dog has got a sharper sense of hearing which can catch vibrations from a further distance. So here we can see already that our senses have a limitation. To give another example, I cannot see the craters on the moon. So what do I do? I take a telescope and with its help I can clearly see the craters. So what am I doing? I am extending the range of my senses. In the same manner, the Native Americans can put their ears to the ground and hear a horse or a train coming from miles away because they can feel those sound vibrations from the earth itself. (Incidentally, it seems that when the Mother was a young child, she got this science from a Native American, and she also tried to listen to those sound vibrations.)

We can see the possibility that our sensorial knowledge is not the ultimate knowledge. There is something beyond the senses and we have to see what are the different levels of consciousness apart from our human level of consciousness. This is difficult for the common man to accept. We can accept that the dog has a better sense of hearing, but if we are told by a yogi that there is a higher consciousness called the illumined mind or the higher mind, our reply would be, "All that is philosophy, I don't believe in it." The scientist says, "No, I cannot accept it." Regardless, there are other levels of consciousness which have been experienced by hundreds of people. So they do exist and they become more and more universalised as one rises.

What advantage is there in having a universalised consciousness? One very practical advantage is that we go beyond the dualities of pain and suffering, pleasure and sorrow, etc. We are always looking for a means to get beyond these dualities. We meditate to get a state of peace in which the tension and problems of the mind are not present. We see that in our meditative moods there is a kind of peace that sets in. Why do you get peace in meditation? It is because for a minute or a few minutes, depending on your capacity, you link yourself with the universal consciousness. It might have been the experience of all us here, at one time or another, that when we meditated we entered into a profound quietness. That is the moment of contact with the universality. We can have this contact emotionally as well with bhakti or bhakti songs. When we listen to the Mother's music, it also brings a contact with the universal consciousness.

Whenever there is—even if only for a fraction of a second—the contact and you feel this quietness, peace, joy or ananda, one is most likely in a mood of surrender. That is where the yoga of surrender comes in. Concretely this means that we surrender each part of our being. Surrender to whom? It may be a person, not a common human being, but one who has that universal consciousness. There may be hundreds of different ways of doing it, but the secret of finding peace, joy, ananda or tranquillity lies in contacting that superior universal consciousness either directly or through a genuine spiritual guru.

The Mother tells us that when we sleep, though not always, our inner being contacts Sachchidananda, and it is this contact with the Transcendent consciousness that gives full rest to the body. Of course, this does not come so easily. The Mother says,

But there is the possibility of a sleep in which you enter into an absolute silence, immobility and peace in all parts of your being and your consciousness merges into Sachchidananda. You can hardly call it sleep, for it is extremely conscious. In that condition you may remain for a few minutes, but these few minutes give you more rest and refreshment than hours of ordinary sleep. You cannot have it by chance; it requires a long training.²

So it is not necessarily the number of hours that you sleep which is

important. What is important is that moment of contact. Let me quote the Mother again to explain how to get this contact:

But from the point of view of sleep and dreams of which we were speaking, there is a very remarkable phenomenon. I have tried it out. If you are able to establish not only silence in your head but also repose in your vital, the stoppage of all the activities of your being, and if coming out of the domain of forms you enter into what is called Sachchidananda, the supreme consciousness, then with three minutes of that state you can have more rest than in eight hours of sleep. It is not very easy, no... It is the consciousness absolutely conscious but completely still, in the full original Light. If you get that, if you are able to immobilise everything in you, then your whole being participates in this supreme consciousness and I have well observed that as regards rest (and I mean by rest bodily rest, the repose of the muscles) three minutes of that state were equivalent to eight hours of ordinary sleep.³

For example, in the afternoon you might sleep for three hours, but when you wake up you are still tired. Another time, when you have a lot of work, you might have three minutes of nap in your chair and afterwards feel completely refreshed.

That is because your mind is suspended, and there is a stilling of all the activities of the being, and because of that suspension, a contact with the universal has been made. What we are driving at is that it is the universal, the transcendent that brings this peace and takes us away from the dualities. Here Sri Aurobindo says,

Then alone the soul in Nature can be allowed to partake of the fruit of the tree of life and be as the Divine and live for ever. For then only can the purpose of its descent into material consciousness be accomplished, when the knowledge of good and evil, joy and suffering, life and death has been accomplished through the recovery by the human soul of a higher knowledge which reconciles and identifies these opposites in the universal and transforms their divisions into the image of the divine Unity.⁴

This is perhaps how we have to bring spirituality to the common person. This higher truth has to be made relevant to our day-to-day activities. Unless the spiritual truth is brought into contact with daily life, it will only become one more 'ism', one more religion, one more philosophy in which the

common person will not have much interest. Wherever I went for my talks I have seen that if we can relate Sri Aurobindo's teachings to day-to-day practical problems then only do they become relevant and even understandable. We are all seeking solutions to our problems and there is no one religion which can give solutions to all people. Religion gives blanket solutions. It says, "Do this and don't do that." It gives us only rules and regulations. This will not serve us anymore. We need a force, we need a knowledge which can come to us on a personal level. That is spiritual knowledge and it is here that Sri Aurobindo is extremely relevant. He comes to each one of us in the way that we personally need.

Sri Aurobindo speaks further about how the higher consciousness has to be brought down into the lower. This is what we mean by transformation. Earlier we spoke about this integration or transformation and touched upon an important point. We asked ourselves if it is possible to integrate water and rock, and saw that they cannot be integrated if we look at them as two different entities. But they are one and the same in essence, is it not? Let us go a bit deeper and try to understand this concept.

Sri Aurobindo brings in a new idea—that of the absolute freedom of the infinite. One of the capacities of the infinite is to limit itself and even to be the opposite of itself. For example, let us take the number 100. If we count backwards we arrive at the number 0. And we can continue counting backwards with the negative numbers until we reach -100. So we could say that the opposite of 100 is -100. Applying this idea to the concept of the infinite, we could say that if the number 100 represents the superconscious, then -100 represents the unconscious. But is -100 non-existent? No, it also has an existence, but it is a negative existence. Similarly, when we say unconscious, it does not mean that consciousness is not there; it is only kept in abeyance.

This example suggests that it is the same Sachchidananda that is both the superconscious and the unconscious. At present, humanity is at the crucial level where we can see all the positive as well as all the negative within us. Sri Aurobindo is telling us that we alone can go into the positive because we have that dual consciousness. He states that we have the potential to see the infinite and to become the infinite. Humanity is the first species in Nature

which has been given the vision to see its infinite possibilities, and we should not purposely blind our eyes to them. He says,

This alone is man's business in the world and the justification, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.⁵

The next point we will take up is regarding our values, which are useful and practical, but not necessarily the ultimate ones. Each country and each culture has its own values. Each state in India and each caste has its own values. Values are there to guide us in whatever manner and with whatever limitations, but they are the guiding lights for the common person. But there is one important thing to remember about values and that is that they have constantly changed. That is the beauty of values; they have never remained the same. You may say that there are some perennial values like telling the truth, but that is not a social, ethical, or aesthetic value. Only values connected with our spiritual growth are perennial. All those that are not connected with our inner being have changed. The values of speech, the values of dress, the values of relationships between children and parents—all values have been constantly changing. In fact, some values go away and then come back after some time.

Just the other day I was speaking to somebody about the value of the Sati system, which exists even today in Rajasthan. It is the age old system of the wife immolating herself on the funeral pyre of the husband! Historically it comes from a time when Rajput warriors were dying in the wars and afterwards the surviving women had a very miserable future. They were either social outcastes or tormented by other religious rules and ostracised. So this cultural value of Sati was there. Whether it was good or bad, it had a temporal value. But today in the context of spirituality we understand that each soul comes for a specific experience which it has to fulfill in this life. To die prematurely is not a value. To live with meaning, to live to fulfill God in life is a higher spiritual value.

We have said that values keep changing over time, but introducing higher values is something that must be done with great caution. In chapter three of the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna tells us not to disturb values that are integral to the faith of a person:

He should not create a division of their understanding in the ignorant who are attached to their works; he should set them to all actions, doing them himself with knowledge and in Yoga.⁶

Reiterating this view, Sri Aurobindo explains in *The Life Divine*:

To enlarge the sense-faculties without the knowledge that would give the old sense-values their right interpretation from the new standpoint might lead to serious disorders and incapacities, might unfit for practical life and for the orderly and disciplined use of the reason. Equally, an enlargement of our mental consciousness out of the experience of the egoistic dualities into an unregulated unity with some form of total consciousness might easily bring about a confusion and incapacity for the active life of humanity in the established order of the world's relativities. This, no doubt, is the root of the injunction imposed in the Gita on the man who has the knowledge not to disturb the life-basis and thought-basis of the ignorant; for, impelled by his example but unable to comprehend the principle of his action, they would lose their own system of values without arriving at a higher foundation.⁷

A person may be living according to some value system and if you ask him to change suddenly the old platform on which he was standing securely, it may be disastrous. He may not understand the new values and he may land up in a great confusion—hanging between the old and the new values! An example of this was the flower-child movement in the West, in America, especially. The Mother had some praise for them—these so-called hippies. They were daring enough to bring down the old values, but not adventurous enough to discover the new values. Many halted at a mid-stage and did not reach a higher stage and grab a hold of something new. So there were drastic changes, but they were not always healthy for the society. As the Mother explains:

To break away from the old traditions and not to obey the old rules is good—but on condition that one discovers in oneself a higher and truer consciousness which manifests Harmony, Peace, Beauty and a superior Order, vast and progressive.⁸

You express your faith in Sri Aurobindo with certain words which are for you the best expression of this faith; this is quite all right. But if you are convinced that these very words are the only correct ones to express what

Sri Aurobindo is, then you become dogmatic and are ready to create a religion.⁹

This kind of radicalism may land us in a kind of 'ism', and Sri Aurobindo is already in danger of becoming one more creed. Aurobindonians must be extremely careful when they speak about Sri Aurobindo and the Mother so as not to turn them into one more guru or one more religion. See what the Mother replied to a sadhak who asked her the following:

What should be the attitude of the sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's yoga towards the various forms of God worshipped by different religions in the past and the present? If he continues to worship them, will it create an obstacle to his progress and prevent his realisation of his aim?

A benevolent goodwill for all worshippers.

An enlightened indifference towards all religions.

As for the relation with the beings of the Overmind, if this relation exists already, each case must have its own solution.¹⁰

Sri Aurobindo explains beautifully in *Essays on the Gita* that even people who worship one deity or god or goddess are appealing to a Power that is superior to man, and that is a right beginning. If a person directs his prayers towards a higher power, that is good enough for a starting point. This will of itself lead him to a higher realisation and when the time comes he will realise in his consciousness that all the *pujas* and ceremonies have no relevance any more. The values will change for the man who grows. So what we have said in India about the different gods and goddesses has its place, but the sooner we come out of it the better. There should not however be any enforcing. Nobody should be able to go and say 'Don't do that!' to a particular centre. On the other hand, I know that there are some centres that are a bit fanatic. To quote the Mother again:

The spiritual spirit is not contrary to a religious feeling of adoration, devotion and consecration. But what is wrong in the religions is the fixity of the mind clinging to one formula as an exclusive truth. One must always remember that formulas are only a mental expression of the truth and that this truth can always be expressed in many other ways.¹¹

I myself feel that a Sri Aurobindo centre is not one more centre of a particular guru. It is rather a centre of a higher supramental consciousness which can face and which should face other systems, other thinking. We

have come to the point where the higher must be brought into contact with day to day life, with different values and different thinking. That is one of the fundamental tenets of this centre, SACAR. We like it to be this kind of meeting point between Sri Aurobindo's consciousness and other thinking because it is only through this meeting, this contact that any relevance can be established between Sri Aurobindo and current systems of thought and living. Otherwise, Sri Aurobindo will only be on the bookshelves or at his samadhi. People must come in contact with the thought, with the vision of Sri Aurobindo which in turn may give birth to new thought befitting for the future of humanity.

Next we will focus on the ego-centered consciousness. Ego is considered to be the centre of our life and world. But this illusion needs to be removed by an effective and systematic knowledge:

The new life and power of the human integer must necessarily repose on a realisation of the great verities which translate into our mode of conceiving things the nature of the divine existence. It must proceed through a renunciation by the ego of its false standpoint and false certainties, through its entry into a right relation and harmony with the totalities of which it forms a part and with the transcendences from which it is a descent, and through its perfect self-opening to a truth and a law that exceed its own conventions,—a truth that shall be its fulfillment and a law that shall be its deliverance. Its goal must be the abolition of those values which are the creations of the egoistic view of things; its crown must be the transcendence of limitation, ignorance, death, suffering and evil.¹²

For example, even today, so-called educated people say automatically and spontaneously that the sun rises and the sun sets. But let's just halt for a moment and ask ourselves if it is right to say so. It is actually not true that the sun rises nor is it true that the sun sets. This is a *practical* truth, if I may say so. But we have accepted this and on the basis of this false truth we organise our lives. In fact, the majority of our villagers still have their daily routine connected with the sunrise and the sunset. Even the whole of nature goes by the sunrise and the sunset. And long ago somebody named Galileo came and told us that the sun does not rise, but rather it is the earth that rotates around the sun. Well, you know the fate he had to face! People would

not believe it and the religious people cried, “How can he utter such a blasphemy?” So he was put to death. Later on science developed and validated what Galileo said. But the practical truth of the sunrise and the sunset is still very necessary to life on earth. The birds sleep with the sunset and even the Mother tells us that we should go to sleep early because,

When the sun sets, a kind of peace descends on earth and this peace is helpful for sleep.

When the sun rises, a vigorous energy descends on earth and this energy is helpful for work.

When you go to bed late and get up late, you contradict the forces of Nature, and that is not very wise.¹³

When science found out that in truth the sun is the centre and the earth moves around it, then that truth was connected to our day-to-day life. And how beautifully it has been connected! It may be irrelevant for you and me, but the very fact that I use my internet or that some of you are carrying your mobile phones is due to the discovery of this truth. We can also land on the moon, watch TV and use the internet all because of the discovery of this one truth. So you see that it is possible to find a higher truth and relate it to our common life. Sri Aurobindo tells us that just as we need science to explain the reality behind matter, so we need a synthetic knowledge which will explain the reality of our mental consciousness. Otherwise, there could be a great confusion in the present human establishment.

This example of the sunrise and the sunset is also a perfect example of the working of our own human ego consciousness. To explain what I mean by this, let's look at a beautiful sentence given to us by Sri Aurobindo where he says:

So also for the mental consciousness God moves round the personal ego and all His works are brought to the judgment of our egoistic sensations, emotions and conceptions and are there given values and interpretations which, though a perversion and inversion of the truth of things, are yet useful and practically sufficient in a certain development of human life and progress. They are a rough practical systemisation of our experience of things valid so long as we dwell in a certain order of ideas and activities. But they do not represent the last and highest state of human life and knowledge.¹⁴

The false truth in which we live is created by the ego sense. I am the centre around which everything moves! Looking into ourselves we can see that this is exactly how we are. The 'I' sense is so very dominant that it blinds our vision and we begin to think that everybody lives around us, that is, lives *for* us. This is the false truth in which we live.

We live in a psychological construction where we become the centre of all movement. And the greatest fallacy is that we extend this judgment even to God and say that God also moves around me! That is why we normally complain when we have some kind of a tragedy or illness. We say, "Hey! What is God doing? Why is he not looking after me?"—as if we are so important and God has no other job than to look after us! When something bad happens—for example, somebody dies in the family—we lament and say, "God has been so cruel!" as if we are the centre around which God moves. The ego has such an incredible audacity that it reserves the right to judge even God himself. So what is needed is for the practical truth of the ego to be integrated with a higher truth. Just as science has incorporated the truths of Physics and Astronomy into our lives, so too must a higher spiritual truth and knowledge be found and incorporated into our lives. The ego must see that it is not the centre of life or even the family. This is a particularly acute problem here in India where the head of the family thinks that the wife, the children, the parents, and the grandparents must all serve him. So you can see what a complex system we have built and the more complex it becomes the more it satisfies the ego.

This fallacy must be corrected by the knowledge that the ego is the false person and the real self or soul or Atman is within and it is he who is the ruler, he who is the centre. Make him the centre of your life. The writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have given us the knowledge we need to rectify this false vision of the ego. True, they are not the only ones to have said this. The Atman has been spoken of by the Vedic Rishis and in the Vedanta as well. Many yogis, saints and prophets have come and they have all spoken about the Atman and tried to correct this false vision. Sri Aurobindo was the first to integrate the higher truth of the self with the Supermind and with day-to-day living.

To take a little diversion, yesterday somebody was asking me about the

relevance of the supermind and the earthquake that happened recently in India. Let me quote the Mother in this context:

Someone has said that disasters and catastrophes in Nature, earthquake and deluge and the sinking of continents, are the consequence of a discordant and sinful humanity and with the progress and development of the human race a corresponding change will come about in physical Nature. How far is this true?

Perhaps the truth is rather that it is one and the same movement of consciousness that expresses itself in a Nature ridden with calamities and catastrophes and in a disharmonious humanity. The two things are not cause and effect but stand on the same level. Above them there is a consciousness which is seeking for manifestation and embodiment upon earth, and in its descent towards matter it meets everywhere the same resistance, in man and in physical Nature. All the disorder and disharmony that we see upon earth is the result of this resistance. Calamity and catastrophe, conflict and violence, obscurity and ignorance—all ills come from the same source. Man is not the cause of external Nature, nor external Nature the cause of man, but both depend on the same one thing that is behind them and greater, and both are part of a perpetual and progressive movement of the material world to express it.¹⁵

Looking at this question from a slightly different angle relating more to human difficulties in the context of the descent of the supermind, the Mother responded to a questioner,

Why have the difficulties increased for quite a large number of sadhaks? (Mother puts the paper down forcefully on the table)

Who told you that it is not because you have become more conscious! that all your difficulties were there before, only you did not know it?... If you see more clearly and see things which are not very pretty, it is not the fault of the Supermind, it is your fault! It gives you a light, a mirror in which you can see yourself better than you did before, and you are a little troubled because it is not always very pretty? But what can I do?

And this person concludes: *“Doesn't the supramental Force work here in spite of all the obstacles the unregenerate human nature puts up against it?”* Truly, I hope it does! for otherwise, nothing could be done, the world would never be regenerated. But I have explained to you why it seems

more difficult to you. It is because you are a little more conscious now and see things you did not see before.¹⁶

Those who are a “little more conscious” would feel more constantly the pressure of the Supermind’s working in the world. It may be very slight, but remember that a constant falling of drops of water can dent a rock. This is what the Supermind is doing. It is constantly pushing man to the edge. And that pressure—in those who are ready—increases to such an extent that they are forced to surrender. A vast surrender is the only strength. And each one of us is pushed towards that vast surrender. Then no more can the ego be a help, neither our parents, nor teachers, or books, or religions, or churches, or our temples. Only this vast surrender to the Supreme can help us. It may take time—years, decades, lives—but this is the way the Supermind has started working. It does not bring violent revolutions; it does not bring earthquakes; it does not bring world wars. But there is this pressure of transformation. Therefore all our old values are crumbling because they cannot stand the pressure. Everywhere there is conflict because of this pressure, this constant pressure from above to manifest itself on earth. We cannot go on for long with this false vanity of our ego. It has to be transformed sooner than later. As writes Sri Aurobindo in “The Hour of God:”

In the hour of God cleanse thy soul of all self-deceit and hypocrisy and vain self-flattering that thou mayst look straight into thy spirit and hear that which summons it. All insincerity of nature, once thy defence against the eye of the Master and the light of the ideal, becomes now a gap in thy armour and invites the blow. Even if thou conquer for the moment, it is the worse for thee, for the blow shall come afterwards and cast thee down in the midst of thy triumph.¹⁷

To continue with our argument, a new idea is added here: that the transition to a higher knowledge may not be possible if we think that this earth is perpetually a condemned place. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

The transcendence, the abolition are not possible here on earth and in our human life if the terms of that life are necessarily bound to our present egoistic valuations. If life is in its nature individual phenomenon and not representation of a universal existence and the breathing of a mighty Life-Spirit, if the dualities which are the response of the individual

to its contacts are not merely a response but the very essence and condition of all living, if limitation is the inalienable nature of the substance of which our mind and body are formed, disintegration of death the first and last condition of all life, its end and its beginning, pleasure and pain the inseparable dual stuff of all sensation, joy and grief the necessary light and shade of all emotion, truth and error the two poles between which all knowledge must eternally move, then transcendence is only attainable by the abandonment of human life in a Nirvana beyond all existence or by attainment to another world, a heaven quite otherwise constituted than this material universe.¹⁸

Some religions and philosophies tell us that this world is a testing ground for the soul; if you pass all these tests then the reward is heaven. Others have said that it is not even a testing ground, but rather an illusion, Maya.

We have said the transition to a higher knowledge is not possible here on earth if this earthly life is eternally damned. Somebody gave me a good allegory which I like very much, though it doesn't have much substance. He said the world is like a tourist attraction. At a tourist attraction, like Disneyland, one goes inside but one does not touch or spoil anything. You go into a hall, see some entertainment—some dancing birds, some speeding spaceships, etc.—and you come out of it without having harmed anybody, without having spoiled anything, without having changed anything. So he says that our attitude towards the world should be that of a tourist. Don't get attached to anything. Don't spoil anything. Go through life with detachment. Look at it and enjoy it but without involving yourself in it. It is a good philosophy of life surely. But what happens? I leave Disneyland and others enter Disneyland and afterwards they too leave. Who has changed? What has changed? Nothing!

Is the earth then an unchanging eternal Disneyland? No! This eternal Disneyland of the Supreme is increasing, is progressing, is evolving. Greater entertainments are added, greater problems arise. So we must not have the attitude that the world is a condemned place. On the contrary, it is an eternal becoming of the Supreme. The Mother has told us that at every moment the world is born anew. Constantly there is rearrangement, readjustment of forces, new things born, old things dying; it is the eternal becoming of the Lord. In this becoming the false image has to be ripped off.

The redeeming factor in the world is getting rid of the ego, because it is the ego which has spoiled the game, which has given us a perverted understanding of the world. So Sri Aurobindo would tell us to first correct our vision of the earth and life, because we have been living in a false vision. If we don't correct that vision, we cannot move forward.

Now all our philosophies urge us to either escape from this world into Nirvana or to live a wholesome life and go to Paradise after death. But if we correct our vision and say, "No! The earth is the centre of the divine evolution. It is the centre that the divine has chosen to manifest himself, ultimately and absolutely." If we can make this correction, then we are like those scientists, like those Galileos who have discovered the truths of science. We will be the Galileos of spirituality who discover that the ego revolves around the Divine and not the reverse, and that the earth is the place of a divine manifestation.

If we don't correct this vision then nothing will change and we will remain in the old values. So the first correction to make is to realise that the ego is not the centre and that the divine is the true centre. The second correction is to realise that the earth is the centre of a divine manifestation. If these two corrections can be made on our mental level, if we can integrate them into our mental belief system, our thinking, our speech, and our dreams then they will percolate into our lives and change our entire rhythm of living. These are the things that Sri Aurobindo has spoken about in the first part of this chapter.

Now the question is, even if we make these two corrections is the transition to a higher knowledge really possible? We may discuss these things in a class of philosophy, but do we really believe it? Mentally we may acknowledge it because of our faith, trust and love for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but are we really convinced? Is it at all feasible to think and act as if the ego is not the centre of life?

This idea that Sri Aurobindo has put forward is almost as unbelievable to us as a future man telling an ape that "In the future another creature is going to come upon the earth who will have a greater faculty than yours. He will be able to fly in the sky and cross the oceans. He will have great powers over the earth, sea and sky." Would the ape believe it? No, the ape could never conceive that there could be a superior creature on this earth. He would say,

“I am jumping on this most magnificent tree. I am happy in this forest. I have no diseases. How can there be greater happiness than this?” He would perhaps even laugh in our face if we told him that he is going to become that new race or that new creature. “You are joking! You are teasing me!” he might say. This is how all this philosophy of Superman and Supermind appears to mankind. If you go to any city and talk to people, to common people about these things, they will tell you that you have wasted their time and money talking about such nonsense. They would say, “How is it possible that there will be a new man, somebody beyond us with greater faculties? We don’t need to have any greater race.” In fact, this is not an exaggeration, but what I have actually been told by people. So it is like Sri Aurobindo says in *Savitri*: “Belief shall be not till the work is done.”²⁰

Sri Aurobindo has written thousands of pages from different angles only to convince us that a higher race is coming, something beyond man. But it is extremely difficult even to get the concept across. I was talking to a German group and when they saw the journal *New Race* (whose name was given by the Mother to my father in 1965) they could not believe it. They asked me, “Why are you trying to bring back the Hitlerian idea of the new race, what Hitler had called the Aryan race?” They were afraid of any higher race—afraid that they would treat us the way man has treated the animal. So we want to reject any idea or concept of a higher race beyond humanity. This rejection is almost innate because of the fear of the superiority of the new race. But Sri Aurobindo says it may be difficult for humanity to believe in this new race, but fortunately, unlike the ape, human beings have the faculties of imagination and intuition. With these faculties we are able to conceive of a greater being, a greater perfection. We may not believe it, but we can at least imagine it. Reason, however, would call it a utopia. It would say, “That is all very nice but it will not sustain you for long. It is very fine, very inspiring, but it is not practical. Perhaps you could have a conference or two on it, but what has it got to do with my day-to-day life?” Sri Aurobindo explains things very well in this beautiful passage:

His dream of God and Heaven is really a dream of his own perfection; but he finds the same difficulty in accepting its practical realisation here for his ultimate aim as would the ancestral Ape if called upon to believe in himself as the future Man. His imagination, his religious aspirations may

hold that end before him; but when his reason asserts itself, rejecting imagination and transcendent intuition, he puts it by as a brilliant superstition contrary to the hard facts of the material universe. It becomes then only his inspiring vision of the impossible. All that is possible is a conditioned, limited and precarious knowledge, happiness, power and good.²¹

So a materialist may say that what Sri Aurobindo writes is all good, but it is an inspiring vision of the impossible. That is what reason has to say. But is it true? When reason criticises we must see how honest it is. Sri Aurobindo says reason is not being honest with itself. Why? Because reason by its very nature is always in pursuit of transcendence. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Yet in the principle of reason itself there is the assertion of a Transcendence. For reason is in its whole aim and essence the pursuit of Knowledge, the pursuit, that is to say, of Truth by the elimination of error. Its view, its aim is not that of a passage from a greater to a lesser error, but it supposes a positive, pre-existent Truth towards which through the dualities of right knowledge and wrong knowledge we can progressively move.²²

This means that right from the beginning of human evolution, human mind has always tried to go beyond. Constantly and on every level—through generations, through millennia, through groups, through individuals—man has tried to transcend. There is always an effort to improve, to progress, to do better. Then why should reason, the moment you say the word ‘Divine’ or ‘God’ react and say “No, that is impossible?” But Sri Aurobindo would reply, “You are yourself doing that. You are trying to exceed yourself at all times. Is not the passion of reason for the Truth?” It is constantly trying to find out Truth—the truth of Nature, the truth of philosophy, the truth of occultism, the truth of art, the truth of man. What is Truth? It is Satyam. Reason may not know the philosophical term for what it is seeking, but it may be ‘Satyam’ or ‘Sachchidananda’.

When it comes to the heart level, what do we find? The essence of our emotions is to seek happiness. We may call it bliss, we may call it peace, we may call it Shanti, we may call it by whatever name, but on the level of the heart the basic experience is that of happiness, joy and pleasure.

What about the body? What are the doctors trying to do? They are trying

to bring in deathlessness. Just yesterday we were speaking to someone who was telling us that the human genome has been analysed and it has been discovered that there are only 30,000 genes, whereas previously they thought there were 100,000 genes. This is supposed to be the blue print of how a human being is made. Since there are only about 30,000 genes, they are hopeful that they can study each gene and find out how to make the body deathless. Scientists tell us that they hope to change genes at the root level so that diseases, such as cancer, can be eradicated on that level. And what about aging? Mankind has spent billions of rupees on how to look younger, how not to age. What is the goal here? Immortality, and immortality is nothing but Ananda.

So what do we see in all this? We see that mankind is already in pursuit of Sachchidananda on the level of the mind, on the level of the heart, and even on the level of the body. And for Aurobindonians, the human genome which has been discovered is very interesting. Don't you see the connection between the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's efforts for the transformation of the cell? The cell seems to have now come forward as a focal point in human consciousness.

Interestingly, one of the conclusions that can be drawn from the discovery of the genome is that if these 30,000 genes belong commonly to all the races, then there is no racial superiority. There is no Aryan race superior to the Chinese race, or a Chinese race superior to a Mongolian race. All races become one and the same. I hope that they will discover some 'gene' theory for the gods so that we can also say that all the gods are also one, because this is the main problem with our religions! They say that gods are different and one is superior to another. Fortunately, however, at least this race psychology may be wiped out for good.

This discovery of the biological unity of man has been an important discovery for us, but equally important is the discovery of gene manipulation. Here Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have done the world a yeoman service. Today the biologists are able to manipulate the genes for diseases, etc. because, I believe, of the work done by the Mother on the cells. What has the Mother done? She unleashed the supramental consciousness or, to put it differently, she introduced the supramental change into the cell structure. Now we know that if a scientist can eradicate one disease in the

gene structure then that change will be passed on to mankind. So perhaps Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have introduced one supramental ray of consciousness into the cell structure which will now become part of the human cellular structure. Just like the scientist is trying to eliminate a disease from the DNA, the Mother has tried to put a positive element into the same DNA. So tomorrow there will be no cancer; tomorrow there will be supramental bodies. A body would be supramental starting from the level of the DNA itself, who knows? Seeing things from this perspective there is no more magic, mysticism or occultism in the transformation of the body!

Now coming back to our argument, we can sum things up by saying that Sri Aurobindo tells us that mind and reason should not revolt against the idea of a new race, because basically, reason is already working for its own transcendence.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that science or the effort of the mind is still only trying to find out the how, the process of a thing, and not the why. With this theory of genes and disease they are not taking into consideration why the disease has come. They are only concentrating on how to remove the disease. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, however, have given us the very cause, the why of the diseases. But science is not interested in the why. That is the basic difference between science and spirituality—science looks at the *how* and spirituality looks at the *why*. That means that science looks at the external process while spirituality or yoga goes to the why of a thing and this makes all the difference. Here Sri Aurobindo gives us a concluding sentence:

And we are thus limited because we strive towards secondary perceptions and not towards root-knowledge, because we know processes of things, but not their essence. We thus arrive at a more powerful manipulation of circumstances, but not at essential control.²³

See this phrase ‘manipulation of circumstances’—all that science is trying to do is to manipulate. It is trying to rearrange the DNA, take out some of its elements, rearrange others, etc. Sri Aurobindo continues:

But if we could grasp the essential nature and the essential cause of error, suffering and death, we might hope to arrive at a mastery over them which should be not relative but entire.²⁴

What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have tried to do is precisely this—to find out the essential cause. Essential cause of what? Sorrow, pain,

ignorance, *avidya*. For example, there is perhaps only one cause, not many, for all the diseases. If you read what the Mother has written about ill health and diseases, it is an eye opener. I shall quote a long passage to give the total view of what she has to say about illness:

To whatever cause an illness may be due, material or mental, external or internal, it must, before it can affect the physical body, touch another layer of the being that surrounds and protects it. This subtler layer is called in different teachings by various names,—the etheric body, the nervous envelope. It is a subtle body and yet almost visible. In density something like the vibrations that you see around a very hot and steaming object, it emanates from the physical body and closely covers it. All communications with the exterior world are made through this medium, and it is this that must be invaded and penetrated first before the body can be affected. If this envelope is absolutely strong and intact, you can go into places infested with the worst of diseases, even plague and cholera, and remain quite immune. It is a perfect protection against all possible attacks of illness, so long as it is whole and entire, thoroughly consistent in its composition, its elements in faultless balance. This body is built up, on the one side, of a material basis, but rather of material conditions than of physical matter, on the other, of the vibrations of our psychological states. Peace and equanimity and confidence, faith in health, undisturbed repose and cheerfulness and bright gladness constitute this element in it and give it strength and substance. It is a very sensitive medium with facile and quick reactions; it readily takes in all kinds of suggestions and these can rapidly change and almost remould its condition. A bad suggestion acts very strongly upon it; a good suggestion operates in the contrary sense with the same force. Depression and discouragement have a very adverse effect; they cut out holes in it, as it were, in its very stuff, render it weak and unresisting and open to hostile attacks an easy passage...

If the whole being could simultaneously advance in its progressive transformation, keeping pace with the inner march of the universe, there would be no illness, there would be no death. But it would have to be literally the whole being integrally from the highest planes, where it is more plastic and yields in the required measure to transforming forces,

down to the most material, which is by nature rigid, stationary, refractory to any rapid remoulding change.²⁵

It was a great surprise to read what the Mother has to say about microbes which according to most allopathic doctors are supposed to be causing so many diseases. Here is the passage:

Now, quite recently, they have found something else and I consider it wonderful. They have discovered that for every disease there is a microbe that cures it (call it a microbe if you like, anyway, some sort of germ). But what is so extraordinary is that this “microbe” is extremely contagious, even more contagious than the microbe of the disease. And it generally develops under two conditions: in those who have a sort of natural good humour and energy and in those who have a strong will to get well! Suddenly they catch the “microbe” and are cured. And what is wonderful is that if there is one who is cured in an epidemic, three more recover immediately. And this “microbe” is found in all who are cured.

But I am going to tell you something: what people take to be a microbe is simply the materialisation of a vibration or a will from another world. When I learned of these medical discoveries, I said to myself, “Truly, science is making progress.” One might almost say with greater reason, “Matter is progressing,” it is becoming more and more receptive to a higher will. And what is translated in their science as “microbes” will be perceived, if one goes to the root of things, as simply a vibratory mode; and this vibratory mode is the material translation of a higher will. If you can bring this force or this will, this power, this vibration (call it what you will) into certain given circumstances, not only will it act in you, but also through contagion around you.²⁶

Scientists may not accept this explanation today, but a day will come when the scientists will have to acknowledge that age and disease are connected with a greater mystery. I don't deny that science is removing veil after veil to discover the truth, and it may continue to do so until it discovers the occult truth of life. Aurobindonians ought to know that there is an interaction between our psychological status, our subliminal status, the beings around us and the world around us. What we see as an external disease such as a dental pain is not something caused in the mouth, in the tooth. It is due to

an interaction and a disharmony, a disequilibrium. This is how the Mother clarifies her view regarding health:

I have told you first of all that all illness without any exception—without exception—is the expression of a break in equilibrium. But there are many kinds of breaks in equilibrium.... First, I am speaking only of the body, I am not speaking of the nervous illnesses of the vital or of mental illnesses. We shall see that later on. We are speaking only of this poor little body. And I say that all illnesses, all, whatever they may be (I would add even accidents) come from a break in equilibrium. That is, if all your organs, all the members and parts of your body are in harmony with one another, you are in perfect health. But if there is the slightest imbalance anywhere, immediately you get either just a little ill or quite ill, even very badly ill, or else an accident occurs. That always happens whenever there is an inner imbalance.

But then, to the equilibrium of the body, you must add the equilibrium of the vital and the mind. For you to be able to do all kinds of things with immunity, without any accident happening to you, you must have a triple equilibrium—mental, vital, physical—and not only in each of the parts, but also in the three parts in their mutual relations....²⁷

Let us return to what Sri Aurobindo is telling us about how spirituality tries to find the root cause of all ignorance, suffering, etc. Mankind has had enough time to really break its head on all the external reasons and causes of things. We have done it for millennia and now perhaps out of great compassion Sri Aurobindo comes and seems to tell us, “Look children. You are striving on the wrong road. If you go this way you will never ever find solace, peace, joy, happiness, or truth.” He has shown us the essential cause of all this deformation, disharmony, suffering and pain. The cause is *Avidya*. It perhaps seems unbelievable that the cause of all this suffering on every level is simply ego. But the Vedic Rishis told us and Sri Aurobindo has told us in a different way that the ego is one of the main causes.

We have heard many times in the Upanishads that the whole universe comes from Ananda, lives in Ananda and goes back to Ananda. How do we reconcile all this? Is there truth in all this? Or is it a truth that belongs to a different world and has nothing to do with this one? How do we link up these two views? On one side they say ego is the cause of all our problems

and on the other they say that Ananda is the cause of this creation. Let's analyse this a bit.

We have seen before that when Sachchidananda becomes the universe there is a kind of stepping down, an involution or devolution. We saw that this stepping down first results in the universalisation of consciousness, but this in itself did not fulfill the purpose of the Divine. And what is the purpose of the Divine in the becoming? It is to become the multiplicity, the many. The universal was not the many; so the Divine took the next step of becoming the many. And between the universal and the individual there is again a process. This process, if I can say, is that the mind is like a sieve and if you pour something into the sieve, what happens? What comes out are individualised formations. Indian housewives know very well that when you pressurise the dough through a sieve what comes out is the individual strings of *murukku*, which are something like pasta strings! When the universal consciousness goes through the mind's sieve what comes out are independent individualised formations.

The mind is a necessary instrument for bringing out the individual. Before mind there were multiples—there was Purusha, Prakriti, Gods, Goddesses—but the individualisation of each form of consciousness came with the mind. Mind also brings the mental ego, the consciousness of the ego.

Why and how did the ego come about? The ego certainly has its role as we can plainly see from Sri Aurobindo's famous words: "Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar." It was necessary because evolution began from the inconscient where all is amorphous; there there is no form, no individual; all is one vast amorphous consciousness. From there something began to emerge, individual forms, but not an individualisation of the consciousness. With the evolution of the human being, the mind and ego emerged bringing greater individuality of consciousness.

To get a sense of the point I am trying to make, imagine a large sculpture such as Michelangelo's 'Moses'. In the beginning it was formless, featureless rock. Afterwards, Michelangelo chiseled away part by part, portion by portion, chip by chip until he arrived at the form of 'Moses'. Then he polished it and brought out all the details with care—every nerve and vein, the eyelids, the smile, the finger nails, even the frown on the forehead. So what has happened here? Out of an amorphous rock, a shapeless thing, an

individuality has come forth through chiseling and chipping, a form and consciousness called 'Moses.' This is precisely what evolution has done with you and me. We were also an amorphous consciousness and then there came a form. Millions of years ago, a form of humanity rose up. It was a tentative form resembling an ape, but he was not an individual. He did not have a mind. He ate and lived like an animal and over the millennia a lot of polishing and detailing took place until we had this smooth, beautiful human body. But along with this smoothening of the human body came the sense of the ego. There was a consolidation of the consciousness along with the consolidation of form.

And this ego—the sense of 'I'—was necessary; in the beginning it was very important. It is like when you put a plant in the garden and protect it with some fencing while it is still small and vulnerable. Otherwise a cow, a goat or other people may damage it. This kind of protection is also necessary for a child, and has been emphasised immensely in Western culture and civilisation. Right from day one there is a separation between the parents and children which gives them a sense of independence and individuality so that by the time the child is 15 or so he says, "I don't depend on my parents." This independence comes very fast and this is the stage where the ego is the helper. In fact, the Mother tells us that the ego is there to actualise our potential. As long as we do not find out our mode of expression, it is necessary to have the ego. As the Mother puts it succinctly: "Ego is the helper so long as it is needed to form the physical individuality, but when that is formed, ego must disappear."²⁸

Unfortunately, what happens over time is the plant or the individual gets big and the fence of the ego which was put to protect it becomes an obstacle. The ego does not give way; it claims: "I have been protecting you. I am the master." It has forgotten that its role is only that of a helper. And this is where *tapasya*, the sadhana comes in to break the 'fence' which was useful at first—because without it we would be nobody—but is now a bar to inner progress.

Interestingly, the Mother would say that most human beings are amorphous non-developed individuals. We have a mass of body, a mass of emotions, a mass of passions but very little in the way of individuality. We are creatures in the mass. Even at the ordinary social level, there are not very

many individuals. Just because one has a name and a human body does not mean that one is an individual. So where does the individuality come in? When we find a modus of self-expression, or when we find our *swadharma*. Are then all the people working as mechanics, doctors, teachers and labourers not individuals? Well, on the general mass level, yes, but the Mother would take us to higher level and say that it is only when one finds one's *swadharma* that one becomes a true individual. Until then we are one of the movements in the mass, nothing more.

So what is the essence of this ego? Well, you might say that because of the ego there is this feeling of 'I'. Psychologically we all feel the 'I', the importance of the 'I'. But basically the ego is a sharp focus on a small point which is called Mrs. X or Mr. X. It is the self-concentration of the Transcendent on a single point. When the Supreme Sachchidananda became this small limited ego, what happened? It resulted in a distortion; a narrow vision of things became the normal way of seeing things. This self-limitation is the cause of Ignorance. Ignorance is nothing more than self-limitation, *avidya*. Now, in order to return to the original Infinity, this formed limited consciousness has to increase itself and enter into harmony with the universal. This is exactly what the Mother was doing on the level of the body. She penetrated 'the mind of the cells', as she called it, and brought it into contact with the supramental consciousness within the cells. Then the body gets the universal consciousness and that is the beginning of the physical transformation.

Some schools of philosophy would have us believe that ego is the cause of all our suffering and that the elimination of ego is the only way to go beyond all sufferings. That leads to a philosophy of asceticism. But in the evolutionary pattern, ego is only a middle term. It has made us self-aware; it has made us an individuality. This was a necessary stage, but we have to go beyond it. The ego has to be transcended and transformed.

Now let's take a look at a quote from the Mother which throws a greater light on what we have been trying to explain:

Egoism is a relatively easy thing to correct, because everyone knows what it is. It is easy to discover, easy to correct, if one truly wants to do it and is bent on it.

But the ego is much more difficult to seize, because, in fact, to realise

what the ego is one must already be out of it, otherwise one cannot find it out. You are wholly moulded from it, from head to foot, from the outermost to the innermost, from the physical to the spiritual, you are steeped in ego. It is mixed with everything and you are not aware of what it is. You must have already conquered it, come out of it, freed yourself from it, at least partially, at least in some little corner of your being somewhere, in order to realise what the ego is.

The ego is what helps us to individualise ourselves and what prevents us from becoming divine. It is like that. Put that together and you will find the ego. Without the ego, as the world is organised, there would be no individual, and with the ego the world cannot become divine...

And yet it is indispensable, if you truly intend to know what the supramental is. If you are a candidate for supermanhood, you must resolve to dispense with your ego, to go beyond it, for as long as you keep it with you, the supermind will be for you something unknown and inaccessible...

Please note that I am not saying that you must be totally free from all ego in order to have a glimpse of the supramental; for then that would be something almost impossible. No, to be free from ego, just a little bit somewhere, in some corner of your being, even only a little corner of the mind; if it is the mind and vital, it is well and good, but if by chance—oh! not by chance—if by repeated efforts you have entered into contact with your psychic being, then the door is wide open. Through the psychic you can suddenly have a very clear and beautiful vision of what the supermind is, only a vision, not a realisation. That is the great way out. But even without going so far as this beautiful realisation, the psychic realisation, if you succeed in liberating some part of your mind or your vital, that makes a kind of hole in the door, a keyhole; through this keyhole you have a glimpse, just a little glimpse. And that is already very attractive, very interesting.²⁹

I remember that sometime in 1973 the Mother told us very clearly that the time of the ego had gone and that we should try ardently, just try from the depths of our heart, to be a little less egoistic because to belong to the ego means to belong to the past. Related to this, the Mother replied to a question asked by a sadhak:

Instead of giving peace, why doesn't the Divine abolish all at once the ego?

Ah? That, that is the work for each one. Trust is what I told you the other day, I read to you what Sri Aurobindo has written; “Do not harbour the indolent illusion that you will be given the aspiration and the work will be done for you.” The aspiration must come from you and the abolition of the ego also. You are helped, you are supported; every time you take a step forward you will feel there is something which gives you all that is necessary to enable you to take the step, but it is you who must walk, no one will take you on his back and carry you... Abolish the ego first, that's a wonderful programme! Once the ego is abolished, there will be nothing more to do, all the work will be over, for it is precisely the ego which impedes you from being in touch with the Divine. Once the ego is gone, quite simply you will be likethat, in a beatific union with the Divine, and all the work will be over. But generally, one does not begin by the end. In any case, what I have just told you holds good: to abolish the ego is your work. You will be helped, but you must walk on your own feet. Do not at all hope that someone is going to carry you on his back and that you will have nothing to do except let yourself be carried.³⁰

Let us now wrap up all these ideas with a few concluding remarks. We have seen that essentially all these questions of suffering, pain and disease are caused by a disharmony and that the root of this disharmony is the ego. Furthermore, we have seen that as long as the ego is there in man he is bound to suffer. Scientists may in the future analyse all the 30,000 genes, but suffering and pain will not leave until man gets rid of his ego. The more egoless we are, the more universal we become. The more universal we become, the more the effects of ego—things like pain, suffering, sorrow, greed, death—will slowly cease to exist. We should also remember the importance of the psychic realisation in this universalisation. The more you go towards your psychic being, the more you go towards egolessness. The moment you become absolutely psychic, there is no suffering at all, as it were. I shall conclude these deliberations on this chapter with a message from the Mother:

When humanity was first created, the ego was the unifying element. It was around the ego that the different states of being were grouped; but now that the birth of superhumanity is being prepared, the ego has to

disappear and give way to the psychic being, which has slowly been formed by divine intervention in order to manifest the Divine in the human being.

It is under the psychic influence that the Divine manifests in man and thus prepares the coming of superhumanity.

The psychic is immortal and it is through the psychic that immortality can be manifested on earth.

So the important thing now is to find one's psychic, unite with it and allow it to replace the ego, which will be compelled either to get converted or disappear.³¹

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Lecture Notes

- I. The reality of evil and suffering
 - a. By the recovery of a higher knowledge alone can we reconcile the opposites of the lower and higher worlds
 - b. This would need an exceeding of human consciousness
- II. Our present values
 - a. They are useful and practical but not necessarily the ultimate ones
 - b. There is a need of a synthetic knowledge which would explain the reality of our mental consciousness. Otherwise, there could be a great confusion in the present human establishment
- III. Ego-centred consciousness
 - a. Ego is considered the centre of our life and world. But this illusion needs to be removed by an effective and systematic knowledge. Then ego will discover that it is the Divine who is the centre
 - b. Transition to this higher knowledge may not be possible if we think that this earth life is perpetually condemned to what it is
- IV. Deeper intuitions
 - a. It may be as difficult for man to believe in the new consciousness and the divine life as it was for the ape to believe in the possibilities of mind
 - b. By these deeper intuitions, man has conceived of a supreme knowledge, power and bliss, but reason takes this as mere utopia
- V. Genesis of ego
 - a. It is the result of the self limitation of consciousness therefore, its vision of things is narrow and even distorted
 - b. Some schools of philosophy believe ego to be the cause of all suffering. Therefore to eliminate ego is the only way to go beyond all sufferings. This leads to a philosophy of asceticism
 - c. But in the evolutionary pattern, ego is only a middle term.

It can be transcended and transformed—that is the ultimate destiny of man
for which nature is in travail

The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge

We now shall take up Chapter VIII entitled ‘The Methods of Vedantic Knowledge’. The opening verse is a quote from the Katha Upanishad which says:

This secret Self in all beings is not apparent, but it is seen by means of the supreme reason, the subtle, by those who have the subtle vision.¹

Until now we have been speaking about the need, the necessity of harmonising the individual with the universal. This entails, as Sri Aurobindo tells us, the dissolution of the ego which is the cause of all our individual and collective problems. It is like a twist in the tape of an audio cassette. If the tape gets twisted, what happens? For the rest of the tape you have disturbances—you may not get the right sound. Because of that one twist, the entire cassette is of no use. It may have some spurts of sound, but you cannot fix the cassette unless you go to that first twist and untwist it. This is precisely what happens with the ego. It was the first twist which came into the being and with that twist everything got out of focus and proportion. We have to correct that twist.

How do we go about it? What is the method of correcting that twist and unifying oneself with the transcendent? To that end, Sri Aurobindo presents us in this chapter with the methods given by Vedanta. Now, there is a difference when it comes to Vedanta and Sri Aurobindo. The first part of Sri Aurobindo’s metaphysics is similar to Vedanta, but it differs in the second part where he brings in the question of transformation. Here however, we will only be dealing with the first part which addresses how we come to know the transcendent.

Is it indeed possible to know it? Straight away Vedanta would tell us that we can never know either the transcendent or the universal as long as we are stuck in the physical world and the senses. The senses are only instruments for knowing this world, so don’t try to apply these senses to something supraphysical. That is the problem with the scientists. They ask us, “How can we know God? Can we see him? Can we put him under the microscope or the telescope?” No, you can’t because these are instruments of the senses. It would be like trying to see the moon with a microscope.

Sri Aurobindo says,

We arrive at the conception and at the knowledge of a divine existence by exceeding the evidence of the senses and piercing beyond the walls of the physical mind. So long as we confine ourselves to sense-evidence and the physical consciousness, we can conceive nothing and know nothing except the material world and its phenomena.²

Therefore we have to change instruments, and use the proper instrument for the proper objective.

Now, does man have this instrument or does he have to bring it in from somewhere else? Is it already available to him or is it something that will come in the future? According to ancient psychology, there are already preexistent instruments in man for this purpose, and they are *sthula sharira* or *prana* and physicality (outer instrument); *anthakarana* or conscious mentality (inner instrument); *citta* or basic mental consciousness; *manas* or the sense mind; *buddhi* or the intelligence; *ahankara* or the ego idea; psychic *prana* or the psychic nervous life-mind.

These instruments are already there, but we do not know how to operate them. But in the first place, what is this instrument? Well, Vedanta speaks of factors which are behind the senses. To give an example, let's take a look at the phenomenon of sight. For the scientist, the eye specialist, sight is very simple. It is just a question of light hitting the retina. But for the Vedic rishi things are not as simple as that. Let's take for instance somebody in a coma or somebody who has fainted. If you open his eye and shine a torch there, he still won't see. So there is something else which receives the light which Vedanta normally calls 'that consciousness'. That is why when a man is in a coma, we say he can't see because he is not conscious. It is not the instrument of the eye that sees. The Kena Upanishad found out the secret that there is somebody, something behind the senses who is seeing, absorbing, enjoying, collecting, evaluating and keeping what is necessary. We may be thinking, "I'm just looking at a building," but each of us looking at that building will have a different response to it. My eyes and your eyes have the same light hitting the retina but the way I look at that building is completely different from any one of you. This is because my consciousness, absorbed in the conception of the building, has a different attachment to it, a different valuation of it. So you see, in itself the object may not be so

important. What is important is the observer who gives a specific value to a thing. The ancient Indian rishis went to a deeper and a greater psychology and found that in a human being there are other levels of cognisance, of knowledge.

The most basic level is called *citta* which is the basic mental consciousness, the basic awareness; it is a pervading consciousness in which nothing is specific. Every human being has this and even animals have it to a great extent. From this basic mental consciousness comes something else which we call the *manas*, the sense mind. Now is this *manas* part of the intelligence? Is it part of the physical senses? Interestingly, Vedanta calls it the only sense in man. This is the sixth sense, but in reality it is the only sense. The rest are only microscopes and telescopes, or as Sri Aurobindo puts it:

But we may even say that it [Manas] is the only sense and that the others, vision, hearing, touch, smell, taste are merely specialisations of the sense-mind which, although it normally uses the sense-organs for the basis of its experience, yet exceeds them and is capable of a direct experience proper to its own inherent action.³

There is another level of cognisance known as the *buddhi*. Sri Aurobindo describes it as follows:

Buddhi is a construction of conscious being which quite exceeds its beginnings in the basic Chitta; it is the intelligence with its power of knowledge and will... It is in its nature thought-power and will-power of the Spirit turned into the lower form of a mental activity.⁴

All human beings have *chitta* and *manas* but not many have come to the level of the *buddhi*. It is not the normal intelligence which we know as common sense intelligence. It is a higher faculty which discriminates. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the faculty by which one can grasp the supraphysical is the reason.

Now I will read you an excerpt from *The Synthesis of Yoga* to help clarify these definitions:

And first we have to make clear the distinction, ignored in ordinary speech, between the *manas*, mind, and *buddhi*, the discerning intelligence and the enlightened will. Manas is the sense-mind. Man's initial mentality is not at all a thing of reason and will; it is an animal, physical or sense

mentality which constitutes its whole experience from the impressions made on it by the external world and by its own embodied consciousness which responds to the outward stimulus of this kind of experience...

In fact the Manas is a development from the external Chitta; it is a first organising of the crude stuff of the consciousness excited and aroused by external contacts...⁵

We have seen that there are these five sense-windows which bring in the sense impressions and the *manas* who is the controller. We have as if a controller sitting there, controlling the volume of the different loud-speakers. These five sense-windows are only gatherers of information. For example, when I look at a building, they gather information such as the window sizes, the color, the open doors, and the *manas* interprets this information.

As Sri Aurobindo says,

What we call the physical senses have a double element, the physical-nervous impression of the object and the mental-nervous value we give to it, and the two together make up our seeing, hearing, smell, taste, touch with all those varieties of sensation of which they, and the touch chiefly, are the starting-point or first transmitting agency. But the Manas is able to receive sense impressions and draw results from them by a direct transmission not dependent on the physical organ. This is more distinct in the lower creation. Man, though he has really a greater capacity for this direct sense, the sixth sense in the mind, has let it fall into abeyance by an exclusive reliance on the physical senses supplemented by the activity of the Buddhi.

The Manas is therefore in the first place an organiser of sense experience; in addition it organises the natural reactions of the will in the embodied consciousness and uses the body as an instrument, uses, as it is ordinarily put, the organs of action.⁶

There is more to the *manas* than that, but let me stop here and go back to the chapter of *The Life Divine* because this background knowledge of these human faculties is sufficient for us to discuss the pure reason, which we must discuss next.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

The reason active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator

between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and superconscious All towards which we are impelled by that evolution.⁷

Reason has two faces or two functions. Sri Aurobindo says, “Human reason has a double action, mixed or dependent, pure or sovereign.”⁸ There is a pure reason and a mixed reason, but it is very difficult to analyse and separate them. But from the yogic point of view, it is very important to find out what is what. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Reason accepts a mixed action when it confines itself to the circle of our sensible experience, admits its law as the final truth and concerns itself only with the study of phenomenon, that is to say, with the appearances of things in their relations, processes and utilities. This rational action is incapable of knowing what is, it only knows what appears to be, it has no plummet by which it can sound the depths of being, it can only survey the field of becoming.⁹

The mixed reason is dependent on the manas. To illustrate how this works, let's say a man walks through the door. The sense-data goes to my manas which analyses it and recognises the man as Mr. X. Then my reason comes into play and says, “Oh! That is Mr. X. For the last three days he came to my class, so he must be here to attend today's class as well.” But actually, I might be completely wrong. Mr. X may have come only to take a book from Ms. D and then leave. He may not be here to attend my class. Normally we are victims of this kind of logic. He came to class for the last three days so I deduce that he must be here for today's class. Logic has no plummet by which it can sound the depth of the being, it can only survey the field of becoming. Next, Sri Aurobindo says:

Reason, on the other hand, asserts its pure action, when accepting our sensible experiences as a starting-point but refusing to be limited by them it goes behind, judges, works in its own right and strives to arrive at general and unalterable concepts which attach themselves not to the appearances of things, but to that which stands behind their appearances.¹⁰

The pure reason is most often used by philosophers and mathematicians; they start with sense experience but they immediately go beyond it. They enter the realm of pure reason which does not depend on external facts. In

the case of Mr. X, if I were a philosopher or a mathematician, I would realise that he might not be coming to my class. There could be other possibilities. And if I were a yogi, I would definitely see that he has come only to take a book. This is because a yogi can identify himself with the other person's mind. So you can see and understand the distinction between the mixed reason, the pure reason and knowledge by identity. These are actually the three levels for finding out knowledge.

Now we come back to our initial question. How do we obtain knowledge of the transcendent? The pure reason takes you closer, but even that doesn't fully give the knowledge. It is however the first step that takes you beyond the physical. The mixed reason gives the knowledge of the physical and the pure reason the knowledge of the metaphysical. Almost all that is metaphysical knowledge comes from the pure mind level.

But most human beings are not happy with metaphysical knowledge. Most of us like to see pragmatic fact. It is nice to have great ideas, but what about converting these great ideas into facts of experience? What the common man wants is an experience, something concrete, something solid. The common man looks at life with two eyes, according to Sri Aurobindo. He tells us:

But our nature sees things through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as idea and as fact and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience.¹¹

Until there is a synthesis between the idea and the fact, the common man will not accept our philosophy. That is why there are so many philosophies both eastern and western which have only remained on the ideal level. And idealism, per se, does not have strength. That is why ideals have not changed man at all. There are plenty of books, thousands of books written on this or that, but they don't have power behind them. Idealism must be connected with power. And how will you connect that idealism with power? If you go back to Sachchidananda, you will see where the power lies. It lies with Chit-Tapas, Consciousness-Force. It is only when a thing comes through your own experiential consciousness that it carries a power. It can be from the lowest level to the highest. For example, if a teacher tells a student something that the teacher has not experienced or practiced, the student knows that the teacher is just bluffing. But real Guru has had experiences, so

whatever he says carries a force. A normal philosophy professor is all book knowledge and will tell you things that don't really carry any force or power.

What we have to remember is that power of effectuation, the power of transformation can come only when it is linked to consciousness, not mind. Reason is good. It gives us a glimpse of what is above but it does not take us there. Sri Aurobindo tells us that:

Therefore, some other faculty of experience is necessary by which the demand of our nature can be fulfilled and this can only come, since we are dealing with the supraphysical, by an extension of psychological experience.

In a sense all our experience is psychological since even what we receive by the senses has no meaning or value to us till it is translated in terms of the sense-mind, the *Manas* of Indian philosophical terminology.¹²

What reason gives us is not an experience; it is only an analysis. To make things experiential means coming down to the level of *manas* because *manas* is the nodus of psychological experience. It is that which is gathering and manipulating the sense-data. And the *manas* gives us two types of psychological experiences. Sri Aurobindo calls them objective and subjective. Objective is when I see an object outside of me. For example, I see a chair, look at it and gather data. Then I have the experience that it is a new chair that belongs to so and so. That is an objective experience. A subjective experience is one that doesn't depend on any sense-data. Let's take the example of anger. When I say, "I am angry," let us analyse what happens. Maybe the anger was caused by something external, but one can be angry without any immediate external cause. I may have a memory of something that makes me angry. In the subjective, the sense instruments are not necessary. I am calm; I am peaceful; I am jealous; I am compassionate. All that can be happening while I keep my senses closed. But in the objective experience, the sense instruments are utilised. The hand goes, the eye contacts, the nose smells—there is a contact with the object through the sense instrumentation. You can see the subtle difference here. Objective is an experience of becoming. Subjective is an experience of being. These are the two fundamental experiences we commonly use. You may not even be aware of this, but we are constantly moving from the subjective to the objective.

But is this Vedanta's final analysis? What does Vedanta tell us? It tells us

that there is no object and subject at all. Everything in this world is one; there is no separation. Then why is it that I have the concept of the objective and the subjective? This is where the ego has come in. Ego is that little twist somewhere which has brought in this sense of separation. And as a result, Nature has evolved instruments to contact that otherness. These are the senses. Interestingly though, the first cellular organisms did not have this type of instrumentation. The animals, however, do have it, just as we also have it. But who depends on this instrumentation the most? We do. Animals are more or less instinctual. So what this means is the greater the sense of separation, the greater the need of the instruments. And the more we return to oneness, the less we will need this instrumentation. A yogi does not have to see what is happening on the road or what is happening to X in Hyderabad or London. Why? Because he doesn't have the normal separative consciousness. In consciousness, he becomes more and more one with the universe, so his senses are less and less needed. If the Mother wanted to help somebody in France or America, she didn't have to go there by plane and touch that person. She could do that through an act of consciousness.

Just to recap, we were discussing that the reason has a double action which is either mixed or pure. We also saw how psychological experiences also have this double action, mixed or pure, objective or subjective. Thirdly, we saw how our ego, which has divided our experience into objective and subjective, has necessitated the development of processes and organs by which to enter into communion with the all.

As Sri Aurobindo says,

In reality, all experience is in its secret nature knowledge by identity; but its true character is hidden from us because we have separated ourselves from the rest of the world by exclusion, by the distinction of ourself as subject and everything else as object, and we are compelled to develop processes and organs by which we may again enter into communion with all that we have excluded. We have to replace direct knowledge through conscious identity by an indirect knowledge which appears to be caused by physical contact and mental sympathy. This limitation is a fundamental creation of the ego and an instance of the manner in which it has proceeded throughout, starting from an original falsehood and covering

over the true truth of things by contingent falsehoods which become for us practical truths of relation.¹³

But this is not final, because we have seen that as we become more universalised the use and necessity of the instruments is lost. Sri Aurobindo tells us that:

It is possible for the mind,—and it would be natural for it, if it could be persuaded to liberate itself from its consent to the domination of matter,—to take direct cognisance of the objects of sense without the aid of the sense-organs.¹⁴

So is there a possibility of going beyond our limitations? That is to say, can we develop new senses? Well, even as we are we can develop new senses. For example, Sri Aurobindo tells us that, “it is possible to develop the power of appreciating accurately without physical means the weight of an object which we hold in our hands.”¹⁵ Some people have this kind of instinct; they can just put something in their hands and say this is exactly half a kilo, or three hundred grams, or four hundred grams, etc. Another example of this is the Native Americans we spoke about who can hear the galloping of horses from miles away. In this case, however, it is the sharpening of a particular sense that takes place. If we look more closely, these extra senses (the sharpening of the ear, the weight sense by the hand) are actually based on the subliminal, what we sometimes call the inner mind, inner hearing, inner sight. Once we enter the subliminal, these normal five senses become much more acute. If we want to hear something ten miles away we could contact our subliminal being where we have an inner ear which can give us contact with things on a more universal level. Universal also includes worlds other than the material, such as the vital world and the mental world. We can contact these as well. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Finally, by an utilisation of the inner senses,—that is to say, of the sense-powers, in themselves, in their purely mental or subtle activity as distinguished from the physical which is only a selection for the purposes of outward life from their total and general action,—we are able to take cognition of sense-experiences, of appearances and images of things other than those which belong to the organisation of our material environment.¹⁶

Now, you can contact the subliminal through yoga, through a natural

capacity or through a divine gift. Some people have told me how they went to a 'spiritual master' to whom they gave written questions in a sealed envelope. Then the 'master' would answer the questions without opening the envelope. So they thought he was a great spiritualist, but it may not be so because such things are most often from contact with the subliminal consciousness. Most so-called miracles by which the common man is mystified are from what we call the subtle physical, the subtle worlds. Today we have a lot of people practicing Reiki and pranic healing. These people contact a subtle level through which they cure you. Then there is the power of autosuggestion which is something the Mother herself has spoken about. Through autosuggestion people's hair has been made to grow back. These practices are true and useful to humanity because they help us to become aware of our deeper capacities. But this is not Sri Aurobindo's ideal or Vedanta's. Sri Aurobindo tells us,

Yet is it a sound rule inherent in the very constitution of universal existence that where there are truths attainable by the reason, there must be somewhere in the organism possessed of that reason a means of arriving at or verifying them by experience. The one means we have left in our mentality is an extension of that form of knowledge by identity which gives us the awareness of our own existence. It is really upon a self-awareness more or less conscient, more or less present to our conception that the knowledge of the contents of our self is based. Or to put it in a more general formula, the knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent.¹⁷

Speaking about knowledge by identity, I could give the example of the Mother's own experience where she identified herself with a tree. If you identify with a tree, what will you know? You will know how the tree feels, how the tree is aspiring. Because of her identification with the banyan tree at the Matrimandir, she could respond to the tree's complaint of pain caused by an axe that was carelessly left by a gardener on its trunk! The Mother tells us that to identify with an object is good, but by this alone you will not know the Divine. If you know That, then you know all this. That's what the Vedas and the Upanishads speak about. They say that by identity with That we come to know all this, and that is because He, the Brahman, has become all this. He contains the whole universe. So the best thing is to go to the source.

“We have to go beyond the mind and the reason”¹⁸ and try to see what Brahman is, because if we can identify with That from which everything has descended, then things are simple.

Previously, we said that unifying only with the universal may not be sufficient, because the universal is a complex mixture of things both divine and undivine. Sri Aurobindo would say that the world is not Brahman fully. Is Sri Aurobindo contradicting the Vedas? No, he is just giving us a realistic image. He would say that this world is Brahman in the becoming. That means that it is going to become Brahman through various stages of evolution, but at present it is a mixture of innumerable factors, innumerable forces—universal and individual, divine and undivine. Because there is such a mixture of forces in this world, the will of the Supreme cannot execute itself fully. By the time it touches the world, the divine force or energy gets dispersed, distorted, twisted, even absorbed, so what reaches the individual is hardly anything. It is like the funds of the central government which, by the time they percolate down to the common man, most of it is siphoned off and the common man gets only a small percentage. So does it happen with the divine force, I guess!

One of the most powerful forces for distorting the will of the Supreme is the ego. For example, if I say, “Look at this marvelous building I have built for SACAR,” this is the greatest distortion of the truth. The truth is that the Mother has done it, maybe through my instrumentation, but surely it is not me, not my ego self! So this is how everywhere it twists and perverts a truth. Similarly, such twisting becomes a cosmic universal twisting on all fronts of human action.

Interestingly, one of the twists of ego is altruism itself! You may be helping all the hospitals and other charitable projects in the world and feel that you are a great helper of humanity and yet you need not go closer to the Divine. Normally when we talk about helping humanity we say that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do not want us to help humanity. That would be a wrong way of understanding them. What they mean is first we should have the vertical ascent and only then attempt the horizontal expansion. Mankind in the name of religion and caste and creed has done this horizontal expansion but what needs to be done is first to contact the Transcendent, or even

simply the psychic consciousness within. It is these who will instruct you and tell you whom to help and in what way to help them.

This is where the question of knowledge by identity comes in. How do I get this knowledge by identity? Well, specifically Mother would tell us it is through aspiration and surrender. Surrender to whom? Surrender to the Divine. If you want to know the inner contents of anything you must be able to identify with it. There is a possibility of identification with someone through intense love. Of course, unless it is vitiated by other vital pleasures and desires, pure love is the means of that identification. But the best way of identification is that of surrender—not to the spouse or society or its masters, but to the Divine. The more we surrender to the Divine, the more we will become aware of the faculty of mental self-awareness by extending it “beyond and outside us, Atman or Brahman of the Upanishads, we may become possessors in experience of the truths which form the contents of the Atman or Brahman in the universe.”¹⁹ So the highest knowledge comes through knowledge by identity. Through it you can gain the knowledge of the whole world and its *modus operandi*.

Now, the greatest obstacle on the path of aspiration and surrender is self-love, the love of one’s own ego. And this love runs so deep that every habit we have is endearing to us. Sri Aurobindo tells us that everything we do is basically a habit and that we fall in love with our habits creating a real obstruction to surrender. How many of us really want to give all our habits, both good and bad, to the Mother? Normally we only want her to take the bad habits or the bad thoughts. But we will not reach the Divine unless we achieve a complete self-giving.

As a summary of what we have been talking about, namely, the knowledge by identity, let me read out a passage from this chapter:

The reason active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and the superconscious All towards which we are impelled by that evolution. The subconscious and the superconscious are two different formulations of the same All. The master-word of the subconscious is Life, the master-word of the superconscious is Light. In the subconscious knowledge or consciousness is involved in action, for action is the essence of Life. In the superconscious action re-enters into Light and no longer

contains involved knowledge but is itself contained in a supreme consciousness. Intuitional knowledge is that which is common between them and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge.²⁰

We have seen that the highest method for getting knowledge is knowledge by identity. We have also seen that although knowledge by identity can give us the whole knowledge of any object or person, we should first aspire for identity with the Supreme Consciousness itself. One can have a direct identification with one object or several objects but this does not reveal to us the nature of the Supreme, because each object only represents one ray, one angle of His consciousness. So if you identify with a tree, you will know all its functioning—its prayers, its sufferings, its joys etc.—but you will not know the essence of the tree because it is only by identifying yourself with the Supreme essence that you understand all other manifestations of that Essence.

Now this knowledge by identity is already at play in man in the principle of intuition. And that is what we are going to take up now—the nature of intuition and the different kinds of intuitions. Those who have read Sri Aurobindo's analysis of the levels between Mind and Supermind know that the intuition proper is one of those levels. These levels are respectively Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition and Overmind. So Intuition is in itself a level of consciousness. But what does that mean?

First of all, intuition is that which is common between the superconscient and the subconscient. How is intuition common to both the highest and the lowest levels of consciousness? Sri Aurobindo clarifies this by saying:

Intuitional knowledge is that which is common between them and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge. But in the subconscient the intuition manifests itself in the action, in effectivity, and the knowledge or conscious identity is either entirely or more or less concealed in the action.²¹

This means that from matter to plants to animals to man, intuition is there

directly translated into action. We have hundreds and hundreds of examples of this, from the beehive to birds who fly thousands of kilometers in the winter to reach a warmer place across the globe. Incredibly, some of these birds fly the same route every year. What is it that guides them? We call it instinct, but what is instinct? Instinct is intuition in direct and effective action. This means that birds and animals don't think as we humans do, instead their knowledge is concealed in their action. Even on our level, when I touch something hot I immediately remove my hand. This is instinctual. We don't have to think!

But as evolution proceeds towards man and beyond, Sri Aurobindo says, "the intuition manifests itself in its true nature as knowledge emerging out of conscious identity, and effectivity of action is rather the accompaniment or necessary consequent and no longer masks as the primary fact."²² Looking at it from a different angle, we could say intuition is something...

...which takes place without any reasoning, any analysis, any deduction. Suddenly one knows a thing, without having reasoned, without having analysed, without deducing, without having reflected, without having made use of one's brain, without having put together the elements of the problem and tried to resolve them—it is not like that. All of a sudden it comes like a light in the consciousness; it can be in the head, it can be lower down, elsewhere; it is a light in the consciousness which brings a precise knowledge on a particular point and it is not at all a result of analyses and deductions. In fact, it is the first manifestation of the knowledge by identity.²³

That is to say, in man the same intuitive action "no longer contains involved knowledge but is itself contained in a supreme consciousness."²⁴ In the superconscient, intuition manifests as knowledge.

An interesting question, one that is very pertinent to us, is how is intuition received by mind? How do we catch or receive intuition? Long ago, when I was in the college level of the Ashram school, I wrote to the Mother asking her this very question. She replied in French:

Calmer le vital
Taire le mental
Garder le cerveau
silencieux et immobile
comme une surface
plane tournée vers
le haut et attentive.
et attende

(Calm the vital. Silence the mind. Keep the brain silent and still like an even surface turned upwards and attentive. And wait...) ²⁵

In another context, another sadhak asked a similar question and the Mother explained:

You can be in contact with the source of the will, of effort, even of a certain kind of knowledge, but in the outer, almost material field; whereas, if you want to contact the intuition, you must keep (*Mother indicates the forehead*) completely immobile. Active thought must be stopped as far as possible and the entire mental faculty must form—at the top of the head and a little further above if possible—a kind of mirror, very quiet, very still, turned upwards, in silent, very concentrated attention. If you succeed, you can—perhaps not immediately—but you can have the perception of the drops of light falling upon the mirror from a still unknown region and expressing themselves as a conscious thought which has no connection with all the rest of your thought since you have been able to keep it silent. That is the real beginning of the intellectual intuition. ²⁶

She says that instead of concentrating between the eyebrows, it is more important to keep the forehead immobile, to make it quiet and become like a mirror turned upwards so that intuition may drop into the mind, like drops of light. By doing this we can train ourselves to catch or bring down

intuition at will. Of course, this means silencing the mind and calming the vital, which is not easy, but there is a process for doing it.

We may receive intuition, but another problem is how much can we translate it into action? The mind and reason which are intermediaries between the superconscient and the subconscient are not always passive, not always a calm lake of water. There is also the mental and vital ego which give a twist to the intuitive truth. So in us the purity of the intuition gets lost or diluted, whereas in the animal, because it does not have a mind, intuition can act directly; there is no dilution, no impurity or perversion that sets in. So their knowledge is exact: birds can fly hundreds of kilometers on exactly the same route as the year before because there is nothing to corrupt the intuition which has been translated as instinctual action. But in man we have the problem. The mind and reason may receive the intuition, but they bring in their own kind of twisting and permutation. However, at a later stage of evolution, there could be some salvation to the mental man because,

Between these two states reason and mind act as intermediaries which enable the being to liberate knowledge out of its imprisonment in the act and prepare it to resume its essential primacy. When the self-awareness in the mind applied, both to content and content, to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also converts itself into the form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supramental.²⁷

We have seen different levels of intuition and how intuition will be the common nature of the new supramental race. Now we come to the next point which is the nature of intuition. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

...the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge.²⁸

So in that moment, in that split second of intuition you *are* the knowledge. The intuition captures you so very powerfully that you lose consciousness of the 'I', the time, everything. You forget that you are Mr. X and are just that knowledge.

Now what is important to note is that this faculty of intuition was in fact

the main method of Vedantins for getting knowledge. What exactly is the nature of intuition? Let me read out this passage:

Intuition is our first teacher. Intuition always stands veiled behind our mental operations. Intuition brings to man those brilliant messages from the unknown which are the beginning of his higher knowledge. Reason only comes in afterwards to see what profit it can have of the shining harvest. Intuition gives us that idea of something behind and beyond all that we know and seem to be which pursues man always in contradiction of his lower reason and all his normal experience and impels him to formulate that formless perception in the more positive ideas of God, Immortality, Heaven and the rest by which we strive to express it to the mind. For Intuition is as strong as Nature herself from whose very soul it has sprung and cares nothing for the contradictions of reason or the denials of experience. It knows what is because it is, because itself it is of that and has come from that, and will not yield it to the judgment of what merely becomes and appears.²⁹

This means that when an intuition comes into the mind it may very well seem illogical. It doesn't follow our limited capacity of reason and logic. It is truth which often seems self-contradictory. And sadly, we most often lose our intuition because reason takes over and seizes on the logicity of the knowledge we have received. So we need to suspend our logic. Unfortunately, however, in our normal life we tend to supersede intuitive truths with a logical reasoning. That is why Sri Aurobindo will explain to us later that reason has become a bar to intuition. Fortunately, the Vedic rishis did not have this; they went exclusively by intuition, so they received truths which are immortal, eternal.

Ancient Vedanta seized this message of the Intuition and formulated it in the three great declarations of the Upanishads, "I am He", "Thou art That, O Swetaketu", "All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman".³⁰

Now these are three different truths and each one has its own philosophical validity. But in order to have the whole truth they must be taken together. To emphasise one to the exclusion of the other is a mistake which has created many problems in the past.

For example, if I emphasise the truth "I am He," what is the logical conclusion that I will reach? It is that I am Brahman and the rest is Maya,

illusion. If I emphasise the second truth “Thou art That,” I conclude that everything outside of me is Brahman. Here the emphasis falls on the material world and that absolute status of Brahman becomes secondary. So, Sri Aurobindo tells us that both of these truths have to be linked up with the third one, “All this is the Brahman.” These truths which the Vedic rishis got through intuition have come down to us over thousands of years, which in itself is proof of the eternity of these truths. But we are not at the moment discussing the truths in themselves. What is important is the intuition that guided them. Sri Aurobindo says that it is a mistake to believe that there were debates amongst the rishis of the Vedantic period. He tells us:

It is by an error that scholars sometimes speak of great debates or discussions in the Upanishad. Wherever there is the appearance of a controversy, it is not by discussion, by dialectics or the use of logical reasoning that it proceeds, but by a comparison of intuitions and experiences in which the less luminous gives place to the more luminous, that narrower, faultier or less essential to the more comprehensive, more perfect, more essential. The question asked by one thinker of another is “What dost thou know?,” not “What dost thou think?” nor “To what conclusion has thy reasoning arrived?” Nowhere in the Upanishads do we find any trace of logical reasoning urged in support of the truths of Vedanta.³¹

So there is a subtle difference between what you know about something and what you think about something. You can see the difference between intuition and reason. Today we ask “What is your opinion?” or “What do you think about it?” Opinions can differ with one another, but “Intuition... must be corrected by a more perfect intuition; logical reasoning cannot be its judge.”³² So regarding intuition, nobody would say you are wrong; you could not be because it is an intuitive truth. It could only be an intuition from a lower level or an intuition from a higher level. *Savitri* is a perfect example of this. Sri Aurobindo has written many drafts of it and it is not the case that the earlier draft is wrong and the later draft is correct, but rather that the later one is better because it is from a higher level of intuition. Sri Aurobindo went on raising it from one level to another and culminating in the expression we call the Mantra. So *Savitri* is a wonderful example of the different levels of intuition.

But there is a problem with intuition. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Intuition is unable to give us the truth in that ordered and articulated form which our nature demands. Before it could effect any such completeness of direct knowledge in us, it would have to organise itself in our surface being and take possession there of the leading part. But in our surface being it is not the Intuition, it is the Reason which is organised and helps us to order our perceptions, thoughts and actions.³³

Intuition for us is never continuous; it is never ordered. Reason on the other hand is ordered; it gives continuity to our action and thinking. If I did Chapter 7 of *The Life Divine* yesterday, logically I should be doing Chapter 8 today and Chapter 9 later. That is the ordered reason. But intuition can come suddenly and suggest “No, you should do Chapter 18 tomorrow!” We are not in a position to understand the rationale behind this command because we do not see any ordered sequence or any link. We need to go step-by-step by linking one thing to another. We cannot jump in the sequence of the logical connections. But this problem did not seem to exist with the ancients. They could understand each other even when there were apparent leaps or breaks in the logic.

Take for example the story of Bhrigu Vallika. Bhrigu goes to his father and asks him to teach him that supreme knowledge having which he can know all that is there to be known. The father asks Bhrigu to go and meditate for 12 years on this subject. The son meditates for 12 years and he returns and tells his father that he has found out the truth. “What is it?” the father asks. “Annam is Brahman,” replies the son. The father does not argue or comment. He simply asks his son to meditate for another 12 years. It goes on like that until Bhrigu finds the supreme truth. It was all through an intuitive guidance and not through any intellectual debate or logical reasoning. So this is the kind of guidance we need to have in our higher life. But, being in a different age of pragmatism and rationalism, such an intuitive guidance may not be accepted by the masses, or we could say that the masses would not be in a position to receive intuitions. In the evolutionary process, a transition was necessary from intuition to reason. Sri Aurobindo explains:

Therefore the age of intuitive knowledge, represented by the early Vedantic thinking of the Upanishads, had to give place to the age of rational knowledge; inspired Scripture made room for metaphysical

knowledge, even as afterwards metaphysical philosophy had to give place to experimental Science. Intuitive thought which is a messenger from the superconscient and therefore our highest faculty, was supplanted by the pure reason which is only a sort of deputy and belongs to the middle heights of our being; pure reason in its turn was supplanted for a time by the mixed action of the reason which lives on our plains and lower elevations and does not in its view exceed the horizon of the experience that the physical mind and senses or such aids as we can invent for them can bring to us. And this process which seems to be a descent, is really a circle of progress. For in each case the lower faculty is compelled to take up as much as it can assimilate of what the higher had already given and to attempt to re-establish it by its own methods. By the attempt it is itself enlarged in its scope and arrives eventually at a more supple and a more ample self-accommodation to the higher faculties. ³⁴

Intuitive vision which is basically a synthetic vision that gives us the sense of unity and oneness could not be upheld for long by the common man. The first intuitive truths gave way to metaphysical truths; intuition gave way to the pure reason. But man can't remain for long on the level of either metaphysics or philosophy, so the pure reason gave way to the mixed reason whose emphasis is on physical reality. Of course, this contains a lot of history. This intuitive vision, which is basically a synthetic vision that sees the unity and oneness, could not be upheld long by the common man. From the intuition we came down to pure reason where you will see the development of philosophy in every culture. That is the first off-shoot. But then, man cannot remain too long on the level of metaphysics, so it comes down to the level of mixed reason, from pure reason to mixed reason.

Yesterday somebody asked me if we (humanity) are deteriorating, if this descent from the intuition to the mixed reason is a sign that humanity is going from bad to worse. No, we have to understand that we are not going from bad to worse, but that this is 'a cycle of progress'. How is it a cycle of progress? The truths that were caught by the early Vedantins were received by only a few among the living at that time. But what happened to the rest of humanity? All of them could not reach that level of intuition because the creation is multi-layered. The divine consciousness that is guiding this evolution has brought these truths to the lower levels so that people down

the scale can understand and practice them. The Vedantic truths have been brought down to the different levels through the Shastras, Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, through village folk stories so that the knowledge could percolate down to the last man. It is like the Ganges which starts in the Himalayas in a little area of five square meters and comes down to an area of maybe five square miles when it plunges in the Bay of Bengal. As it comes down, not only does it fertilize a large area but also thousands of people are able to take advantage of it. This is how Indian spirituality—and for that matter spirituality in every country—has been brought down to the common man. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Without this succession and attempt at separate assimilation we should be obliged to remain under the exclusive domination of a part of our nature while the rest remained either depressed and unduly subjected or separate in its field and therefore poor in its development. With this succession and separate attempt the balance is righted; a more complete harmony of our parts of knowledge is prepared.³⁶

Man is not just mind. Man is also the heart; he is also the vital; he is also the body. All these parts have not only to be enlightened but fulfilled. We should not think that only our upper intuitive level and our pure reason can be connected to the Divine. The Divine is also the vital. The Divine is also the body. This body needs self-expression and today that is what is happening. The body has never been given such an importance in the past of human evolution. But unfortunately, this has also resulted in an amplification of the expression of the lower vital because the body and vital are very much linked.

The Divine develops and matures each part of the being, and today, according to Sri Aurobindo, there is a need for an integral maturation. That is why the Divine secret is not to be revealed only in one way, expressed however brilliantly, in the Upanishads, the Gita, the Tantra or any other scripture. The beauty of this creation is that every level has its truth which cannot be bettered by a higher level. That is a very subtle truth. Shakespeare, for example, was the voice of Nature; the spirit of Nature spoke through him. There is no second Shakespeare in the world, because at that level Shakespeare has caught the essence of Nature. And on other levels, this is what Dante has done, what Homer has done, what Valmiki has done, what

Kalidasa has done. Even in *Savitri*, as Sri Aurobindo explains, there are certain truths that are better expressed on their own level. Take physical, sensual beauty for example. Some of the lines of *Savitri* describe in great detail the beauty of the body of Savitri, but in a way that is purified of a lower vital vibration, and yet keep their sensuousness because the body also is a truth.

Moving on, I will read another passage from *The Life Divine*:

Therefore, when the age of rationalistic speculation began, Indian philosophers, respectful of the heritage of the past, adopted a double attitude towards the Truth they sought. They recognised in the Shruti, the earlier results of Intuition or, as they preferred to call it, of inspired Revelation, an authority superior to Reason. But at the same time they started from Reason and tested the results it gave them, holding only those conclusions to be valid which were supported by the supreme authority.³⁶

So the first Indian philosophers accepted the supremacy of the higher truths of intuition. But once this phase started it was inevitable that the ego of reason would take over. Sri Aurobindo explains:

Nevertheless, the natural trend of Reason to assert its own supremacy triumphed in effect over the theory of its subordination. Hence the rise of conflicting schools each of which founded itself in theory on the Veda and used its texts as a weapon against the others...The unity of the first intuitional knowledge was thus broken up and the ingenuity of the logicians was able to discover devices, methods of interpretation, standards of varying value by which inconvenient texts of the Scripture could be practically annulled and an entire freedom acquired for their metaphysical speculation.³⁷

In this way everything in human civilisation gets its fulfillment. Now Sri Aurobindo has come to take us to the next rung of evolution. Had there not been fulfillment on the vital and the physical, his coming would have been too early. But he is the person, who based on the changes of the past, opens the future to us. This is how we can look at the transition from intuition, to pure reason to mixed reason.

This trend could be compared to the development of a child. In the beginning the child is very humble and obedient saying, "Yes father, yes

mummy.” But as he grows he says, “Bye, mummy. I’m going out dating.” He no longer asks permission. This is exactly what happened to reason. This resulted in an inevitable descent into the mixed reason which culminated in the birth of science. And science with its emphasis on physical material reality bid farewell to all philosophies as well as all scriptures labeling them as imagination, poetry and fancy.

So, that is the level we have come to today and that is why today we have so many problems with our children. They cannot accept the authority of a spiritual person. Our mentality is that only what I see is the truth, only what my senses tell me is the truth, not what is written in books.

Fortunately, during the last decade or two there has been a slow infiltration of acceptance—acceptance not reverence—for the higher truth of the pure reason. That is why there is a huge proliferation of spiritual literature today which is a mixture of the pure reason, intuitive truths and physical truths. Now whenever I enter a bookshop while I am travelling in India or abroad I see youngsters getting interested in this literature. This is a sign of the coming of the spiritual age.

But falsehood will not go quietly. As Mother said in 1972, I do not remember the exact words, but the meaning was this that before falsehood is destroyed it lashes its tail hardest. The present time is a time of violence, and one of the greatest violences being done at this hour is the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhist sculptures by the Taliban movement in Afghanistan. When something in the lower vital has to be destroyed, it tries to destroy before it gets destroyed. That is the truth of these lower forces. They know that their end is near and knowing that they destroy as much as possible. What is happening in Afghanistan is a real shame and a great tragedy, but this is the human ignorance. It is indicative of this reversal of consciousness. We are moving backwards in a sense but we are reclaiming old truths.

This movement began, if I may say so, on August 14, 1914 when Sri Aurobindo started writing *The Life Divine*, because he brought back those old truths which he himself experienced. Between 1903 and 1914 he prepared himself by re-living, re-experiencing and reincarnating these truths within his own being. The great Mahashakti, the creatrix, the Mother arrived and gave him the possibility of expressing these old truths in a new form suited to the present age and taking them forward towards a greater

realisation. If the Mother had not come, Sri Aurobindo would never have started *The Arya*, not only literally but on the spiritual level too. This is because the Mother gives birth to knowledge; she gives birth to everything, even the great Purusha. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, all his knowledge was in his bosom but it could only come forth when the Mother became the bridge. Before that Sri Aurobindo penned a few things such as the *Bande Mataram*, but this was not his philosophy. To bring back the old wisdom in a new language was one of the missions of the Mother and it was the first thing she did when she came to India. Then Sri Aurobindo started writing in English presenting what had first been given to humanity as the Vedantic truths. Thanks to Sri Aurobindo, the clouds surrounding these Vedantic truths and the Vedas themselves have been removed. He has brought forth the truths that lay hidden within them. *The Life Divine* is a bringing forth of the lost truths of the Vedas.

Allow me to take a diversion from the text and discuss the different levels of intuition as explained by the Mother:

There are different kinds of intuition, and we carry these capacities within us. They are always active to some extent but we don't notice them because we don't pay enough attention to what is going on in us.

Behind the emotions, deep within the being, in a consciousness seated somewhere near the level of the solar plexus, there is a sort of prescience, a kind of capacity for foresight, but not in the form of ideas: rather in the form of feelings, almost a perception of sensations. For instance, when one is going to decide to do something, there is sometimes a kind of uneasiness or inner refusal, and usually, if one listens to this deeper indication, one realises that it was justified.³⁸

The first one we see is on the level of emotions. Here it manifests as a kind of feeling that something is not right. A hesitation comes in which says, "No, I should not meet with that person" or "I should not go to that place." This is what we call in common language a 'gut feeling'. It is almost a kind of voice. And if you listen to that 'perception of sensations' you will be happy later. There are plenty of examples of this kind of foreknowledge, so I don't have to relate any to you. Suffice to say that you have a sense, a sixth sense or a sort of prescience, and you must listen to that.

At the same time the Mother warns us that we should not mistake a kind of

subconscious reasoning for genuine intuition. Now, what is this subconscious reasoning?

There is also another form but that one is much more difficult to observe because for those who are accustomed to think, to act by reason—not by impulse but by reason—to reflect before doing anything, there is an extremely swift process from cause to effect in the half-conscious thought which prevents you from seeing the line, the whole line of reasoning and so you don't think that it is a chain of reasoning, and that is quite deceptive. You have the impression of an intuition but it is not an intuition, it is an extremely rapid subconscious reasoning, which takes up a problem and goes straight to the conclusions. This must not be mistaken for intuition.³⁹

To give an example, this morning I was thinking about the garden pattern here at SACAR. I was with a friend of mine and we were thinking about how we should plan it. And suddenly with the problem came the solution instantaneously. Was it an intuition? It may not be so. What happens is that that many times it is the reason acting at a super speed like a computer. The reason goes through all the logical steps but the intermediate steps are not seen. It's just like when you hit 'enter' on a computer and instantaneously the answer comes. You don't see what is happening in between; you just hit 'enter' and within one second you have the whole thing. Our mind also does this. You think you have a great intuition but in truth it is only rapid logic. So let us not mistake this type of super speed logic for intuition.

Now on the mental level, as I just now described, it comes as a drop of light into the silence of the mind.

In the ordinary functioning of the brain, intuition is something which suddenly falls like a drop of light. If one has the faculty, the beginning of a faculty of mental vision, it gives the impression of something coming from outside or above, like a little impact of a drop of light in the brain, absolutely independent of all reasoning.⁴⁰

We must at the same time be aware of the dangers of self-deception from subconscious will and desire. Very often when we want to win a point, we argue saying that it is our intuition. Or if we want to impress somebody we say, "I had a great intuition that we should do it like this." And when we see that this is not being accepted by the other party, we can even go to the

extent of saying that we were “sitting in meditation and it came as an intuition!” But this is only a sweet self-deception. It is actually our own will, our own desire that we have given the name of intuition. Then we say, “Look, I went to the Ashram and I had this idea, so it is an intuition straight from the Mother. Therefore it must be done.” The mind is very clever and it is very difficult to analyse the purity of the truth and to separate out our own personal prejudices, desires, etc. that get attached to the intuition. Sometimes there is no intuition at all; it is only our own ambition which is formulated and presented to the other person. In the depth of our heart we know it is not true but we want to impress the other person by using the big word ‘intuition.’

Now, the last form of intuition is the inner guidance that comes through surrender. We said this previously that intuition or knowledge can best come through surrender.

And there comes a time when one feels a kind of inner guidance, something which is leading one very perceptibly in all that one does. But then, for the guidance to have its maximum power, one must naturally add to it a conscious surrender: one must be sincerely determined to follow the indication given by the higher force.⁴¹

It may be that we are then in a better inner attitude to receive the higher consciousness, because when we surrender, the effects of the ego are reduced and all our vital ambitions and desires are nullified, or if not nullified, at least reduced to a minimum. Of course, the more we surrender the more we get intuitive knowledge and the more we become one with knowledge by identity.

Now here one last word regarding knowledge by identity. On the human level we get a taste of it in different ways. In a moment of true surrender when we have a sense of being ‘almost lost’ in a fraction of a second—maybe we are meditating at the Samadhi, or before the Mother’s photograph—and we feel for a split second a total loss of ourselves. That is the moment of true surrender; the moment when the ‘I’ gets almost dissolved. These are moments of experience which life gives us in order to give us a taste of the higher truths. This is the rhythm of life and nature itself. It gives us a taste of the Beyond so that we become a nympholept of that Beyond. If we do not get a taste of the real Thing, then we cannot follow it.

Those of us who are on the mental levels of consciousness cannot have the full knowledge by identity. We have only trickles of it, drops of light, but those in the supramental consciousness would have it as a natural possession. For us reason is the standard of life; for those in the Supermind, knowledge by identity would be the standard.

In order to get a clearer picture of what we are trying to understand, let me read out a long passage from the Mother:

At present, man governs his life through reason; all the activities of the mind are of common use for him; his means of knowledge are observation and deduction; it is by and through reasoning that he takes his decision and chooses his way—or believes he does—in life.

The new race shall be governed by intuition, that is to say, direct perception of the divine law within. Some human beings actually know and experience intuition—as, undoubtedly, certain big gorillas of the forests have glimpses of reasoning.

In mankind, the very few who have cultivated their inner self, who have concentrated their energies on the discovery of the true law of their being, possess more or less the faculty of intuition. When the mind is perfectly silent, pure like a well polished mirror, immobile as a pond on a breezeless day, then, from above, as the light of the stars drops in the motionless waters, so the light of the supermind, of the Truth within, shines in the quieted mind and gives birth to intuition. Those who are accustomed to listen to this voice out of the Silence, take it more and more as the instigating motive of their actions; and where others, the average men, wander along the intricate paths of reasoning, they go straight their way, guided through the windings of life by intuition, this superior instinct, as by a strong and unfailing hand.

This faculty which is exceptional, almost abnormal now, will certainly be quite common and natural for the new race, the man of tomorrow. But probably the constant exercise of it will be detrimental to the reasoning faculties. As man possesses no more the extreme physical ability of the monkey, so also will the superman lose the extreme mental ability of man, this ability to deceive himself and others.⁴²

Here we see two main ideas. The first idea is that the new race will have intuition as their common heritage. The second idea is that the result of

using this intuition will be a drying up of the mental reasoning faculty because in Nature a thing that is not used dries up and falls off. Man has lost the physical agility of the monkey because it has not been put into use. Similarly, the new race will lose its capacity of reasoning because it will no longer be in use. The Mother has given us the message that in regard to education the stress should be more and more on the intuitive knowledge rather than reason. It may take a long time for this transition, but in this manner slowly mind and reason will become obsolete and intuition would be the natural faculty of the new race beyond man.

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Lecture Notes

I. The instruments of knowledge

a. a) In order to understand the trend of the divine working, man has within him the faculty of reason and its different levels

b. The powers of our lower nature

1) *Sthula sarira*—prana and physicality = outer instrument

2) *Antahkarana*—conscious mentality = inner instrument

3) *Citta*—basic mental consciousness

4) *Manas*—the sense mind

5) *Buddhi*—the intelligence

6) *Ahankara*—the ego idea

7) *Psychic prana*—the psychic nervous life-mind

II. Double action of reason

a. Mixed or dependent or indirect—It confines itself to the appearances of things and to the circle of our sensible experience

b. Pure or independent or direct—It goes beyond appearances; it can know the truth behind appearances. It brings us more metaphysical knowledge than the physical

c. *Manas* as the sixth and only sense

III. Double action of psychological experience

a. Mixed or dependent—its seeks to become aware of the object dependent on the senses and forms

b. Pure or sovereign—it seeks to know the subject of identity

c. Our ego has divided our experience into subject and object. So, we have to develop processes and organs by which to enter into communion with the all

IV. Beyond our existing limitations

a. Mind can take direct cognisance without the help of the sense organs, e.g., hypnosis

b. To develop other senses and faculties

V. Knowledge by identity

a. “The knowledge of the contents is contained in the knowledge of the continent”

VI. Intuition

- a. The nature of intuition and different kinds of intuition
- b. Intuition: knower and known are one through knowledge
- c. Intuitive truths of the Vedanta
- d. Transition from intuition to pure reason to mixed reason
- e. From *sruti* to the conflicting schools of philosophy
- f. In spite of the trend from intuition to reason, fundamental conceptions of Vedanta have survived.

The Pure Existent

Today we will discuss the chapter, 'The Pure Existent'. It is perhaps the most abstract of the first nine chapters because it deals with the most abstract concept. But I suppose that after working through the philosophical thought of the previous chapters, you will now be able to grasp even this most abstract concept!

I believe that the best way to understand Sri Aurobindo is to read him regularly. By reading him sufficiently, we come to know the nuances of his language which is very difficult in itself. Secondly, by reading him a bit everyday, say a few paragraphs per day, our ideas slowly start becoming clearer. By reading Sri Aurobindo continuously, the very brain cells increase. It is like physical exercise. If you exercise daily, your body muscles will increase, is it not? Similarly, by reading Sri Aurobindo the grey matter of the brain increases, so over time you begin to understand. Since these brain cells have been created by his consciousness, or the pressure of his consciousness or the Mother's consciousness, they begin to receive their light. These cells are meant exclusively to receive that influence and knowledge and consciousness, as it were. This is why we need to read Sri Aurobindo regularly.

We now start with the concept of 'The Pure Existent'. I will read out the first quote which says: "One indivisible that is pure existence."¹ This single line is perhaps the most difficult one we come across in philosophy. You can see that the title itself 'The Pure Existent' is quite enigmatic. It is not just existence. Already there is a distinction drawn between what existence is and what the Existent is. So we need to clarify a bit before we move forward.

When we say Existent, we are speaking about that which is beyond manifestation. This Unmanifest Being or Tat is beyond the question of any space-time manifestation, whereas existence is purely something that is related to the manifestation which we normally call Sat. The complete form, the complete name of the manifest Being is actually Sachchidananda, whose most essential characteristic is Sat. Consciousness and Ananda come afterwards. First you have to exist, to be. If that existence is not there the rest of the characteristics cannot be there. So in this chapter Sri Aurobindo is

going to deal with that which is beyond manifestation while also explaining what existence is.

If you look around impartially, what do you see? What do you feel? We see and feel the constancy of movement and change. The sun rises and the sun sets, night comes and night goes. Everything is in motion. This world is full of dynamism, full of energy. What this energy is doing or where it is going we don't know. Regardless, the first thing we see is this tremendous energy. We cannot deny it. Both Sri Aurobindo and Vedanta would tell us that the first fundamental characteristic of this world is apparently that of energy. And what is our reaction to this energy? In the first paragraph of this chapter Sri Aurobindo tells us that:

We instinctively act and feel and weave our life thoughts as if this stupendous world movement were at work around us as centre and for our benefit, for our help or harm, or as if the justification of our egoistic cravings, emotions, ideas, standards were its proper business even as they our own chief concern.²

When we see this energy, we see ourselves as the nodus or centre of its workings. We feel that this stupendous massive energy is here to satisfy and fulfill our ideas, ambitions, wants and needs. But if you really look at it, you see that humanity is not even a grain of sand in comparison to these stupendous, eternal, infinite energies. Yet look at us! We think we are the centre! This is where we go wrong in trying to establish our relations with things around us. But at the same time, the Transcendent somewhat depends on the individual for its self-revelation or in the process of ascent or evolution. In the chapter, 'Man in the Universe', of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo reveals this equation thus:

The universe and the individual are necessary to each other in their ascent. Always indeed they exist for each other and profit by each other. Universe is a diffusion of the divine All in infinite Space and Time, the individual its concentration within limits of Space and Time. Universe seeks in infinite extension the divine totality it feels itself to be but cannot entirely realise; for in extension existence drives at a pluralistic sum of itself which can neither be the primal nor the final unit, but only a recurring decimal without end or beginning. Therefore it creates in itself a self-conscious concentration of the All through which it can aspire. In the

conscious individual Prakriti turns back to perceive Purusha, World seeks after Self; God having entirely become Nature, Nature seeks to become progressively God.³

We are happy to know that since it means that human beings have got some importance in this world! So we could feel proud that we are also instruments in the building up of this world.

We have come to know that God needs us, but the question is, do we need Him? That is where we are at present in the evolution. We don't seem to need Him most of the time because we have our own support system in doctors, builders, psychiatrists, etc. This gives us a tremendous false ego. To think ourselves to be the centre of everything is wrong. But Sri Aurobindo warns us not to go to the opposite extreme and be depressed by our smallness, because to think of ourselves as nothing also is wrong. We have to find a balance in this relation. Sri Aurobindo tells us that:

If we look...not at mass of quantity but force of quality, we shall say that the ant is greater than the solar system it inhabits and man greater than all inanimate Nature put together. But this again is the illusion of quality. When we go behind and examine only the intensity of the movement of which quality and quantity are aspects, we realise that this Brahman dwells equally in all existences.⁴

In this context, I always remember and repeat these lines from Sri Aurobindo:

The hand that sent Jupiter spinning through heaven,
Spends all its cunning to fashion a curl.⁵

It is the *samam brahma*, the equal Brahman which both whirls the spheres through the heavens and fashions a curl on a woman's forehead. An anthill, just because it is minuscule, is not less important than the universe and the planets. There is no such distinction in terms of quantity. In fact, the anthill is higher in terms of quality because it has started expressing consciousness on the level of life, whereas the planets are still on the level of matter.

But ultimately, when we go behind these aspects of quantity and quality, we see *samam brahma* equal in all existences. There is nothing that is big or small. It is equal Brahman everywhere. But this is a concept we can't grasp easily. How can Brahman be there just as equally in the ant as in the sun? This flabbergasts our mind. It normally looks at things from the standpoint

of quantity. So Sri Aurobindo tells us that we have to look at the problem intuitively.

To clarify this, let us use the example of the surface of the ocean. On the surface there are small waves and big waves. Behind every wave whether small or large is the whole ocean. Every wave is fully connected, fully supported by the ocean. So if there is a small wave here and a very big wave there it does not mean that the bigger wave has greater support and the smaller one wave has less support. The support of the ocean is the same everywhere. So it is not possible to say that this one ant has one ounce of divine support and the sun has a trillion tons! We cannot have any kind of division; all is equally supported by *samam brahma*. If we are seeing quantity we are dividing the Divine. This proposition of one ounce and a trillion tons leads to the concept that the Divine can be divided into smaller portions. But in reality he is 'One indivisible'. Brahman is the sole existence; there is nothing beyond Brahman. So how can Brahman be divided? It is illogical. It is the same with the concept of addition: given that there is nothing else but Brahman, how can you add to Brahman? Brahman exists by himself, in himself, and to himself. He is the one Existent. If you can grasp this concept, then it becomes easier to understand how Brahman is there equally in all.

We are saying that Brahman is indivisible. Fine. But we still see ants, elephants, stars and the sun. Isn't there still a difference in the manifestation? How is *samam brahma* there equally in all things? Let's see what else Sri Aurobindo has to say on the matter. In the second paragraph he says:

The force of strength that goes to make the strong man is no whit greater than the force of weakness that goes to make the weak. The energy spent is as great in repression as in expression, in negation as in affirmation, in silence as in sound.⁶

This is the secret clue. In the ant, the Divine is withholding Himself from expression and this withholding takes as much energy as expressing. To clarify this idea, let's analyse 'anger'. If you try to control your anger you use a certain amount of consciousness and will power to repress that anger. If you let it burst forth the same energy goes out. So it is only a question of expression or repression; the energy is the same. Therefore the psychologist will say, "Why repress? Express yourself. Let the anger burst forth. Don't

hold it inside.” But Yoga does not say so. Yoga on the contrary says control your anger; don’t let it burst forth.

That is what happened in our Satyagraha movement, the non-violence movement during the freedom movement of India. In the light of what we have said, is non-violence really non-violent? Not at all. You may not have taken a gun and shot at a British officer, but how much violence are you doing to yourself by withholding all that energy within you, energy of the same violence, the same anger, the same vengeance? So by Satyagraha you are doing violence to yourself! Maybe India has become so violent today, thanks to those old Satyagraha movements, who can say? Gandhi himself was the victim of an outburst of this violence. It was not about some person shooting him; that was only a pointer to show that non-violence isn’t really non-violent. This does not mean that I am telling you to pick up stones and start throwing them at buses around your town. That is not the way. What we have to understand is that the principle of equality must be maintained so we are not attacked by violence, jealousy or revenge. If you are in that consciousness, then it is fine.

This same principle also applies in the case of silence and sound. To keep silence is not a joke. It is not easy to meditate and try to silence the mind. It requires a tremendous amount of concentration and energy; it is much easier to go out and blabber. So sound and silence are only expressions; the energy behind is the same.

Here we have seen two fundamental ideas: first, the indivisibility of pure existence, and second, *samam brahma* dwelling equally in all this manifestation. If you have understood these two concepts, then you have grasped two very difficult concepts in Indian philosophy.

Now we will discuss what is the nature of this All, this infinite energy. This is the second most important argument we have in this chapter. We have said that this universe, when we look at it, seems to be an unbounded energy which is equal in all manifestations of itself. The only difference is the intensity of its expression.

We find ourselves facing a third philosophical problem, the problem of eternal motion and movement versus eternal stability. Here again we have divided views. Some say It is movement; others say It is stability. Whatever line we take results in a whole different line of philosophy and attitude

towards life. Normally when we look at the world, what we see is the intense experience of movement. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

Those who see only this world-energy can declare indeed that there is no such thing: our idea of an eternal stability, an immutable pure existence is a fiction of our intellectual conceptions starting from a false idea of the stable.⁷

For the ordinary consciousness, we tend to think that everything is in motion, and the motion of this energy creates whatever forms there are. Some philosophies have gone to the extent of saying that there is only movement and motion; there is nothing stable in the universe. Whatever stability we see is only a large block of movement of energy. What do we mean by that? For example, when I walk on this floor, I feel the floor is stable. We go on the idea that the earth is stable and we are moving on it. Scientifically speaking, however, we know this is not the truth; the earth itself is moving, but for pragmatic experience we say the earth is stable and we are moving. But actually, the earth is moving, everything is moving. You may have had the reverse experience when you have travelled in a train. If I sit in my compartment looking out of the window, I see the world moving—the trees, the people, the houses, the stations—everything is moving, but I am stable. Ultimately, however, the mind tells me I am also moving.

So what is all this movement? We see that Buddhism has taken things to the extreme by saying that there is nothing stable in this world; all is a flux. Even this personality is changing; every second it is changing. I am standing here, but it is not the same person as yesterday. But if you ask a Buddhist philosopher, “How is it that we have changed? We have all come back to the same room, sat in the same chairs and are looking at and listening to the same speaker. You say that we have all changed, and yet we recognise each other. How is that possible?” The Buddhist would answer that we recognise each other because of memory and association. Our memory says, “Yes, that person was like that so it must be him.” So although all of us have changed, we all have some kind of memory of the past self. But what is memory? And why is it that memory has not changed also? The Buddhist would cleverly answer that memory has also changed, because I recognise you not as an identical person to what you were before but as a similar person.

Another problem comes up when we bring up the question of the soul. The

Buddhists say that we don't have anything stable or permanent called a soul. A soul would be something permanent, stable, unchanging like the Divine who is indivisible and unchanging. Buddhists cannot accept that something could be unchanging; so they conclude that there is no soul at all. There is only movement and all stability is only a block of movement.

This lands us in the Nihil, the Non-Existence, where there is nothingness. So what does Sri Aurobindo have to say about this? He says,

We have only these two alternatives, either an undefinable pure existence or an undefinable energy in action and, if the latter alone is true, without any stable base or cause, then the energy is a result and phenomenon generated by the action, the movement which alone is. We have then no Existence, or we have the Nihil of the Buddhists with existence as only an attribute of eternal phenomenon, of Action, of Karma, of Movement. This, asserts the pure reason, leaves my perceptions unsatisfied, contradicts my fundamental seeing, and therefore cannot be.⁸

Let us look at the problem from a different angle. Can there be only movement without something stable? Let us analyse the very concept of movement. When I say I am moving, or I tell you to see how this pen is moving, how do you know the pen is moving? Is it because your senses are saying so? Your senses might be wrong. How can you tell either philosophically or by simple physics that the pen is moving? If I move it from point A to point B in front of this screen, you know this in relation to the screen behind which is not moving. If the screen were also to move you would not perceive the movement of the pen. It would be like two trains moving parallel to one another at the same speed. You would think you are not moving. But if one of the trains speeds up then you would say, "Oh, that train is moving!" So if something moves it has to be in reference to something that is stable, otherwise you cannot perceive it. That is the basic truth on the level of physics itself. Now, metaphysically speaking, we understand that all concept of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose. One cannot have just energy flow. The very word 'movement' means that there is something not moving initially which starts moving. So movement cannot exist by itself.

From the point of view of Vedanta, we would say that movement belongs to space and time, that is, to existence, and stability belongs to the Existent.

But what is this Existent? The Existent is that silence, that non-movement, that *sthanu*. That simply is. So the pure Existent, as the title connotes, simply is. *Is* here means that it has not yet become, it is beyond manifestation. The moment it moves it comes into space and time, into manifestation. I hope you are getting the distinction here. Movement means manifestation, while the *sthanu*, stability, is the nonmanifest. From the nonmanifest comes the manifest.

To conclude what we have been speaking about I will read this passage from *The Life Divine*:

The very conception of movement carries with it the potentiality of repose and betrays itself as an activity of some existence; the very idea of energy in action carries with it the idea of energy abstaining from action; and an absolute energy not in action is simply and purely absolute existence.⁹

Now what is absolute existence? To help our understanding, I will read two passages from the chapter:

...it seems to be asserted to us by Vedanta that as we are subordinate and an aspect of this Movement, so the movement is subordinate and an aspect of something other than itself, of a great timeless, spaceless Stability, *sthanu*, which is immutable, inexhaustible and unexpended, not acting though containing all this action, not energy, but pure existence.¹⁰

When we look at existence in itself, Time and Space disappear. If there is any extension, it is not a spatial but a psychological extension; if there is any duration, it is not a temporal but a psychological duration; and it is then easy to see that this extension and duration are only symbols which represent to the mind something not translatable into intellectual terms, an eternity which seems to us the same all-containing ever-new moment, an infinity which seems to us the same all-containing all-pervading point without magnitude.¹¹

This question of movement belonging to space and time is important to understand. It is also a little tricky. In movement there is manifestation, and manifestation means time and space. All our existence, all our experiences have these two dimensions of time and space.

We can also add a third dimension, that of consciousness. When I say I am sitting here in this lecture hall, I am aware, I have a consciousness. But there

is a deeper level of consciousness which is not the consciousness of time and space, but a spiritual consciousness. The experiences of body, mind and vital have a content which is common for all of us, but it is only when we add the spiritual dimension that we can reach the supreme consciousness of the all.

But when we speak of the spiritual dimension, what is its essence? Listen again to the last sentence of the last passage I quoted from *The Life Divine*: “an eternity which seems to us the same all-containing ever-new moment, an infinity which seems to us the same all-containing all-pervading point without magnitude.” That is an incredibly beautiful statement. It is a moment that contains the all; it is not a moment in time. What is this all-containing ever-new moment? It is Sachchidananda.

In light of this we can now understand why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother tell us that the Supreme does not have the divided view of past, present and future. It is we from our mental perspective who think of the past, present and future. For the Supreme, the moment contains the whole. All that we think of as the past and the future is contained in the present. The spiritual consciousness moves from point to point, from moment to moment without having to look back and without having to look forward. Every moment carries all time if one can be in that consciousness. Every moment is a new birth. So that is why I have been telling you that this is the dimension we have to add, the spiritual dimension wherein one can experience timelessness and spacelessness.

Let's look at another quote from this chapter:

This is the sign of the original ignorance which is the root of the ego, that it can only think with itself as centre as if it were the All, and of that which is not itself accepts only so much as it is mentally disposed to acknowledge or is forced to recognise by the shocks of its environment. Even when it begins to philosophise, does it not assert that the world only exists in and by its consciousness? Its own state of consciousness or mental standards are to it the test of reality; all outside its orbit or view tends to become false or non-existent. This mental self-sufficiency of man creates a system of false accountantship which prevents us from drawing the right and full value from life. There is a sense in which these pretensions of the human mind and ego repose on a truth, but this truth

only emerges when the mind has learned its ignorance and the ego has submitted to the All and lost in it its separate self-assertion.¹²

So as individuals we should not think of ourselves as too very important to this universe nor as too little to the universe. All the universe has got *samam brahma* and it gives equal importance to me as well as to the sun and to the ant. That is true accountantship. The whole problem of present humanity is that we are having a false account. The real solution is the ego submitting itself to the Supreme. And what is the right way to do this? We have to believe, understand and accept ourselves as part of the entire cosmic movement. We are all players in the vast infinite play. We are all contributing just a wee bit, but we are still part of this play. We are part of this magnificent unfolding play and to play our role truly, the best thing to do is to submit ourselves to the Supreme. Then the ego realises it is only a partial movement of the infinite movement. If we do not submit to the Supreme, the ego thinks that it is very important, that the world and God exist to fulfill its desires. But the moment we start surrendering, we realise all are equally good, equally important.

The Gita says that each one of us has a *svadharma* and *svabhava* and that the divine is manifesting himself through us. It is only when we submit ourselves through consecration and surrender that we realise our *svadharma*. Now people ask the question, “how does one know one’s *svadharma*? I am working in this place. I am an engineer. I am a computer scientist. Is it my *svadharma*?” Nobody can tell what your *svadharma* is. It is revealed to you as you go along. I once wrote a letter to the Mother because I was curious to know my future, though not exactly my *svadharma*, and she wrote to me:¹³

(Let your resolution be integral and constant and little by little your future will be revealed to you.

With love and blessings.)

I suppose that is how our future as well as our *svadharma* get revealed to us as we go along with a sincere quest in our mind and a deep aspiration in our heart.

The pure Existent is one of the most difficult concepts in philosophy, but it can be broken down into three basic ideas. The first is that the Supreme Reality is one. The second is that the Supreme is indivisible. The third idea to

understand is that the Supreme is essentially unknowable to our thought. So the Supreme is one, indivisible and unknowable. These are the three basic characteristics and they belong to a state beyond manifestation. There are other features which are equally important but which come into play only when there is a manifestation. When the Supreme Existent comes into manifestation it becomes Sat, Chit-Tapas and Ananda.

We have seen how the argument that the Supreme is only movement and energy cannot stand ground because without something being stable there cannot be anything moving. Even the logical approach to movement requires something stable in the background. So, on all levels—metaphysical, logical, experiential—movement and stability go together. After expounding on this idea, Sri Aurobindo returns to the definition of the pure Absolute. It is beyond all movement and stability and is itself unknowable by thought, whereas here on the empirical level we have both pure existence (fact of being) and world existence (fact of becoming). Let me read out a sentence which summarises the whole thought:

If this indefinable, infinite, timeless, spaceless Existence is, it is necessarily a pure absolute. It cannot be summed up in any quantity or quantities, it cannot be composed of any quality or combination of qualities. It is not an aggregate of forms or a formal substratum of forms.¹⁴

We have a tendency to think that if all things in the world, movable and immovable, are put together, that conglomerate would make the Brahman. But Brahman is not the many put together. He is all this and at the same time he is beyond all this. He is the one who has brought forth the many out of himself and when He withdraws them into Himself, He continues to remain for He is the sole Existent. So there is a distinction between the pure Absolute and the multiplicity which includes godheads and forces and all creatures that are in the universe. When we say that Brahman is the one Absolute, it means that he is beyond all manifestation. Sri Aurobindo emphasises this point. He says:

If all forms, quantities, qualities were to disappear, this would remain. Existence without quantity, without quality, without form is not only conceivable, but it is the one thing we can conceive behind these phenomena. Necessarily, when we say it is without them, we mean that it exceeds them, that it is something into which they pass in such a way as to

cease to be what we call form, quality, quantity and out of which they emerge as form, quality and quantity in the movement. They do not pass away into one form, one quality, one quantity which is the basis of all the rest,—for there is none such,—but into something which cannot be defined by any of these terms.¹⁵

Having established what the pure Absolute is, Sri Aurobindo takes up the next point, that of manifestation. As we said previously, when there is a manifestation, its parameters are time and space. Movement and manifestation are synonymous with space and time. You cannot think about movement without time and space and you cannot think about time and space without movement.

This relates to the distinction Sri Aurobindo makes between ‘timeless eternity’ and ‘time eternity’.¹⁶ Timeless eternity is the status of the Supreme before manifesting. Once the manifestation starts, so to say, there is time eternity. It is this eternal movement in time which is seen by the two aspects of time and space. Time is, if we can say, eternity in manifestation; beyond manifestation it does not exist.

Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Two things alone exist, movement in Space, movement in Time, the former objective, the latter subjective. Extension is real, duration is real, Space and Time are real. Even if we go behind extension in Space and perceive it as a psychological phenomenon, as an attempt of the mind to make existence manageable by distributing the indivisible whole in a conceptual Space, yet we cannot go behind the movement of succession and change in Time. For that is the very stuff of our consciousness.¹⁷

So Time is even more basic than Space. He continues:

We are and the world is a movement that continuously progresses and increases by the inclusion of all the successions of the past in a present which represents itself to us as the beginning of all the successions of the future.¹⁸

So what then is Time itself? We have said it has three dimensions: past, present and future. The past means the time that has passed by; now it is 4:25 p.m., so we could say that 4:00 p.m. is past time. The future is what will happen, so standing at this point of time we could say that 7:00 p.m. is future time. What is present time? (*An audience member says 4:30 p.m.*) Did

you say 4:30? Are you sure? It cannot be 4:30, because the moment you uttered it, it became the past. There is no present; you cannot catch the present! Sri Aurobindo tells us that the present “always eludes us because it is not, for it has perished before it is born.”¹⁹

That seems funny though, doesn't it? There is no present; there is only the past and the future! And yet it is said that the most important time is now, the present. That is why Sri Aurobindo gives us the phrase “ever-new moment.”²⁰ The present moment is actually the most important, because it is a bridge between the past and the future. But it is not the ‘present’ that you can see on a watch. Sri Aurobindo tells us that there is a present and the supramental consciousness always lives in a present which is ever new. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo explains the experience of time in the Supermind in a chapter called ‘Towards the Supramental Time Vision’:

The supramental consciousness on the other hand is founded upon the supreme consciousness of the timeless Infinite, but has too the secret of the deployment of the infinite Energy in time. It can either take its station in the time consciousness and keep the timeless infinite as its background of supreme and original being from which it receives all its organising knowledge, will and action, or it can, centred in its essential being, live in the timeless but live too in a manifestation in time which it feels and sees as infinite and as the same Infinite, and can bring out, sustain and develop in the one what it holds supernally in the other. Its time consciousness therefore will be different from that of the mental being, not swept helplessly on the stream of the moments and clutching at each moment as a stay and a swiftly disappearing standpoint, but founded first on its eternal identity beyond the changes of time, secondly on a simultaneous eternity of Time in which past, present and future exist together for ever in the self-knowledge and self-power of the Eternal, thirdly, in a total view of the three times as one movement singly and indivisibly seen even in their succession of stages, periods, cycles, last—and that only in the instrumental consciousness—in the step by step evolution of the moments. It will therefore have the knowledge of the three times, *trikaladrsti*,—held of old to be a supreme sign of the seer and the Rishi;—not as an abnormal power, but as its normal way of time knowledge. ²¹

It is a marvelous description of how the Supermind lives simultaneously in

timelessness and in time! We all know the famous advice: “Why worry about something that has passed? Why worry about the future, something that has not yet come? Be occupied with the present.” Indeed, that is the sanest thing to do. But to live truly in the present is only possible when one can live in a higher spiritual consciousness. In the mental consciousness, we are always obsessed either by the past or the future. Mind cannot live in an integral consciousness; it must always live in divided time.

In India of ancient times, the famous philosophy of *Kshanikavada*, or momentaryness, was very prevalent. This philosophy emphasises that life is ephemeral, transient and unhappy. But if life is full of sorrow, what is the cause? Buddha said it is desire. Desire to live is the basic cause of *asukham*. Therefore, he said remove desire. If you take away the desire to live, it means taking away the energy of life, extinguishing the life energy in you. In other words, it means Nirvana, extinction. Extinction of what? Extinction of the dynamism of energy, of *tapas*. And how do you extinguish the life flame? Don't supply it with the oil of desire. If you don't give it the oil of desire then it will slowly burn out resulting in Nirvana. But this approach is very difficult, and some have doubted whether this was actually the philosophy of the Buddha, because what the Buddha actually said may not have come out as Buddhism. While describing the birth of religions Mother tells us that what Jesus said is not Christianity and what Buddha said is not Buddhism. Let me read out a rather long passage from the Mother in order to expand this idea:

Religion may be divine in its ultimate origin; in its actual nature it is not divine but human. In truth we should speak rather of religions than of religion; for the religions made by man are many. These different religions, even when they had not the same origin, have most of them been made in the same way. We know how the Christian religion came into existence. It was certainly not Jesus who made what is known as Christianity, but some learned and very clever men put their heads together and built it up into the thing we see. There was nothing divine in the way in which it was formed, and there is nothing divine either in the way in which it functions. And yet the excuse or occasion for the formation was undoubtedly some revelation from what one could call a Divine Being, a Being who came from elsewhere bringing down with him from a higher

plane a certain Knowledge and Truth for the earth. He came and suffered for his Truth; but very few understood what he said, few cared to find and hold to the Truth for which he suffered. Buddha retired from the world, sat down in meditation and discovered a way out of earthly suffering and misery, out of all this illness and death and desire and sin and hunger. He saw a Truth which he endeavoured to express and communicate to the disciples and followers who gathered around him. But even before he was dead, his teaching had already begun to be twisted and distorted. It was only after his disappearance that Buddhism as a full-fledged religion reared its head founded upon what the Buddha is supposed to have said and on the supposed significance of these reported sayings. But soon too, because the disciples and the disciples' disciples could not agree on what the Master had said or what he meant by his utterances, there grew up a host of sects and sub-sects in the body of the parent religion a Southern Path, a Northern Path, a Far Eastern Path, each of them claiming to be the only, the original, the undefiled doctrine of the Buddha. The same fate overtook the teaching of the Christ; that too came to be made in the same way into a set and organised religion. It is often said that, if Jesus came back, he would not be able to recognise what he taught in the forms that have been imposed on it, and if Buddha were to come back and see what has been made of his teaching, he would immediately run back discouraged to Nirvana!²²

Such a dilution, distortion seems to be happening to Sri Aurobindo's thought whether we like it or not. Scholars are coming up with new terminology such as 'overman' instead of 'superman' and new interpretations. Christ and the Buddha had not written down their teachings, but fortunately we have the written word of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. So there should not be much of a problem (I hope so!) as to the distortion of the written text except with regard to different interpretations, some emphasising on the principles of Integral Yoga while others on the personality of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Coming back to the philosophical argument, we have seen that Buddhism believes in momentaryness, in the *Kshanikavada*. It says our life goes from one moment to another. In this transitory character of life there is nothing called the self or the soul. This *kshana* or this moment is the eternal

becoming. That means that there is no Being; there is only Becoming. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo also say that the world is a new birth at every moment. The Mother has emphasised this and asked us to live in the present moment.

We started off this chapter saying that what we perceive in the universe is eternal energy alone. Buddha said yes, all is only energy, and energy means becoming. If that is so, then what is our experience of this energy? We experience it in the form of karmic law. In Buddhism the concept of karmic law is very central. It is also important in Hindu philosophy. However, in Hinduism there is the idea that this karmic law can be superseded by the Supreme's grace. Once you are completely surrendered to the Divine, all our karma gets erased. But in Buddhism there is no Being who can help you on the way. Karma is the absolute law that carries its own consequences.

Sri Aurobindo asks, how is it possible to uphold the *kshanikavada* theory of Buddhism? Let us take the example of taking steps: I take one step, then a second step, then a third step. It is true that the steps are different, but there is *somebody* taking the steps and maintaining the continuity, is it not? There must be somebody stable or permanent who is taking the steps; someone who is changing himself into these new forms. He would conclude that at each moment this new form or new step is being taken by the eternal Sachchidananda consciousness itself!

Let us now look at this from another angle which is a kind of synthesis between Buddhism and Vedanta—the philosophy of Heraclitus. As you know, the Greek philosophers were also in search of the essence of this universe. Each philosopher came up with a different answer. One said the essence of the universe is Water, another said it is Air, and yet another said it is Ether. Heraclitus said that the essence of the universe is Fire. He said, “No man or God has created the universe, but ever there was and is and will be the ever-living Fire.”²³ He doesn't just say it is fire; he says it is “an ever living fire that was, is and will be.” So obviously it is not the fire on the physical level. Let us read from Sri Aurobindo's writings on Heraclitus to understand better his concept of Fire:

Heraclitus saw, on the contrary, that if the form of the flame only exists by a constant change, a constant exchange rather of the substance of the wick into the substance of the fiery tongue, yet there must be a principle of

their existence common to them which thus converts itself from one form into another;—even if the substance of the flame is always changing, the principle of Fire is always the same and produces always the same results of energy, maintains always the same measures.

The Upanishad also describes the cosmos as a universal motion and becoming; it is all this that is mobile in the mobility, *jagatyam jagat*,—the very word for universe, *jagat*, having the radical sense of motion, so that the whole universe, the macrocosm, is one vast principle of motion and therefore of change and instability, while each thing in the universe is in itself a microcosm of the same motion and instability. Existences are “all becomings;” the Self-existent Atman, Swayambhu, has become all becomings, *atma eva abhut sarvani bhutani*. The relation between God and World is summed up in the phrase, “It is He that has moved out everywhere, *sa paryagat*”; He is the Lord, the Seer and Thinker, who becoming everywhere—Heraclitus’ Logos, his Zeus, his One out of which come all things—“has fixed all things rightly according to their nature from years sempiternal”,—Heraclitus’ “All things are fixed and determined.” Substitute his Fire for the Vedantic Atman and there is nothing in the expressions of the Upanishad which the Greek thinker would not have accepted as another figure of his own thought. And do not the Upanishads use among other images this very symbol of the Fire? “As one Fire has entered into the world and taken shapes according to the various forms in the world,” so the one Being has become all these names and forms and yet remains the One. Heraclitus tells us precisely the same thing; God is all contraries, “He takes various shapes just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, is named according to the savour of each.” Each one names Him according to his pleasure, says the Greek seer, and He accepts all names and yet accepts none, not even the highest name of Zeus. “He consents and yet at the same time does not consent to be called by the name of Zeus.” So too said Indian Dirghatamas of old in his long hymn of the divine Mysteries in the Rig Veda, “One, existent the sages call by many names.” Though He assumes all these forms, says the Upanishad, He has no form that the vision can seize, He whose name is a mighty splendour. We see again how close are the thoughts of the Greek and very often even

his expressions and images to the sense and style of the Vedic and Vedantic sages.²⁴

Like the Buddha, Heraclitus also uses the image of a stream. Both say you cannot step in the same waters twice. Once you take that second step the waters have already changed; it is not the same waters. The difference is that the Buddhists concluded there that there is no essence of things; there is only the eternal nothing, the void, non-being. Heraclitus, however, found a balance: he saw that even if the form of the flame only exists by constant change, there must still be a principle of existence that converts itself from one form to another. We can see this idea symbolically in the image of a river; the waters are always changing but the riverbed remains the same. The riverbed is what is constant and it is within that constancy that the waters are changing. Similarly, there is a single substance of a flame which, although it is moving, doesn't vanish but will become this form or that form. Heraclitus caught this idea that there is both movement and stability. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

Heraclitus does not exclude Being from the data of the problem of existence, although he will not make any opposition or gulf between that and Becoming. By his conception of existence as at once one and many, he is bound to accept these two aspects of his ever-living Fire as simultaneously true, true in each other; Being is an eternal becoming and yet the Becoming resolves itself into eternal being. All is in flux, for all is change of becoming; we cannot step into the same waters twice, for it is other and yet other waters that are flowing on. And yet, with his keen eye on the truth of things, preoccupied though he was with this aspect of existence, he could not help seeing another truth behind it. The waters into which we step, are and are not the same; our own existence is an eternity and an inconstant transience; we are and we are not. Heraclitus does not solve the contradiction; he states it and in his own way tries to give some account of its process.

That process he sees as a constant change and a changing back, an exchange and an interchange in a constant whole,—managed for the rest by a clash of forces, by a creative and determinative strife, “war which is the father and king of all things.” Between Fire as the Being and Fire in the Becoming existence describes a downward and upward movement—

pravrtti and *nivrtti*—which has been called the “back-returning road” upon which all travels. These are the master ideas of the thought of Heraclitus.²⁵

Western philosophy is based on this Greek philosophy, much of which is influenced by Heraclitus apart from Socrates and Plato and Aristotle. All civilisations have started with the divine aspect of Maheshwari who is wisdom. Greek culture too started with the wisdom of Heraclitus and Plotinus which was passed on to the philosophers just as in India the Vedas and the Upanishads gave rise to the six schools of philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo says that Heraclitus’ knowledge of truth was limited to universal reason and universal force. Somewhere on the universal level Heraclitus got the truth of Chit-Tapas (Chit is knowledge and light and Tapas or Shakti is force or energy) and he passed this concept on to western culture. The foundation of western culture, with all its magnificent achievements on the material level, lies in Plotinus and Heraclitus.

One thing the Indian sages saw but which Plotinus and Heraclitus missed was the aspect of Ananda. It is the Ananda or universal Delight which is most essential for the evolution of humanity. Knowledge and Force are necessary for individual and social evolution, for the development of society and the growth of a nation, but it is only Ananda that gives the zeal of aspiration towards growth and evolution. It is India which has the secret of this third aspect of Sachchidananda. The Vedas said that the whole universe began from Ananda, lives in Ananda and goes back to Ananda. Western civilisation has emphasised pleasure and aesthetic beauty, but not the deeper divine Ananda. In the West you can see marvelous aesthetic beauty in every road, every lane, every house, every garden. But Ananda has become pleasure, and pleasure is vital-physical. It is the lowest level of Ananda and it misses the spiritual beauty and spiritual delight. But that is the way of the *samam brahma*, I suppose. The Supreme is not partial and manifests himself differently in every culture. If he has given Chit-Tapas to the West then he has given Ananda to the East. According to Sri Aurobindo, the West must now look to Asia for this third element. Of course, Indian spirituality has also been corrupted, but the fountains of Ananda have not run dry. In fact, Sri Aurobindo has unleashed that fountain once again. He calls the Mother

Om Anandamayi, Chaitanyamayi, Satyamayi, and it is this that he has brought down in order to bring the New Race.

Now a beautiful picture emerges. At the conclusion of this chapter we see the great Supreme Absolute as both absolute movement and absolute stability, as both the timeless eternal and the time eternal, as both the great transcendent and the great world existence. Here Sri Aurobindo concludes with one of the most glorious sentences in *The Life Divine*. He says:

World-existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing.²⁶

This is a sentence often quoted by Aurobindonean scholars. It gives the essence of Heraclitus, the essence of Vedanta, the essence of everything. It says that world existence, this universe, is the ecstatic dance of Shiva. Note that it is an ecstatic dance and not a destructive dance. In the world existence, ecstasy is the essence and Ananda is the beginning. The very fact that it is the dance of Shiva shows that it is a dance of the Being and not of an impersonal existence. Shiva is an ecstatic dancer, and his dance is based in Ananda. With each step, with each rhythm there is the multiplication of the worlds, of the forms. There is this tremendous dynamism which is moving among the worlds. The Chit-Shakti, in the form of Shiva, creates this universe out of Ananda. Sri Aurobindo writes that even the dynamic movement of this creation leaves that 'white existence' exactly as it was. This shows us the dual aspect of the One and the Many. The supreme essence may take on infinite forms, but the substance remains the same.

People ask, "Why is there a creation? What is the purpose of creation?" It is only for the joy of dancing. Interestingly, Sri Aurobindo takes the image of Shiva's dancing, Shiva as Nataraj. Shiva for us represents the Supreme Lord of Transformation who may become active when the supramental transformation begins. This was supposedly his answer when the Mother had asked him to collaborate in Sri Aurobindo's work. So he is the Lord of Transformation, the essence of supramental consciousness. It is the Supermind releasing itself into innumerable forms which is the dance of Shiva.

Sri Aurobindo tells us:

we cannot describe or think out the Absolute in itself, beyond stability and movement, beyond unity and multitude,—nor is that at all our business,—we must accept the double fact, admit both Shiva and Kali and seek to know what is this measureless movement in Time and Space with regard to that timeless and spaceless pure Existence, one and stable, to which measure and measurelessness are inapplicable.²⁷

Ultimately we have to accept Shiva and Shakti, the one and the multiple, the movement and the stable because this universe is ultimately a making of both. There is the Purusha within and the Prakriti without. This human being is a perfect balance of both the Purusha and Prakriti in a single body. The individual human being is a representative of the creation of the transcendent. That is why Sri Aurobindo has told us that we must accept our true aim, our true dharma, which is to fulfill God in life. This is man's manhood or as Sri Aurobindo puts it:

This alone is man's real business in the world and the justification of his existence, without which he would be only an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects on a speck of surface mud and water which has managed to form itself amid the appalling immensities of the physical universe.²⁸

This idea shows us the sum and substance of the last five chapters in which he has shown us the image of the transcendent, the image of the universal and the necessity of the individual in evolution.

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Lecture Notes

I. Our perceptions of existence

- a. Our first perception of the world is of a boundless energy of infinite existence and infinite movement; this mighty energy is impartial, *samambrahma*
- b. b) We suffer an illusion of quality and quantity, but in reality, the energy spent is as great in repression as in expression, in negation as in affirmation.

II. Distortions of the ego

- a. Our ego-centric view sees ourselves as centres of the universe. This creates a system of false accountants which prevents us from getting the right and full value from life
- b. When the ego submits itself to the supreme, it realises it is only a partial movement of the infinite movement

III. Stable existence

- a. What is the nature of the all, the infinite energy? The Vedanta asserts that the movement is an aspect of a great timeless, spaceless stability, not energy but a pure existence
- b. Some schools of philosophy believe stability is a fiction because stability involves motion of energy
- c. This conclusion logically leads us to the Nihil of the Buddhists

IV. Pure Existence transcends and includes both stability and movement

- a. Pure existence is beyond all movement and stability and in itself unknowable by our thought
- b. But on the empirical level we have both pure existence and world existence, a fact of being, a fact of becoming
- c. World existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of god numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, ever is and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the

joy of the dancing
d. We must ultimately admit both Shiva and Shakti

Conscious Force

Let us begin our discussion of Chapter X, which is entitled 'Conscious Force'. It is a very interesting and basic chapter. The title itself is very interesting. Sri Aurobindo has used the word 'Force' and added the adjective 'conscious' to it. Note, he does not say 'consciousness'. So we will see in what sense Sri Aurobindo uses the word 'conscious' with regard to 'force'.

Normally we don't think about whether 'Force' is conscious or not. We think that force is an impersonal energy or a flow of energy. Sri Aurobindo starts the chapter with a very general statement: "All phenomenal existence resolves itself into Force."¹ It is a very graphic sentence and it implies that all that we see around us is ultimately nothing but force or what science would call as energy. Science, yoga and philosophy all agree that the world is nothing but a formulation of energy. So how does this vast energy take form? Sri Aurobindo tells us:

In the ancient images by which human thought attempted to make this origin and law of being intelligible and real to itself, this infinite existence of Force was figured as a sea, initially at rest and therefore free from forms, but the first disturbance, the first initiation of movement necessitates the creation of forms and is the seed of a universe.²

Now rather than the ocean, let us take this sheet of paper as an example (*showing a sheet of paper*). In a single sheet of paper there are no formations possible. For any forms to appear in this paper there has to be a pressure somewhere, a pressure on two points and out of that pressure the paper folds itself into some kind of form. If there is no pressure there is one complete vastness. So there has to be some points of self-pressure. It is important to remember that. There is a self-pressure upon this vastness of being and out of this self-pressure begins formation or formulation. If you understand this basic concept then we can go one step further and see what are the other steps according to the old Indian physicists. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

The elementary state of material Force is, in the view of the old Indian physicists, a condition of pure material extension in Space of which the peculiar property is vibration typified to us by the phenomenon of sound. But vibration in this state of ether is not sufficient to create forms. There

must first be some obstruction in the flow of the Force ocean, some contraction and expansion, some interplay of vibrations, some impinging of force upon force so as to create a beginning of fixed relations and mutual effects.³

This is very scientific and yet it is approaching the spiritual view. This first state is called ether. Ether is space which has no form or formation. Sri Aurobindo continues:

Material Force modifying its first ethereal status assumes a second, called in the old language the aerial, of which the special property is contact between force and force, contact that is the basis of all material relations. Still we have not as yet real forms but only varying forces. A sustaining principle is needed. This is provided by a third self-modification of the primitive Force of which the principle of light, electricity, fire and heat is for us the characteristic manifestation. Even then, we can have forms of force preserving their own character and peculiar action, but not stable forms of Matter. A fourth state characterised by diffusion and a first medium of permanent attractions and repulsions, termed picturesquely water or the liquid state, and a fifth of cohesion, termed earth or the solid state, complete the necessary elements.⁴

This thought is very similar to Greek thought. What I find amazing is that wherever they were—in the West or in the East, in Greece or in India—the ancient scientists captured the same principle. As you know the early scientists were always philosophers, whereas in modern times they split themselves into scientists and philosophers. There was one philosopher named Thales who lived around 600 B.C. who concluded that Water was the cause of all things. He said that Water is the essence which has become all this world, all this universe—not in its liquid form, but as vapour. However, he could not answer the question of how Water could become its own opposite which is fire. Next, another philosopher, Anaximenes, gave us a new principle. He did not name it and only said it was something boundless. What is it? He did not specifically mention Air, but said it was something which does not have any boundaries. After Anaximenes, there was Anaxagoras who said that Air is the essence of the universe. He said that Air when it is dilated becomes Fire and when it is condensed becomes Water. Then we have Heraclites, who said that Fire is the essence of the universe. Sri

Aurobindo had great praise for Heraclites. In fact, he called him a mystic, as opposed to a scientist or a philosopher. Lastly, a fifth philosopher named Parmenides said that Earth is the essence.

Now it is very interesting to see that each of these philosophers took one of the five principles to be the essence of things. They were not wrong but they were not fully right either. The only one who was fully right was Empedocles. He said that you have to put all of them together and that there is one more principle, the principle of love, that holds them all together. So you can see what a beautiful evolution of thought this was and what an achievement for early philosophy.

Coming back to Sri Aurobindo, what is important is to see a new dimension of these five elements. This new dimension is the spiritual level. The five senses are not just the five senses that we imagine them to be. Each one of them has a kind of divine origin. Each one leads us to one of the divine aspects of the truth. The eye, for example, gives the light of the truth; the ear, the *nadabrahman* or vibratory aspect of being (i.e. Om); the nose, the celestial fragrance that sanctifies or elevates the being; the tongue, the divine nectar otherwise known as Amrita or Soma; and the touch, divine intimacy. These are spiritual values or spiritual truths. What is most interesting is that the outermost can lead you to the innermost.

The Mother has told us in one of her conversations that there are actually twelve senses in the human body, not just five. These are not just in the subtle physical, but in the physical body itself. There are other capacities on the subtle physical level, but she was not speaking of them. In one of her talks she says:

We are granted five, aren't we? In any case, there is another one which, precisely, has a relation with consciousness. I don't know if you have ever been told this, but a person who is blind, for instance, who does not see, can become aware of an object at some distance through a kind of perception which is not touch for he does not feel it, which is not vision for he does not see, but which is a contact—something that enables him to make a contact without hearing, seeing or touching. This is one of the most developed senses apart from those we habitually use. There is another sense, a sort of sense of proximity: when one comes close to a thing, one feels it as if one had contacted it. Another sense, which is also physical, puts you in touch with events at a great distance; it is a physical sense for it belongs to the physical world, it is not purely mental: there is a sensation. Some people have a sort of sensation of contact with what is happening at a very great distance. You must not forget that in the

physical consciousness there are several levels; there is a physical vital and a physical mind which are not solely corporeal. Foresight on the material plane is also one of the physical senses... We have, then, something that sees at a short distance, something that sees at a long distance and something that sees ahead; this already makes three. These are a sort of improvement of the senses we have; as for instance, hearing at a great distance—there are people who can hear noises at a great distance, who can smell at a great distance. It is a kind of perfecting of these senses.⁵

The Mother herself had the ability to see behind her back through this capacity to extend her senses. She would say that the great beauty of the senses is that they are interchangeable. That means that somebody who is blind can develop sight from some other organ—say the fingers. Fingers can also see. The Mother says that this is a science. In fact, she refers to a French scientist who has worked a lot on this type of study—that of extending one's senses into other organs—and she asserts that he has made quite a few conclusive remarks on the subject which are true and could be practiced.

What is the significance of the fact that the senses can be interchanged? Do we really hear with our ear? Do we really see with our eyes? This is a question the Kena Upanishad had addressed thousands of years back, and the answer it gave was in the negative; it said that the senses are only instruments, and that there is someone or something else behind the senses who sees, hears, touches, smells and tastes. If that someone is not there, no sense data is perceived. If a person is in a coma and you open his eyes he still will not see. That is because the conscious person behind is withdrawn. There is the spiritual Purusha, the soul that actually sees.

In *The Future Poetry*, Sri Aurobindo says that the soul is the real experiencer. He says that all expression of art is always from and through the soul. Anything that does not enter from the soul level is only superficial and does not last. There have been thousands and thousands of poets, musicians and artists whom the world has not come to know because their work comes from the external surface consciousness and not the soul. Anything that has the touch of soul, the world eventually comes to know. For example, William Blake was not much recognised in his own lifetime, but one hundred years later his poetry came back with a vengeance and he is now recognised as one

of the greatest poets the world has ever produced. So wherever there is truth, it will last and ultimately shine out.

Coming back to the issue at hand, Sri Aurobindo's main question is what is the nature of this Conscious Force? Is it just a blind eternal movement that goes on and on shaping itself into forms, or is there something behind this Force? To answer this he has given us two different replies. The first one is the philosophy of Sankhya which has given us the principles of Purusha and Prakriti. Sankhya says there is no consciousness behind Prakriti, but don't we see that there is a consciousness behind the tree, the animals, the insects, even matter itself. So how does Prakriti, which has no consciousness, become conscious? It is because Prakriti's activities are reflected in the Purusha, and by that reflection the Prakriti becomes conscious.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

Purusha is the Soul, not in the ordinary or popular sense of the word, but of pure conscious Being immobile, immutable and self-luminous. Prakriti is Energy and its process. Purusha does nothing, but it reflects the action of Energy and its processes; Prakriti is mechanical, but by being reflected in Purusha it assumes the appearance of consciousness in its activities.⁶

In this view, Nature only assumes "the hue of consciousness;"⁷ it is not really conscious. This is the answer that Sankhya gives us in regard to the nature of Conscious Force, but you can see that it may not be very convincing to the modern mind. There is a different answer given to us by modern science. It tells us that all is force; Nature is energy. It says that from this energy, life and mind have arisen. Consciousness, it says, is born from matter; it is not recognised as something separate. For science, matter is the base and consciousness is only an outcome of matter. Even the soul in man is a chemical combination brought about by matter.

So we have two different opinions. First we have Sankhya which says that Nature takes on the appearance of consciousness because of its proximity to the Purusha. Then we have the outlook of science which says that consciousness is a result of matter and is born by a process of evolution. But somehow they do not seem to be acceptable or satisfying.

You could read *The Life Divine* purely as a wonderful mental exercise in strengthening your logic because there is a perfect logical system here. Sri Aurobindo takes up one argument and looks at it from different angles,

going from one argument to another. Then he comes up with his own argument based on his own experience which gives a synthetic view of all the other arguments. It is like a puzzle in which each piece is put into its proper place. None of the arguments are rejected; all are embraced.

So having presented us with the arguments of Sankhya and science, Sri Aurobindo now shows us another more Upanishadic approach which says that Purusha and Prakriti are inseparable. He writes:

The answer most approved by the ancient Indian mind was that Force is inherent in Existence. Shiva and Kali, Brahman and Shakti are one and not two who are separable. Force inherent in existence may be at rest or it may be in motion, but when it is at rest, it exists none the less and is not abolished, diminished or in any way essentially altered... For it is impossible, because contradictory of reason, to suppose that Force is a thing alien to the one and infinite existence and entered into it from outside or was non-existent and arose in it at some point in Time.⁸

This implies that Kali or Shakti is inherent in Shiva. In the Sankhya philosophy, the witness Purusha in us is not acting, rather, it is the Prakriti which is acting, which is influencing the Purusha within. The Purusha is a non-active person who is only watching Prakriti do what she wills. So according to Sankhya there is a kind of domination of Purusha by Prakriti. In fact, in the Tantra also it is the Shakti which is predominant. Shiva is pictured as lying beneath the feet of Shakti. So there are philosophies which say that Shakti is predominant over Purusha, over Brahman. But Sri Aurobindo cannot accept this argument. He says that Shakti is an innate aspect of Sat; it is not independent of Sat. It is Sat who brings forth his Chit-Shakti, his Consciousness-Force which is inherent in his infinite Being, at rest in the unmanifest, active in the manifestation. Consciousness is the aspect of Sat necessary for manifestation. The Mother expressed this truth very well when she wrote this with regard to Sri Aurobindo and herself: "Without him, I exist not; without me, he is unmanifest."⁹ This outlook on things should not imply that Purusha is greater than Prakriti or that Sat is greater than Chit. But if that is so, then why does Sri Aurobindo say that Sat is first and force is second? There must be a reason.

For the sake of argument, let us examine what would happen if force were to come first. If force had manifested first, then this universe, this creation

would be mechanical, automatic. It would be blind and thus have no purpose, no intention. It would be like the wind blowing: whither goes the wind? We don't know. However, in truth, behind the wind-power, human will, human thought and human emotions there is something else. That someone else is called the Atman, Paramatman, Brahman, Sachchidananda—names don't matter; what is important is to put things rightly.

Now, how is this important to us on a day-to-day level? In fact, why is philosophy at all important for us on a day to day basis, you may ask. I would say that *The Life Divine* is not a book of philosophy in the usual sense, and it is a mandatory reading for those who want to understand the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. We cannot avoid it. It is better to break our heads on it than not to. We will at least be breaking our heads on crystals of knowledge rather than on stones of ignorance!

So why does Sri Aurobindo tell us the Purusha is important? Because there is an existence, a guidance, a presence, a consciousness behind the force. This is important to my life and your life because we must surrender ourselves to this Consciousness-Force, to Sachchidananda. Integral Yoga asks us to surrender to the Divine, and the Divine is here within each one of us as the Atman. The beginning of yoga is this surrender to the inner being, so knowledge of the Purusha is important for then we know to whom we must surrender. Sri Aurobindo argues very strongly that we must follow this equation or we may be misled like the Tantrics were. What did the Tantrics do? They surrendered to the Shakti. It is a great thing to do so, for Shakti is the manifesting force and energy of the Divine. Tantrism went to the extreme with Shakti and forgot Shiva; that is why Tantrism failed to deliver. On the other extreme we have Advaita Vedanta which says Brahman is the only truth and Shakti is Maya. This outlook resulted in a neglected world with ascetics wandering in the mountains and forests. So Advaita Vedanta takes you out of the world and Tantrism takes you into the bowels of the earth, as it were.

Sri Aurobindo, however, has given an equal importance to both Shiva and Shakti and in doing so has brought about the complete equilibrium. He says that the conclusions of both Vedanta and Tantra have to be combined, both have to be given an equal importance in our lives. Then only can we realise Brahman upon earth; then only is there the possibility of transforming our

lives with this Consciousness-Force. I will now read out a passage in which he says:

[Brahman] is itself logically anterior to Shakti or Maya and takes her back into its transcendental being when she ceases from her works. In a conscious existence which is absolute, independent of its formations, not determined by its works, we must suppose an inherent freedom to manifest or not to manifest the potentiality of movement.¹⁰

Note that the word he uses here is 'anterior' as opposed to 'first'. Purusha is anterior to Prakriti; Shiva is anterior to Shakti. He also says that Brahman has the freedom to manifest or not to manifest. Sri Aurobindo continues:

A Brahman compelled by Prakriti is not Brahman, but an inert Infinite with an active content in it more powerful than the continent, a conscious holder of Force of whom his Force is master.¹¹

If you say Shakti is predominant, then Brahman has no choice. But this cannot be. Brahman has this Force as an aspect of himself, an inevitable, inseparable part which he brings out when he chooses. The decision to manifest is his. Sri Aurobindo continues:

If we say that it is compelled by itself as Force, by its own nature, we do not get rid of the contradiction, the evasion of our first postulate. We have got back to an Existence which is really nothing but Force, Force at rest or in movement, absolute Force perhaps, but not absolute Being.¹²

Here I will give you a hint to help you understand *The Life Divine*. Wherever you see a partial view, you can be sure that Sri Aurobindo is speaking about somebody else's view. You might think it is Sri Aurobindo's argument but it is not so. Ignorance of this fact is what gives rise to quarrels among Aurobindonians because they quote *The Life Divine* without this understanding. Sri Aurobindo has this magnificent capacity to identify, for example, with Shankara, and write about Shankara better than anyone else! But when you come to an argument which is comprehensive, synthetic then you know this is the outlook of Sri Aurobindo.

To sum up, we have seen three arguments regarding the nature of Conscious Force. The first was that of Sankhya in which the principles of Mahat (the vast cosmic principle of Force)¹³ and Ahankara (the divisional principle of Ego-formation)¹⁴ are reflected in the soul and take on the tinge of consciousness. The second argument was that of modern science which

says that consciousness rises from matter. Lastly we saw the synthesis which states that Shiva and Kali are one and inseparable.

Now we have reached a turning point in this chapter which takes us to a deeper explanation of consciousness. Up until now we have only been dealing with force—how it is universal, like a quiet ocean full of equilibrium. In yoga the question of equilibrium is of great importance. In fact, the Mother says this coming age will be one in which we regain the state of equilibrium which has been lost since the beginning of creation. In addition, she says the true spiritual life is that which gives equilibrium to our lives—and this is nothing but the Integral Yoga—in which we combine all aspects of life: not rejecting any, not being partial to any, not over-stressing on anyone and maintaining an equilibrium or, in the language of the Gita, equanimity.

We have also discussed what Force is—the way it has gone through the process of materialisation as well as the different levels it has undergone before it reached matter. These levels are ether, air, water, fire and earth. We have also seen that force is inherent in Brahman and is in fact inseparable from it. In addition, we read the important line from Sri Aurobindo where he tells us that Brahman compelled by force is not Brahman. These are the different arguments, but the important conclusion that we arrived at was that there must be a consciousness behind this force because without this consciousness there would be no direction in the movement of this force. Force itself need not be intelligent at all; therefore we said there must be some kind of a consciousness behind this force. Now we come to this question: What do we mean by consciousness?

Well, it seems to be a very simple thing; all of us know what we mean by consciousness. The moment you ask this question to any person the first answer you will probably get is “an awareness.” When I am aware of the surroundings around me or when I am aware of myself, then I say I am conscious or I have consciousness. People would say when somebody is in a coma that he has lost his consciousness. That is the common understanding of consciousness—when I am asleep I am not conscious; when I am awake I am conscious. But this is, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, a very superficial understanding. He tells us:

Ordinarily we mean by it [consciousness] our first obvious idea of a

mental waking consciousness such as is possessed by the human being during the major part of his bodily existence, when he is not asleep, stunned or otherwise deprived of his physical and superficial methods of sensation. In this sense it is plain enough that consciousness is the exception and not the rule in the order of the material universe. We ourselves do not always possess it. But this vulgar and shallow idea of the nature of consciousness, though it still colors our ordinary thought and associations, must now definitely disappear out of philosophical thinking.¹⁵

In this very powerful sentence he tells us that this kind of superficial understanding of what consciousness is must disappear out of all discussions of philosophy. It is high time that we realised that consciousness is something beyond this. Even science itself gives us hints of different levels of consciousness beyond the mind. So Sri Aurobindo tells us to grasp this understanding once and for all that consciousness does not equal mental awareness. He tells us:

For we know that there is something in us which is conscious when we sleep, when we are stunned or drugged or in a swoon, in all apparently unconscious states of our physical being.¹⁶

This is where Sri Aurobindo gives us a completely different definition. Here we take the help of the Upanishads, because in these works we have a wonderful and full description of the different levels of consciousness. Some of you may know this, but for those who don't it is to your advantage to read the Upanishads. The Upanishads speak of four levels of consciousness, one of which is Jagrat. It is the waking consciousness and what we normally define as mental awareness. This is the first level. Normally people think consciousness is this. So what are the characteristics of Jagrat? First there is thought: all our thinking, all our thoughts belong to this Jagrat or mental awareness. We also have sensations through which we get knowledge of the external world, as well as memory and imagination. All these form our outer or external awareness in which we have a separative consciousness. We may do brilliant things—we may be great poets or philosophers—but basically this is a separative consciousness. This is because it is a mental consciousness, which by its very nature is individualistic and separative. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy there are some underlying concepts, one of

which is that mind means separation. The best the mind can do is to cherish the idea, the ideal of oneness. That is its range. This is our normal consciousness, which is the first level of consciousness that has been given by the Upanishads.

Then we have the second level, which is called Swapna or 'dream consciousness'. What is important here is that this is the consciousness of the subtle worlds, the consciousness of the life plane and the mind plane.

Normally people say that when a man is asleep, he is not conscious. But the truth is that he has only suspended the Jagrat. There is an inner Purusha or Swapna Purusha who is awake even when the mental awareness is suspended. The Upanishads tell us that we continue to be conscious even when the outer level of consciousness is suspended. We are neither dead nor unconscious. The Swapna state is the state of the subtler worlds, the subtler planes of consciousness.

From this second level we go to a third one called Sushupti or the dreamless state. There is a state of consciousness where we do not even have dreams. But what does this mean? Well, it might mean that in this state we are lost on the inconscient level, what we sometimes call heavy sleep, but in reality this Sushupti level corresponds to something very important. It corresponds to the supramental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo and the Upanishads explain that it is only in moments that we touch this realm of the supramental consciousness. That point of contact, which could be just a minimal split second contact, is called the dreamless state. Most of us do not even remember our dreams. But when we say, "I did not dream last night," it is not true. It is just that we don't remember our dreams. Now if we are lucky we get a peep into the regions of supramental consciousness and overmental consciousness; our Purusha can take a peep of the dreamless state or Sushupti. So we are receding level by level from the physical to the subtle physical to the supramental. But this still is not the end of the line. We have one more level.

This last level is known as Turiya, and it is the highest level conceded by the Upanishads. Highest means what? Turiya is the level of absolute self-existence. In brackets I would add here that it is the level of Sat-Chit-Ananda.

So we see there are four levels of consciousness. Most of the time we are in Jagrat or Swapna. Sushupti is for the most part out of reach and Turiya is

absolutely out of common human reach at all. Yet this is not as depressing as we think it to be.

Sri Aurobindo has explained that at night our souls often go to the Turiya level.

A long unbroken sleep is necessary because there are just ten minutes of the whole into which one enters into a true rest—a sort of Sachchidananda immobility of consciousness—and that it is which really restores the system. The rest of the time is spent first in travelling through various states of consciousness towards that and then coming out of it back towards the waking state. This fact of the ten minutes true rest has been noted by medical men, but of course they know nothing about Sachchidananda!¹⁷

This is a tremendous surprise that what is really rejuvenating our energies is the contact of the psychic with the Sachchidananda consciousness. If it is not able to do that we have perturbed sleep. That can happen if you have a bad stomach or if you have a very bad headache or if you are terribly worried and thinking all through the night. Then there is no space for the release of the psychic being. That is why it is essential to have a quiet sleep. Doctors recommend eating lightly before sleep, and the Mother herself has told us if we take a cup of hot milk with honey before bed we will have quiet sleep. These are external aids to give us quieter sleep so the soul can travel to the higher levels of consciousness. If that does not happen there is no chance that you will wake up fresh.

Coming back to the four levels of consciousness, we see that in ancient times yogis tried to reach this level of Sushupti, but the problem was to keep an unbroken contact with the mental consciousness and the life environment. Raja Yoga had the ideal of reaching Samadhi, the trance level, but this was in a way a kind of escape. They proposed, “Let us reach the level of Samadhi and be quiet and peaceful there.” But Sri Aurobindo does not quite approve of Samadhi because in the Samadhi state one is cut off from the world, whereas in Integral Yoga one is supposed to maintain a full contact with the physical world.

Now these four levels are actually four states of Brahman. The Upanishads say that Brahman has manifested himself on these four levels, or in other words, we could say “all these manifestations are his own form.” This is the

beautiful idea given to us by the Upanishads. But Sri Aurobindo does not stop with that, he goes further. Of course, the Upanishads talk indirectly about some of this, but Sri Aurobindo gives us a direct explanation. First we have the normal outer consciousness or external consciousness. This is number one. Number two is what he calls the subliminal or the inner consciousness. This is something that modern psychology has dealt with but not very successfully. They are just beginning to deal with it. In *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo explains that the subliminal contains the vibrations and stresses which are not immediately required for the life purpose. These settle down in the background and remain in the background. Here again we have three levels—the inner physical, the inner vital and the inner mind. These three levels are there behind our outer personality. Sri Aurobindo tells us that this region has all the knowledge which is not immediately required by the external and that it has a direct connection with universal knowledge. That is what is most important: the subliminal has a direct connection with all that is universal, with the universal vital energy and the universal mental energy. Children sometimes forget to eat because they are connected to the universal vital energy and draw upon that for their stamina. Children are obviously very alert and alive on the subliminal level. The outer consciousness is not yet developed or so rigid in them, so they are more open and can draw on this universal energy. Then there is another level of the subliminal where adults practice such things as clairvoyance or Reiki healing, etc.

In the outer consciousness we have the outer personality consisting of the mind, the emotions together with the vital, and the physical. There is also the ego nodus to which these three are connected. The ego is the central organising point for the external being. Now, in the subliminal region (which consists of the inner mental, vital and physical) we also find a controlling agency, which we call the inmost being. Now this inmost being is nothing other than the psychic being. It is the immortal in the mortal body. So you can say in a rather systematic way that normally the external being is controlled by the ego and the inner trinity is controlled by the psychic being. So we have two centres of control in us: the desire soul and the bliss soul. At present, man is normally centred in the desire soul and needs to move into

the bliss soul. I will come back to this later, but for now let me go on to explain the next level of consciousness in the human being.

Below the subliminal lies the subconscious and the inconscient. This is the nether end, the darkest part of the human being. In the language of the Vedas this is the Dark Mother. (In the Vedas there are two Mothers, the Dark Mother and the White Mother, the radiant Mother.) The subconscious, however, is a completely universal collective consciousness. This means that all that is common to human beings all over the world, wherever they are and whatever they are, is there in the subconscious. In fact, one can say that it is in a way a storehouse of the complete evolution of the earth itself.

Why is this important to understand? It is because the subconscious is actually the starting point of evolution. We could very easily say that Brahman has created the world; we have come from the Supreme, from the Supermind, but what is truly the starting point of mankind? In a strict sense, we should say it is the inconscient which is the starting point of evolution. From the inconscient arises matter, from matter came up life, and from life evolved the conglomeration called man. All that is in the subconscious and the inconscient is still with us. Each one of us is as if standing on the vast ocean of darkness and inconscience that is common to all of us. Our fears, our hopes, our hungers, our urges are universal. In fact, in a chapter of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo says that this hunger is present even at the level of matter, or to put it another way, desire begins on the atomic level. So desire is an ingrained part of our subconscious. Each one of us is carrying the burden of the inconscience within us and that is what makes transformation so difficult, apparently impossible. Because of this problem, religious thought has always said: "The body is a nodus of ignorance—so get rid of it."

On another note, have you ever read the mythology of different countries? It is very interesting. When you read Greek mythology, Indian mythology, Chinese mythology, African mythology or any other mythology in the world, you will see similar concepts. You will be surprised to see that the concept of immortality in the Vedas is there, though in a different manner, in the mythology of China or Persia. So we have basically the same mythology throughout the entire world because every culture when it dips into the past finds the same process of evolution and the same main themes

such as the hero, evil and the Divine. Nobody has told this to the Chinese, the African, the Greeks and the Indians but all these cultures have these stories where there is always a hero and a villain, the Divine and the Anti-Divine. Even children's stories carry these themes. We cannot escape this, it is as real to our psychological consciousness as is desire in our own bodies.

The subconscious is where humanity shares not only the human past but also whatever is there in its past from the mineral world and the plant world. It is the universal subconscious, which is ageless—it is there since the beginning of creation itself. All that has come through the millennia of creation is now undergoing a change in the Mother's efforts to transform the physical! You can see that the transformation is not just an individual effort, there has got to be something of the universal too in the effort. Maybe because of this dimension, at one point she had to leave her body. She has perhaps to wait for some pioneers who can represent this kind of evolution. Her own task is almost done, and by the very fact of what she has done, one may say that she is indeed divine in her consciousness. Never before has a human being attempted to transform the subconscious since it is so difficult, dangerous and universal a power. Unless one possesses the Divine power or unless one is Divine himself it is not possible to change the subconscious and inconscient depths.

You may remember the Mother's painting of Sri Aurobindo. It is a beautiful sketch she had made without even seeing Sri Aurobindo. She had titled it "Divine Consciousness emerging from the inconscient." You may have heard about how, after the Mother joined the Ashram, she and Sri Aurobindo made a journey together into the subconscious. They had to go there in order to put the vibration of the Supermind into the subconscious. Sri Aurobindo has emerged out of the inconscient into the subconscious, into matter, into life, into mind, and all up into the Supermind. This will be clear to you if you read Savitri, because this is exactly what Satyavan does. He is the evolutionary Avatar who has risen from the inconscient into matter and continued up all the levels of consciousness.

Now let us speak about the last level of consciousness, which is the Superconscient. We are indeed children of the subconscious, but we are also sons and daughters of the Superconscient. Within man we have both the

subconscious and the superconscious. What is this superconscious? It is the Supermind as well as Sachchidananda.

We can see that a human being is a very complex personality. We can also see that all the problems of the mental, vital and physical rise up from the subconscious. Unfortunately, western psychology goes towards the subconscious. Their basic idea is that the suppressed subconscious should be given expression. Well, that has led to more complications than solutions. Sri Aurobindo would say that if we concentrate on the subconscious, which is very murky, we will not have enough spiritual capacity. It's like lighting a small torch in the dark. What happens? You can't see the next step in front of you. If you go into the jungle at night, you can't even see the moon and the sky. You can't have just a candle light there, but this is what some of the psychotherapists do. They go into the subconscious carrying only a candle light and both the doctor and the patient seem to fall into the same pit!

Sri Aurobindo advises us instead to go towards the superconscious so that the subconscious can be illumined and all the problems that leap up from there can be treated by the supramental sun and tapas. This is not just a philosophy but an evolutionary necessity, because Mind cannot solve these problems. Sri Aurobindo wanted to give mankind the greatest and most powerful light that there is in creation. Previously other Avatars brought the Overmind and other levels of the Spiritual Mind, but Sri Aurobindo aimed at bringing the highest light and consciousness so the lowest can be transformed. This is the main idea in bringing down the supramental sun.

Now of course before we get there we have a helper—the psychic being. What is the psychic being? It is the divine child between the superconscious and the inconscient, between the white mother Aditi and the black mother Diti. The role of the psychic being is to bring the superconscious; it connects to the superconscious and from there throws its light into the subconscious. The superconscious does not come directly into the subconscious, but indirectly via the psychic being. It is the passage; it projects what it gains from the superconscious into the outer being. But if there is a big block of a mountainous ego, then the psychic being cannot go through. But if we make the ego smaller and smaller, then the psychic being can influence our mind and life. That is why it is said that one should surrender one's ego, make it as small as possible, as transparent as possible. If we want a psychic contact,

this huge block of black stone must be reduced to a minimum. This is the point of yoga.

Let's now go to the last section of the chapter where Sri Aurobindo takes up one last question. In his words, he asks:

Does the range of what we can call consciousness cease with the plant, with that in which we recognise the existence of a sub-animal life? If so, we must then suppose that there is a force of life and consciousness originally alien to Matter which has yet entered into and occupied Matter, —perhaps from another world. For whence, otherwise, can it have come?

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This is very interesting because if we say that consciousness stops with the plant then we have to conclude that there is no consciousness in matter. The scientist would say, "I do not see any consciousness in matter. It is a dead thing." Sri Aurobindo, however, would reply by saying, "If there is no consciousness in matter then how did life arise from it? From where did it come?" I was surprised to read recently in *India Today* as well as in other newspapers the idea that life did not begin on the earth, that in fact, it came from some other planet. In reference to this, Sri Aurobindo writes:

The curious speculation is now current that Life entered earth not from another world, but from another planet. To the thinker that would explain nothing. The essential question is how Life comes into Matter at all and not how it enters into the matter of a particular planet.¹⁹

The main question is how did life enter matter? It doesn't matter if life came from Mars, Jupiter or the moon. What is important is how did life come into matter. Sri Aurobindo would say life is pre-existent in matter as a potential. It is not something that has come in from outside. In a woman when the egg is mature the sperm contacts the ova becoming a zygote. Afterwards the zygote turns into a baby. So first there is a preparation in the earth's womb. Then the 'sperm' comes from a higher level and contacts the womb of the earth resulting in the birth of a new plant, a new animal, a new man, etc. So in evolution both the growth from below and the contact from above are necessary. Following this logic, Sri Aurobindo says that life was pre-existent in matter; therefore, consciousness is there in matter also.

Up until now we have seen that there is a continuity of consciousness from Brahman to the levels of matter; it has undergone different levels of

concretisation, but even in matter it is there. Sri Aurobindo has given us all of these long arguments only to show us that the Consciousness, which is present down to the level of matter, is there even behind Force. He tells us that it is not Force which has gone through ether, fire, water etc., but rather, it is Consciousness which has gone through these levels and it is the outer body of matter which expresses this consciousness.

What we have to understand is that the eternal Force, which the scientist recognises, has consciousness at its back. That is why the title of the chapter is 'Conscious Force'. So Force is not separate; Sat and Chit are there behind Tapas. Here again Sri Aurobindo anticipates a question you might have in your mind. That question is: "If there is Consciousness behind Force, does that mean that there also is Intelligence?" We have to answer: "Indeed there is a supreme intelligence in matter in the form of the Real-Idea, the supramental Intelligence."

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13. SABCL, Vol. 30 (*Index and Glossary*), 1976, p. 320.
14. Ibid., p. 283.
15. *The Life Divine*, p. 85.
16. Ibid.
17. SABCL, Vol. 24 (*Letters on Yoga*), 1970, p. 1485.
18. *The Life Divine*, p. 87.
19. Ibid., p. 87 (footnote).

Lecture Notes

I. The different steps in the formation of Matter according to the old Indian physicists

a. The five elements

- i. Ether /Space = *Vyom* = Sound = Ear = Field Energy = Infinite Existence
- ii. Air = *Marut* = Touch + 1 = Skin = Gravitational Energy = Mind
- iii. Fire = *Tej* = Light /Sight Visible + 2 = Eye = Electric Energy = Heart = Agni
- iv. Water = *Apas* = Taste + 3 = Tongue = Chemical Energy = Life
- v. Earth = *Kshiti* = Smell + 4 = Nose = Mechanical Energy = Matter

b. Spiritual level

- i. Eye = The Light of Truth
- ii. Ear = The Nada Brahman = The vibratory rhythm of the Being = OM
- iii. Nose = The Divine Fragrance that sanctifies and elevates the being
- iv. Tongue = The Divine Nectar = *Amrita* = *Soma* = Honey of Paradise
- v. Touch = The most common organ = plants have it = Intimacy
- vi. Identification—direct contact with the Supreme's body

c. Actually there are 12 senses in the physical which can be developed. At a higher level they are not self-exclusive—they can do the work of each other.

II. How does the contact of the vibrations of Force give rise to consciousness?

- a. According to Sankhya: The principles of Mahat (cosmic principle of Force) and Ahankara (principle of Ego)

- formation) reflect the conscious Soul
- b. Modern Science: Nature is Force and all is a mutual adaptation between forces
- III. How and by what mysterious process did this formative movement of Force begin?
- a. If there is only Force then no such question exists
- b. Shiva and Kali are one and inseparable—the eternal coexistence of Purusha and Prakriti. Force is inherent in Existence—it is only in rest or action
- IV. Why did the Force translate itself? What is its goal?
- a. If we assume that Existence and Force are non-conscious, then this question does not arise. It is the innate nature of Force to translate itself into movement and Form. So there is no final goal or purpose in evolution
- b. If Existence is conscious Being, then is it compelled by the nature of Force? But this is not the nature of Brahman, as seen in the Upanishads. It has an inherent freedom to manifest or not to manifest
- V. What is Consciousness?
- a. According to the Upanishads, Brahman manifests in four ways:
- i. *Jagrat* = Awakened/Mental/Objectivised/Externalised = Individualised Consciousness. A web of day-to-day sensations, thoughts, and percepts. It is rigid and individualistic and separative. It is concerned with the outer world
- ii. *Swapna* = Dream state: It is concerned not only with the dreams but with the subtle life and mental planes
- iii. *Sushupti* = The dreamless state = supramental plane beyond our experience because our causal body is not yet developed in us so it is contacted only in dreamless sleep

- iv. Turiya = Consciousness of pure self-existence—no connection at all possible for the normal consciousness.
- b. Sri Aurobindo adds greater dimensions to the human consciousness in addition to what the Upanishads have expressed:
 - i. Subliminal/Inner Consciousness: Is made up of the residuary powers of the normal consciousness—considers the individual as a wave in the universal movement; it contacts directly the inner life energy; examples: clairvoyance, distance-control/action, knowledge of past and future, etc.
 - ii. Subconscious/Unconscious/Inconscient: This comprises those movements which are irrational and are not acquired by the individual in the normal course of his life experience, but are ingrained in his nature and are native to his physical make-up
 - iii. Superconscient: Origin of creation—all norms and archetypes belong to the Superconscient; they are dropped in the Inconscient as seeds which get deformed in the process
 - iv. Inmost Consciousness: The psychic—the link between the Superconscient and the Individual
 - v. Conclusion: Consciousness *is* Energy—It does not *have* power, it *is* power; Consciousness is awareness pregnant with power
- VI. Consciousness does not cease with plant—on the contrary, it goes into the metal and Matter; it is there in Matter as the Real-Idea
- VII. Consciousness is therefore a self-aware force of existence, which also implies some kind of intelligence, purposefulness and self-knowledge
 - a. If it is so, then why is there so much waste in Nature?

Answer: we see only part of Nature's purpose

- b. It is there in all things as intelligence and self-awareness, though it is dormant in some of the different stages
- c. Behind Force there is the Chit, the Consciousness, and behind Chit is the Sat, Existence, which is expressing itself in all formations.

Delight of Existence: The Problem

We shall now take up Chapter XI, 'Delight of Existence: The Problem.' This chapter discusses the philosophical problem of delight, Ananda, being the basis of an existence which includes pain; Chapter XII will discuss the solution. They form a very basic unit in *The Life Divine* because they deal with what are pragmatic truths. They give an explanation of pain, suffering and evil. As we know, we are all much concerned with these problems. In fact, throughout the ages and all across the world, philosophers, saints and religious teachers have tried to deal with the questions of what are pain, evil and suffering. Why is there evil? Who has created evil? This is in fact a knotty problem which each philosopher or yogi has tried to answer in the light of his own experience. Here we will see what Sri Aurobindo has to tell us in the light of his own integral experience of life and Brahman.

The first question we will take up is the why of creation. The answer is simple: Delight! That is the main heading so we shall take up that question in the light of Sri Aurobindo's explanation. He begins the chapter with a quote from the Upanishads in which we have been given the basic equation for the movement of creation. It says: "From Delight all these beings are born, by Delight they exist and grow, to Delight they return."¹

We have all heard this famous sentence, but how do we interpret it? Maybe we can accept philosophically the first phrase that all is born out of Delight. Here at least there is no problem theoretically. There is not much of a hinderance in saying that God created out of delight. No argument there. However, the idea that everything here exists and grows by Delight is one that human beings are not likely to agree with. To return to Delight seems possible though. The main problem is with the middle phrase and we shall deal with it as we go along.

Let us come to the first point that everything is born out of Delight. However, we have seen in the previous chapter that it is Consciousness-Force or Chit-Shakti which has multiplied itself into innumerable forms. It is true that this Force which has become these forms has a consciousness behind it. That was the conclusion of the previous chapter. The main question Sri Aurobindo asks here in this chapter is, "Why should Brahman,

perfect, absolute, infinite, needing nothing, desiring nothing, at all throw out force of consciousness to create in itself these worlds of forms?”² If Brahman has got everything within him, then he needs nothing, because the basic meaning of desire is wanting and possessing something which is not yourself. So how can Brahman come and say, “I need that?” Does Brahman need anything? We saw in the previous chapter that Shakti cannot compel Brahman to create; Brahman is absolutely free to create or not to create. He is the Master; he is the Lord.

We act because we need something. I need money. I need joy. I need comfort. These are some of the causes of my action. But what could be the cause of the action of Brahman who needs nothing? This is the dilemma. Sometimes I act because I am compelled to act by circumstances. For example, I may be told by my boss to do a certain work. For Brahman, however, there is no external master. So the problem is that there is no desire and no master to compel him and yet he has acted. Why? This is where the Upanishads give us the answer. They tell us that it can be for only one reason: for delight. We have said that this world is a Lila; it is a game, a play. I used to go and play basketball and football in the evening because I enjoyed playing, not because I wanted to win prizes. It was the ‘play’ that was attractive.

Remember, however, that the word ‘Lila’ is a tricky one. I am sure most of you here have played games in your youth or are even now playing games. Now, what is the essence of a game? There are two teams. You play a game with an opponent. Now, when you play a game with an inferior team you may win, you may get a gold medal, but you don’t have the deeper joy. The opponent may have only scored 120 points while you scored 200, but there was no great fun in the game. If you want to have fun, play with an equal. Your opponent must be as strong as you in order for you to enjoy the game to the fullest. So the essential meaning of the word ‘Lila’ implies that if God has to play a game then he must have an equal opponent, and this is none else than the Devil, Satan, evil—call it whatever you like. Thus Lila too is a play, but a play amongst equals, and that is the crux of the word Lila. That is why in India when we use the word ‘Lila’ there is an extraordinary acceptance of the anti-divine also. We are not so much bothered by the question of why evil has come, because if it is a Lila then it is all a game. Of

course, in this play you don't know who will win the game. Sometimes your opponent is ahead; sometimes you are ahead. There is a swinging back and forth, but in the end the Divine will win the game. It may only be by a narrow margin, but He will get 'the gold'; this is sure. That is how we will return to Delight!

This is the basic structure of the world, but Sri Aurobindo goes much deeper. He would ask, "What is this Delight?" We know that Delight is an inseparable part of Sachchidanada, but how is it that Delight is the basis of this creation? It is because the moment there is any creation, it is accompanied by delight. The moment a form is given by Chit, Ananda comes in; they are inseparable, even in a simple pen or a blade of grass. It is the sap of every form. It is the rasa that keeps the form together. Therefore bliss is an inevitable ingredient of all forms.

We can accept this too, but now we need to understand the word 'Delight' itself. What is delight? There can be a hundred different answers, because each one of us gets delight in a hundred ways. Someone may say delight is eating a chocolate, or getting a car or a house, or millions of other things. There can be a hundred million things that could be the cause of delight, but behind all of them there is one common point. What could that be? Well, due to the time factor, I cannot get into that discussion too deeply, so I will give a straight and simple answer. We get delight when we cross over a difficulty, over a boundary or over a limitation. This can be with anything. For example, I want to get a TV and I don't have enough money. I need ten thousand rupees to buy it and I only have nine. I am limited; I cannot proceed. So I do some extra work and I get the one thousand rupees I need and cross the boundary that was stopping me from buying the TV. I overcome the limitation that was upon me and this is the essential truth of any kind of delight. It may come from passing an exam, from getting a house, from getting a job. Another word that Sri Aurobindo and the Upanishads give us for delight is illimitable, infinity, or the word 'Anantam'. When you cross a limit you begin to sense delight.

This is the basic definition of delight. Therefore, we can now see how the Divine is absolute delight because basically it is satyam, jnanam, anantam—he is the infinite. In Sanskrit abhayam is immortality; fearlessness is called

immortality. Similarly, limitlessness is called the Delight. These are the inherent qualities of Sachchidananda.

Now, having given this definition, Sri Aurobindo moves on to the next argument. We have seen the why of creation. Now comes the main question: If Delight is the basis of the creation, then how can we account for pain and evil? Let us concentrate on that. If we claim that the world is Delight, then any ordinary man with common sense would argue, “How can you say so seeing all the pain and evil around you?” If God is all delight, if Sachchidananda is all delight, then these are the two problems that the philosopher has to answer: the why of pain and suffering and the why of evil. These are the two questions that Vedanta has to answer if it asserts that this world is created out of Delight. Sri Aurobindo affirms that:

In everything that is, dwells the conscious force and it exists and is what it is by the virtue of that conscious force; so also in everything that is there is the delight of existence and it exists and is what it is by virtue of that delight.³

But then two powerful contradictions come up: the emotional and sensational consciousness of pain and the ethical problem of evil. These two questions make up the essence of this chapter.

The first issue is pain and suffering. When we say that life is full of suffering, we must quote what the great Buddha told us. He said that all this life is one stretch of pain; therefore, let us get out of it. He also said the cause of pain is desire. Desire for what? Not simply the desire for material things or success, but rather the desire to live itself is the greatest cause of suffering according to the Buddha. So if you don't want to suffer you must stop birth and rebirth by attaining Nirvana. Buddha asks us to get out of this endless suffering which is caused by the continuous desire to live. It may take a thousand lives, but we can do it all the same.

Now, as against this, let us look at what the Vedic Rishis had said. I will read out a prayer of the Vedic Rishis:

Let us live a hundred winters, let us hear something happy and harmonious through the years, let us see beautiful things with the eyes, let us enjoy the span of one hundred years given to us by the Gods.⁴

So on one side we have the attitude of Vedanta and on the other the attitude of the Buddha. One looks at life as sorrow and suffering and the

other looks at it as a divine fulfilment. What do you feel? Do you think that life is full of suffering and pain? Normally we bemoan saying, “I have got so many problems. I have physical problems, mental tensions, and emotional stresses, etc.!” Our own pain or others’ pain are the common topics of our discussions. We keep talking about pain and suffering all the time.

Sri Aurobindo would say that it is a bit of an exaggeration to think of life as constant pain and suffering. What happens usually is that life is one long stretch of happiness, joy. We cannot call it delight, but it is one long stretch of happiness. What happens is that during this long stretch of happiness, sometimes for a few moments or a few hours a dark patch comes. Imagine if you put one little dark point on a white screen. You would look at the dark point and say, “It is such a lovely screen, but it has one dirty spot there.” This is precisely how we look at life. Sri Aurobindo says that happiness is so normal that it has become something natural. It is like somebody who has asthma. We don’t even think about our breathing because it is so natural. But an asthmatic counts every breath and thanks the Lord that he has taken one more breath. I can tell you this because once I suffered from asthma many years ago. So when we are in pain we think that life is full of nothing but suffering. But these moments of pain are just dots on a white canvas. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

...we shall find that the sum of the pleasure of existence far exceeds the sum of the pain of existence—appearances and individual cases to the contrary notwithstanding—and that the active or passive, surface or underlying pleasure of existence is the normal state of nature, pain a contrary occurrence temporarily suspending or overlaying that normal state.⁵

So the normal state is happiness; pain only comes in and suspends that state for a while. That is what we remember. If I asked you to write down your memories, how many of you would write about your sorrows and pain and how many of you about your good memories? You would see that we mostly remember those dark points in our life—the death of somebody, the loss of job, the loss of money—all our tragic points. It is the human tendency to dwell on these tragic points. This is where the psychiatrist takes advantage of the human psychology and dwells on the darker side of nature. Instead of bringing light into our nature they ask us to dig deeper into the

subconscious and we become more depressed as this darker spirit comes upon us. Then they give us more sedatives and the business goes on.

If you go to a yogi, he will never ask you to dig into your darker side. He would say meditate on the Divine. Or he would tell you to go to God with your problems because he is the searchlight and torchlight that will not only shine light on your problems but also burn them away. This is the difference between a yogi and a psychiatrist. The yogi will always take you to the Divine light. Therefore Sri Aurobindo would tell us:

In that balance we enter only positive pleasures on one side and discomfort and pain on the other; pain affects us more intensely because it is abnormal to our being, contrary to our natural tendency and is experienced as an outrage on our existence, an offense and external attack on what we are and seek to be.⁶

Next, we have the idea of an extracosmic God. If God inflicts pain and suffering he must be an immoral God. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

If we say that pain is a trial and an ordeal, we do not solve the moral problem, we arrive at an immoral or nonmoral God,—an excellent world-mechanist perhaps, a cunning psychologist, but not a God of Good and of Love whom we can worship...⁷

Here is something we have to ponder because many religions tell us that pain and suffering are given to us as a test of our faith, our endurance and our trust in the Divine. So bear it, because it is he who is testing you. Well, it is a nice way of putting a balm on your pain, but it is very temporary. The idea of bearing pain and suffering as a test of God is a temporary balm, but it doesn't eradicate the problem.

We shall now take up the main question which is that if God or the Divine, whatever term you want to use, is all good, then how do we explain the problem of pain? We started off saying as some religions say that it is a test of your faith, of your trust, of your surrender. Can we really buy this argument? How have we been so bad that God has given us so much pain and suffering? Is there any justification for that? What happens is that instead of increasing our faith in the Divine, we start revolting and say, "Oh no! I don't want to worship this kind of God who is always judging me, punishing me, putting me into situations where I have no freedom of expression. I have to be always afraid of the supervisor up there! When I

make a mistake he writes it down and then he gives me ten times the punishment. Such a God can only be an immoral God. He cannot be a just God. He takes joy in someone else's suffering!" Actually, this was the God with which we started in all our religions, a God of punishment and judgment.

But in spirituality the first thing we are taught is that God is not a judge. God is really a friend with whom we can be completely free. We can talk to him. We can make mistakes. We can have any kind of free communication and then we can begin to love God. We begin to love God spontaneously, easily, without any bars. That is why we tell our children that they can even speak to God because God is the best friend who knows us better than we know ourselves. But how many thousands of years it has taken to change this concept? So in a way we can say God himself has evolved. We have come a long way and this is a positive sign that we are moving beyond religion towards spirituality. As long as we are bound by religion, fear of God is an underlying factor. As long as you fear God, you can be sure that you are in the frustrating bonds of religion. The day you don't fear Him, you have stepped into a spiritual life.

That is why we need to move towards a focus of love. To have a focus of love, many of us find our own form of God. You may find any God, but don't be afraid. If the commandments of God instill fear in you, then it is better not to have those commandments. The only commandment I would like to follow is the commandment of love. The rest of them only create fear, which is the main instrument for the lack of progress in spiritual life. We have been closeted in a room and warned that if we step out of that room—what we call in India the Lakshman Rekha—we will be punished. And the worst part is that God is omnipresent; we cannot hide our sins, mistakes or guilt from him. You can see the tremendous fear that has come into our being and existence. With this fear, how can anyone ever grow? In modern education we give our children freedom because it is in freedom that a child can grow and express himself. By the example of the failure of communist Russia, we see that as long as the individual is not given freedom there is a lack of inner growth.

Moving on to the next point, Sri Aurobindo says:

And if to escape this moral difficulty, we say that pain is an inevitable

result and natural punishment of moral evil,—an explanation which will not even square with the facts of life unless we admit the theory of Karma and rebirth by which the soul suffers now for antenatal sins in other bodies,—we still do not escape the very root of the ethical problem,—who created or why or whence was created that moral evil which entails the punishment of pain and suffering? And seeing that moral evil is in reality a form of mental disease or ignorance, who or what created this law or inevitable connection which punishes a mental disease or act of ignorance by a recoil so terrible, by tortures so often extreme and monstrous?⁸

I am sure all of us have felt this. You see, we all commit errors out of ignorance. When a child commits a mistake and says, “Mama, I am sorry I have done this. I didn’t know,” his mother doesn’t punish him. She says, “It’s okay. Forget it. It was done out of ignorance.”

Do you know the famous novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*? In it a young person, a poor person is driven by such a great hunger that he steals a loaf of bread from a bakery. As a result he is sent to prison where he suffers all kinds of tortures for years and years apparently for no reason. Isn’t that monstrous? So who has created this monstrous evil, this monstrous pain and suffering?

In modern times doctors take a sympathetic view to one who has a mental disease. Even in the case of murderers, if they are mentally deranged, we do not punish them, but send them to a hospital for treatment. So if we humans can do this, then why is God not able to understand us?

Sri Aurobindo says that we cannot accept this kind of an argument that this suffering is a punishment for moral evil because humanity does these things out of ignorance. We cannot accept this, at least not now in modern times or by those in whom spirituality is awake. In a very fine ending to this paragraph he says:

The inexorable law of Karma is irreconcilable with a supreme and moral and personal Deity, and therefore the clear logic of Buddha denied the existence of any free and all-governing personal God; all personality he declared to be a creation out of ignorance and subject to Karma.⁹

In India we explain our punishments, our pains, our suffering, and of course our good deeds by the law of Karma. We do not say that there is a God who is looking at me and punishing me for what I am doing. We do not

bring God into pain and punishment at all. We say that it is our karma; it is my karma for which I am suffering now. So we have kept God, the one who judges us, out of the problem. Instead, we have an impersonal law which will not judge us but is automatic, almost mechanical and everyone is the same in its eyes. The Buddha also gives a great emphasis on Karma, mostly because he didn't believe in a personal Godhead. This is very important because the moment you bring in a personal Godhead what happens? He becomes a character, a personality and then people say God is justice and is giving rewards and punishments.

So Buddha rejected the concept of a personal God. There is only *ritam*. Remember the words *satyam*, *ritam* and *brihat*? *Ritam* is the law. *Satyam* is truth. *Brihat* is vastness. We saw in a previous chapter that *brihat* or vastness is the beginning of creation. We also said that in this vastness of force there is an expansion according to a certain truth, a certain *ritam*, a certain law of manifestation. The Buddha very beautifully took up that *ritam*, that inexorable law as the ultimate. You don't have to please any God or plead with any God. You don't have to go to temples. But you have got to be very strict with your own action because all action leads to some kind of reaction, either a rewarding reaction or a painful reaction. Sri Aurobindo says here that Buddha eliminated this concept because he declared all action to be a creation of the ignorance. Even God, Buddha said, is a creation of the ignorance because it is we after all who conceive of a God and give him all these epithets. And who are we? We are children of ignorance, so we can never conceive of God as he is. We conceive Him as we want Him to be—all good, all perfect, all beauty, all infinity, all eternity.

In the spiritual life at least we don't accept that God is a judge sitting in heaven and looking down on us, or as Sri Aurobindo puts it, "an extracosmic personal God."¹⁰ This word 'extracosmic' is important because in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, God is extracosmic. Extracosmic means a God who created the cosmos and is looking at it and judging it from outside. If we have this kind of an extracosmic God, then the problem of an immoral God comes in. You see the logic? If God inflicts pain and suffering on his creatures then it would seem he is an immoral God. Therefore Sri Aurobindo says:

In truth, the difficulty thus sharply presented arises only if we assume the

existence of an extracosmic personal God, not Himself the universe, one who has created good and evil, pain and suffering for His creatures, but Himself stands above and unaffected by them, watching, ruling, doing His will with a suffering and struggling world or, if not doing His will, if allowing the world to be driven by an inexorable law, unhelped by Him or inefficiently helped, then not God, not omnipotent, not all good and all loving.¹¹

The solution is to look at the Divine from a completely different angle. The problem comes up because we think of God as being up there and man being down here—God in heaven, man on earth. But Vedanta solves this problem. It looks at the world not as the creation of God but as the self-manifestation of God. This is the solution to the problem of God's immorality for creating an ignorant world and allowing its creatures to suffer due to their ignorance.

If the world was only created by God and separated from him, then what happens? The mother gives birth to the baby. She takes care of the child until he is about eighteen and then she says, "You are a young man now. Go out into the world." Then when he gets married and has his own children there is a complete separation. If the child calls up and says, "Mummy I am in trouble. Please send me \$500," she may help him but beyond that the child lives his own life and the mother lives her own life. But if we say as Vedanta does that the world is a becoming of the Divine himself, that changes everything. Then everything—the good, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful—all is Himself and nothing else. Then the whole concept changes; the whole philosophy changes; the question itself changes.

Sri Aurobindo tells us:

...such a God is not the Vedantic Sachchidananda. Sachchidananda of the Vedanta is one existence without a second; all that is, is He. If then evil and suffering exist, it is He that bears the evil and the suffering in the creature in whom He has embodied Himself. The problem then changes entirely. The question is no longer how God came to create for His creatures a suffering and evil of which He is Himself incapable and therefore immune, but how came the sole and infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss to admit into itself that which is not bliss, that which seems to be its positive negation.¹²

We say, "Okay God, you have become all this, but tell me how did you give admittance to the wrong element? We see that you have become pain, ugliness, suffering, but how did this come about in your perfection? How did you admit these negative things, this sorrow and pain?" This is the main question we have to address now. Sri Aurobindo changes the entire question and says, "how can evil and suffering exist in Sachchidananda, since he is not mechanical existence, but free and conscious being, free to condemn and reject evil and suffering?"¹³ If we see somebody is wrong or bad we reject him and say, "Don't come into my house. You may harm me." So why didn't the Divine stop evil before it came? Why didn't he foresee the evil coming in and prevent it from coming? Are we right in asking this question? There is a problem here. Why is it not right? Because there is no 'other' in the Divine. The evil person is Himself. The good person is Himself. The world is Himself. There is no other to say, "Hey! Stay out!"

The question itself is wrong, but still we may not be convinced. Let us take away the word 'creation'. Perhaps in Indian philosophy the word creation should be taken out of the dictionary itself. We should say, God has BECOME. Then we can ask, "At what stage of the becoming did this so called ugliness come in?" Now this seems like a question that is understandable and justifiable. In the Divine where all is one there is no pain or suffering. The arena of pain and suffering is the multiplicity. Sri Aurobindo is slowly bringing us to the answer. First he says, "Let us be clear where the pain and the suffering is." He tells us that you cannot apply the criteria of pain and suffering to the Transcendent, to the One. Pain is in the arena of creation and we cannot impose a phenomenon of the many onto the One. They are two different fields of existence. One is the field of Sachchidananda, of the oneness and the other is the field of the many, of the manifestation. We cannot apply the same laws upon them; they are two independent although inseparable existences.

Sri Aurobindo tells us:

For the ideas of good and of love which we thus bring into the concept of the All-Delight spring from a dualistic and divisional conception of things; they are based entirely on the relations between creature and creature, yet we persist in applying them to a problem which starts, on the contrary, from the assumption of One who is all. We have to see first how

the problem appears or how it can be solved in its original purity, on the basis of unity in difference; only then can we safely deal with its parts and its developments, such as the relations between creature and creature on the basis of division and duality.¹⁴

This is the central line of argument in the second part of this chapter. We have understood now that there is pain and suffering on the level of the multiplicity and not on the level of oneness, but can we verify this statement? Yes we can. Sri Aurobindo tells us that if we go beyond the mind, the consciousness of mind, we will see there is no pain and suffering. As we go beyond mind what are the essential qualities that you gain? The quality of unity and the quality of harmony. What is the essence of unity and harmony? It is the expansion of consciousness. As you go to higher levels of mind, at each step you are becoming wider and wider until you reach the supramental level where you are identified with the Supreme. There, Sri Aurobindo would tell us, there is no pain. In one of his aphorisms, he says:

There are four stages in the pain God gives to us: when it is only pain; when it is pain that causes pleasure; when it is pain that is pleasure, and when it is purely a fierce form of delight.¹⁵

“A fierce form of delight”—it is a beautiful phrase! Another way to say it would be ‘intolerable ecstasy’. So pain and ecstasy are two sides of the same coin, and which one you experience depends upon your consciousness. When it is only pain it is purely in the physical. When it is pain that causes pleasure it is vital. When it is pain that is pleasure it is mental. And when it is a fierce form of delight you are in unity with the Divine, and we would call that the psychic.

Pain has different degrees depending on our consciousness. If we are bogged down in the physical there are aches and pains; you are purely in the physical consciousness. But as we rise into the higher levels pain disappears more and more. Why? What is the logical explanation? Sri Aurobindo has already given the hint. What is delight? By definition we said it is illimitableness, it is infinity. So if you want to get rid of your pain, what do you do? You go towards delight. What does that mean? It means expand your consciousness. So the more we go towards the Supermind the wider our expanse of consciousness becomes and ultimately pain will not exist.

Now if you go towards the psychic being, you also enter into a consciousness of wideness; therefore pain has to vanish.

It is said that even if you cut your arm you will not have pain if you are in the highest consciousness. It is said that Ramana Maharshi extended his hand to the doctors and said, 'you may cut my hand.' No anaesthesia, nothing! Of course, what he did was different. He withdrew the consciousness from the hand and let the hand be operated upon. Sri Aurobindo fell down in 1938 and broke his thigh bone. When the Mother rushed in and called the doctors he was lying there in perfect ease and bliss and apparently he commented that he had experienced ecstasy through the pain. So physical pain can be converted into ecstasy, and this is one of the spiritual ways of conquering pain. That is why the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are constantly telling us, constantly hammering on us to change our consciousness, to expand our consciousness, to go towards the psychic being. As long as we are in the realm of the mental, vital and physical we will have pain.

We have seen that there are basically two problems that arise when we speak about delight being the essence of creation. These two problems are the problem of pain and suffering and the problem of evil. Sri Aurobindo has just explained these problems; he has not given the solutions. He will give us that in the next chapter. Here he says that the question of pain and suffering gets a completely different shade of meaning when we look at it from a Vedantic point of view, as opposed to a religious point of view, and that ultimately we cannot apply our human standards or judgments on the Divine because they are two different categories of existence and what applies to one category—all the rules, the laws and the value systems—does not apply to the other category.

Leaving the question at that, Sri Aurobindo now takes up the question of ethics. This is perhaps not only more interesting but also something that really bothers us, because the question of evil has not been solved. Taking up this, issue, Sri Aurobindo says:

The attempt of human thought to force an ethical meaning into the whole of Nature is one of those acts of wilful and obstinant self-confusion, one of those pathetic attempts of the human being to read himself, his limited habitual human self into all things and judge them from the standpoint he

has personally evolved, which most effectively prevent him from arriving at real knowledge and complete sight.¹⁶

Sri Aurobindo says that the first mistake that we human beings make is that we extend our own human judgment to all of nature. We extend what we think is cruel, violent or evil and say there was a cruel earthquake or storm that killed so many people. When a tiger eats a deer we say how cruel it is. So with this kind of human valuation we try to judge Nature, and we make the same mistake with God. We say that even if God is not evil, he has created and is enjoying this evil and violence. Now this mental attempt of man to superimpose his value system on God or Nature prevents us from knowing the true nature of God or of Nature because we become categorical, divided and rigid, and therefore cannot enter into the knowledge that is unifying.

But is there any ethical law on the material level itself? Look at Nature. Look at the floods, the mountains, the rivers, the oceans, the avalanches, the storms, the rains, the earthquakes. Is there anything here one could call ethical? When there is a huge earthquake or a volcanic eruption thousands of people may die, but earthquakes and volcanoes existed long before human beings came upon this earth. They have not changed their law to suit humanity. They only follow fixed habits which take no cognisance of good and evil. Sri Aurobindo says that all these natural laws were there before man, the animals or even the plants came, so how can we pass judgment on them? We can see that the material level has no ethics at all. The animal or vital nature is also non-ethical. When a lion kills a deer, it does not think, "I am killing somebody." It is only following an instinct of self-preservation. There is no sense of guilt or sin. When man comes, however, things change. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Blame and condemnation, or rather self-blame and self-condemnation, are the beginning of true ethics. When we blame others without applying the same law to ourselves, we are not speaking with a true ethical judgment, but only applying the language ethics has evolved for us to an emotional impulse of recoil from or dislike of that which displeases or hurts us.¹⁷

This is the beginning of ethics. Man is essentially a consciousness who can look at himself, analyse himself. Animals and plants don't do that. Man,

however, can look at himself and say, “Hey! I have done something wrong.” This condemnation of oneself or blaming oneself for some action is the beginning of ethical law. So we have a sort of evolution. First is the non-ethical which is the level of matter. Then we have the infra-ethical which is the animal. Lastly there is man who according to Sri Aurobindo is “half-ethical.”¹⁸ This is because we will often approve of a hurt done to others that we would not approve of being done to ourselves.

But Sri Aurobindo will not leave it at that. He goes further, and in this most interesting paragraph he says:

This recoil or dislike is the primary origin of ethics, but is not itself ethical. The fear of the deer for the tiger, the rage of the strong creature against its assailant is a vital recoil of the individual delight of existence from that which threatens it.¹⁹

So ethics basically starts with this fear or dislike. In Sanskrit it is called *jugupsa*. But the fear of the deer for the tiger is not ethics. You may have watched the National Geographic channel on TV and seen the deer when it sees the tiger coming. The expression on its face is full of fear. It is almost frozen with fear, so much so that sometimes it can't even move. You see each living creature wants to live and have the delight of existence. So the fear of the deer is actually the fear of losing its existence. Now the same fear when it comes to the level of mind turns into ethics. It turns into a recoil of the being, a kind of shrinking. In your childhood I am sure you have played with a snail and if you ever touched its antenna you saw that it will immediately withdraw them. We also, when we see that something is going to hurt us mentally, physically or emotionally, we have a sudden shrinking. It is essentially the same fear that is there in the deer.

In the next sentence Sri Aurobindo goes a step further and says:

Disapproval of that which threatens and hurts us, approval of that which flatters and satisfies refine into the conception of good and evil to oneself, to the community, to others than ourselves, to other communities than ours, and finally into the general approval of good, the general disapproval of evil. But, throughout, the fundamental nature of the thing remains the same. Man desires self-expression, self-development, in other words, the progressing play in himself of the conscious-force of existence; that is his

fundamental delight. Whatever hurts that self-expression, self-development, satisfaction of his progressing self, is for him evil.²⁰

This is the basis of ethics. Each living creature wants to have the delight of existence. It wants to live. It is only a perverted mind which wants to die. There is a beggar in front of my house, maybe in his seventies, who for the past two and a half years has been staying on a footpath in a place which is about three feet by four feet. In the beginning he used to go out for begging but now he is so weak he can't even walk around; so he sits in front of his house and begs. I have often wondered what is it that wants to live in him? Given all our material comforts, I have often wondered how much does one actually need in order to live. I see this man day in and day out and I have hardly ever seen him sick. I won't say he is healthy. He has become weak because of old age and less food, but I was more sick in the last two years than this man who is sitting on the footpath! In addition, he is not sad; he is not crying and he does not want to commit suicide. Something in him wants to live even though he doesn't have three meals a day, or a fan, or winter clothes. Something takes this delight of existence which is innate right from the ant to the dinosaur. It is the basic self expression of the supreme Sachchidananda.

In man we not only want to live and exist physically, but we also want to grow. Part of this growth is self-expression, what the Gita calls expressing your *swadharma*. In this expression of ourselves, if there is any hindrance from anybody then we call that person or that event or that attitude evil. Mankind wants to fulfil its being and Sri Aurobindo says this is the basics of ethics.

Now ethics vary from country to country, from culture to culture. What is good for me may be bad for you and vice versa. What happens is that ideals differ and therefore ethical value systems differ. Are these ideals permanent? No, not at all. When we are children, our parents are our ideals. If the father is a doctor and you ask the child, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" he will say, "I want to be a doctor." If the father is a businessman, then he will say "a businessman." But when the child grows up he will change his ideal and want to be something else. There is no permanent ideal that we have in life. Sri Aurobindo says:

Only, his conception of the self-development changes, becomes higher

and wider, begins to exceed his limited personality, to embrace others, to embrace all in its scope.²¹

Here is a marvellous piece from the Mother which exactly explains this passage:

From a certain point of view there is nothing that is totally useless in the world. Only, things which were tolerable and admissible at a certain time are no longer so at another. And when they are no longer admissible, one begins to say they are bad, because then a will awakes to get rid of them.²²

I always maintain that the Mother is a great psychologist and I wish that somebody would take up a complete study of psychology and the Mother. That way we can have a spiritual psychology. In the West they are still trying to discover a psychology that can be applied to the inner being of man. Unfortunately the psychologists cannot enter these depths, but the Mother is full of this. I wish some young brain from Auroville or Pondicherry or even SACAR would take up this project of a spiritual psychology because it would be a great contribution to the world of psychology. Coming back to the passage, the Mother then says:

But in the history of the universe—one can even say in the history of the earth, to limit the problem to our little planet—I think everything that exists had its necessity and importance at a given moment. And it is as one advances that these things are rejected or replaced by others which belong to the future instead of the past. So of things which have no further purpose one says, “They are bad.”²³

Try to understand, because here the Mother has given us the ultimate definition of bad and good. She continues:

...because one tries to find within oneself a lever to push them out, to break with the habit. But perhaps at one time they were not bad, and other things were.

There are ways of being, ways of feeling, ways of doing, which you tolerate in yourself for quite a long time, and which don't trouble you, don't seem to you at all useless or bad or to be got rid of. And then all of a sudden one day, you don't know why or what has happened, but the outlook changes, you look at things and say, “But what is this? This is in me! Am I carrying this in myself? But it is intolerable, I don't want it any longer.” And suddenly it seems bad to you because it is time to reject these

things, for they do not harmonise with the attitude you have taken or the progress you have made in your march forward in the world.²⁴

Ladies tend to be very fond of self-decoration—lipstick, earrings, etc. At a certain stage of life they feel this is how they should be in society—all decked up and with a lot of perfume. They find it natural. But one day they may take up the path of yoga and then feel that all this is out of place. They say it doesn't belong to them anymore. Their whole value system changes. They go forward in their expansion of consciousness, in their march towards truth and find that this is no longer useful, and quietly say, "I don't want it any longer." The Mother continues:

These things should be elsewhere, they are no longer in their place, therefore you find them bad. But perhaps the same things which seem bad to you would be excellent for other people who are at a lower level.

There is always someone more dull, more unconscious, more ignorant or worse than oneself. So the state which is intolerable for you, which you can no longer keep, which must disappear, would perhaps be very luminous for those who are on the lower rungs.²⁵

It is like when a snake drops its old skin. It is a very natural thing that happens. Another image we can use is that of a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. So there is always this growth of consciousness. It is not a question of fighting my evil, of fighting my weaknesses and all that. It is rather that a state becomes intolerable for you. That is why your elders and your parents can give you a hundred thousand advices but still nothing happens because you have not gone into the essence of your being, you have only heard the advice with good wishes. But no advice is useful to you unless it has come from within you. There must be a kind of self-preparation. Even a tree can be your teacher telling you to let this bad habit drop off, just like it lets its dying leaf drop off. When the being is ready anything in Nature can be a message. It need not be a scripture or a guru.

The Mother beautifully tells us here once again:

But one cannot judge. It is impossible to say, "This is bad." At the most one can say, "This is bad for me, it is no longer in its place with me, it must go." That's all. And one drops it on the way.

And this makes the progress much, much easier, to think and feel like that instead of sitting down in despair and lamenting about things and

what you are like, and the misery you endure and the defects you have and the impossibilities which beset you and all that. You say, “No, no, those things are no longer in their place here, let them go elsewhere, where they will be in their place and welcome. As for me, I am going forward, I am going to climb a step, I shall go towards a purer and better and more complete light; and so all these things which like the darkness must go away.” But that’s all.²⁶

Otherwise, how will you fight human weakness? It is not possible. You will spend ten lives trying and still you will not drop your weaknesses. It is only this inner burning, this inner aspiration for the life of the butterfly that will do it. Otherwise you will remain comfortable in your cocoon.

So what exactly is bad? It is only that which is out of place and out of time. Otherwise everything has its place and time. Today if I have evolved and realised all this self-decoration is out of place for me because I want to lead a yogic life then I will not load myself down with the outer ornamentation. But it may be appropriate for a young lady who wants to look beautiful. Her consciousness of the vital needs these embellishments but a consciousness turning to the spiritual doesn’t need them. So the same valuation you once had for gold ornaments is out of place and out of time and therefore it is bad. You say, “I want to go higher into a purer, better and more complete life and consciousness. These things must be dropped.”

Each time one sees in oneself something which seems really nasty that proves that one has made progress. This is a wonderful thing, because even to realise one’s mistake is already a step forward. In yoga we must analyse ourselves. And each time we enter into a self-analysis we are taking a half step forward. But we shouldn’t focus the microscope on the mistake because if we do that, what happens? A tiny thing becomes a big thing. So let us not put the microscope on our mistakes but stick with rational self-analysis: “Why have I been angry? Why was I disturbed? What is the reason?” If we go deeper in this analysis, deeper into the darkness, then that means we have taken a step forward. Instead of lamenting and falling into despair we should be happy. We should say, “Ah, that is good. I am getting on.”

Even in the individual value system there is no permanent good and bad. For a terrorist or an anti-nationalist, it may be good to kill even innocent

people. But twenty years later the same man after going through many changes will find it bad.

We have said earlier that behind all that happens is the supreme Sachchidananda trying to find delight. In matter there is a kind of delight but it is not expressing itself in any kind of response or reaction or action, but nevertheless it is still there. In animals too there is a different kind of joy. Joy or an expression of joy does not mean that one has to do actions or make forms or create things. Like the mountain it can be still for ten million years and yet have the joy of stillness. In action there can be joy, but there can also be joy in non-action. The supreme Sachchidananda has this delight of existence on all levels and in all ways. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

In other words, ethics is a stage in evolution. That which is common to all stages is the urge of Sachchidananda towards self-expression. This urge is at first non-ethical, then infra-ethical in the animal, then in the intelligent animal even anti-ethical for it permits us to approve hurt done to others which we disapprove when done to ourselves. In this respect man even now is only half-ethical. And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics.²⁷

Now I will read a small passage that gives a wonderful idea of what we mean by supra-ethical. Sri Aurobindo gives a lovely distinction. He says:

Morality is for the Western mind mostly a thing of outward conduct; but conduct for the Indian mind is only one means of expression and sign of a soul-state.²⁸

Try to distinguish this. Hinduism also speaks of good conduct. We teach our children good conduct, but an individual is not to be judged by his conduct alone. Sri Aurobindo continues:

Hinduism only incidentally strings together a number of commandments for observance, a table of moral laws; more deeply it enjoins a spiritual or ethical purity of the mind with action as one outward index. It says strongly enough, almost too strongly, “Thou shouldst not kill,” but insists more firmly on the injunction, “Thou shalt not hate, thou shalt not yield to greed, anger or malice,” for these are the roots of killing.²⁹

Do you see the difference between ethics and supra-ethics? One says “thou shalt not kill,” “thou shalt not steal,” etc., like the ten commandments. But

supra-ethics goes beyond and says “purify your mind, purify your vital of anger, greed and malice.” This is the spiritual thing which results in the purification of the inner being. This is not just cutting away the branch which is dying but cuts at the roots themselves. Sri Aurobindo continues:

Hinduism admits relative standards, a wisdom too hard for the European intelligence... The Western ethicist likes to have a high standard as a counsel of perfection and is not too much concerned if it is honoured more by the breach than by the observance; Indian ethics puts up an equally high and often higher standard; but less concerned with high professions than with the truth of life, it admits stages of progress and in the lower stages is satisfied if it can moralise as much as possible those who are not yet capable of the highest ethical concepts and practice.³⁰

If you say that you should not have desire and greed that is an ethical rule. But can we expect a young man of twenty-one years not to have desire? It is not possible. Indian ethics or Indian spirituality would tell us that life is fullness. If a young man wants to go through desire, through the acquisition of wealth, then Indian ethics would allow him to go through it, but while going through it, it is important to keep the ideal of dharma in one's view. Keep that self-law, that divine aim alive within and everything will be perfect.

I can tell you my own personal experience with this. Whenever I have travelled, one of the things I have learned, which automatically comes upon me because I was a child of the Ashram, is that wherever I went I just remembered my Lakshman Rekha, ‘I am the child of the Mother.’ Lakshman Rekha is a self-limitation. The moment I remember this sentence (that I am the child of the Mother), then all my reactions, all my emotions, all my greed and all my needs take on a different parameter altogether, because the remembrance that I am the Mother's child uplifts me to a higher level of doing things. If you don't have such a reference point in you then there is nothing to stop you from doing wrong deeds. If I say I am the Mother's child, then although no one else may be looking at me, I know the Mother is looking at me. Then what happens? Then all my actions automatically get redirected; life gains a different hue, a different meaning, a different purpose. One of my teachers related to me something the Mother had told her, which I have always remembered in my life: “You may do anything and everything

you want to do, but all that you should be able to do in front of me.” How can one escape from that? Where is morality? Where is ethics? The Mother has given entire freedom and yet she has put a noose around our necks. That noose is called the Golden Chain. But one must be very sincere, otherwise one can turn this into a license to indulge in stupidities.[†]

In India when we fly kites we sometimes have kite fights. When two kites fight, you know what we do? There are two methods. One is that the moment they entangle themselves, one person tries to pull the string very fast and cut the other string. The other method is to leave the string, and the other fellow tries to pull. I leave it, and then most often the other fellow gets cut. This is what the Mother does! She leaves you but you will not be able to go too far, you will have to come back, because though you may go to the end of the sky, you will feel it is not home. Your home is within you where the Mother is!

We have seen that ethics is only a stage in human evolution during which we have to operate by rules and regulations. We also saw that we cannot apply ethics to what is supra-ethical or what is beyond the multiplicity. In the same way that you cannot apply ethics to the avalanche or the storm or the tiger, you cannot apply your concept of good and evil to what is beyond. When Sri Aurobindo remarks that ethics is only a stage in evolution, try to understand that he is not trying to avoid the question. He is going to give us the solution in the next chapter, but for now he is only trying to give things their proper placing.

We have seen that the conscious force of existence, developing itself into forms, seeks in that development the delight of existence. It evidently began for that delight but it continually seeks new forms of itself and in the passage to higher forms there intervenes the phenomenon of pain and suffering which seems to contradict the fundamental nature of its being. This and this alone is the root problem.

Sri Aurobindo says that the problem is limited to the evolution of man on the mental level. Beyond mind there are no ethics and below mind there are no ethics. He asks how shall we solve the problem of ethics, the problem of good and evil? Then he replies:

Shall we say that Sachchidananda is not the beginning and end of things, but the beginning and end is Nihil, an impartial void, itself nothing but

containing all potentialities of existence or non-existence, consciousness or non-consciousness, delight or undelight? We may accept this answer if we choose; but although we seek thereby to explain everything, we have really explained nothing, we have only included everything. A Nothing which is full of all potentialities is the most complete opposition of terms and things possible and we have therefore only explained a minor contradiction by a major, by driving the self-contradiction of things to their maximum.³²

This doesn't give us the answer, so what is the argument? First we must make it clear to ourselves that just as when we speak of universal consciousness, we are speaking of something more essential and wider than the ordinary human mind, so also when we speak of the universal delight of existence we mean something more essential and wider than the ordinary emotional and sensational pleasure of the individual human being. Now Sri Aurobindo is slowly approaching the solution. He is not yet giving it but he is giving us a direction. What is it? Straight away he is trying to clarify things with a definition of pleasure and pain.

Let's take a look at a quote from the Mother which explains this. She tells us:

Ananda belongs to the Supreme Lord.

Ecstasy belongs to the perfected yogi.

Joy belongs to the desireless man.

Pleasure is within the reach of all living beings, but with its inevitable accompaniment of suffering.³³

We ourselves feel that most of the time when we act there is a desire behind it, but if perchance we do the act without any motive we have joy. And this motiveless action or desireless action is within our grasp. We can consciously do that. When we do an act we say, "No, I don't want anything personal for me," because the moment we look for personal benefit we lose the joy. Now this kind of action also cannot be that much thought out; it has to be pretty spontaneous, it has to be a gesture that springs from within and is not calculated.

We have seen that joy belongs to the desireless man; pleasure is in the reach of all beings but it carries the price of suffering. It is almost a natural law. Pleasure and pain go together, joy and desirelessness go together, and

ecstasy and beyond duality go together. So this is the definition of delight. Here Sri Aurobindo writes:

Delight of being is universal, illimitable and self-existent, not dependent on particular causes, the background of all backgrounds, from which pleasure, pain and other more neutral experiences emerge.³⁴

This is the crux of the issue. He is saying that delight is the essence and all the stages have their own way of expression. When it comes to the mental stage, it goes through a process of negative and positive currents, a process of duality. This is an interesting point. Below the mind there is no duality and above mind there is less and less duality. Duality is at its acme on the mental stage. Why? In the first chapter of *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo tells us that Nature herself has chosen contradictions as her way of evolution. For progress as well as for the mental consciousness, duality is the fastest way to evolve. So this pain and pleasure is the best way for human beings to move further towards their spiritual destinies and to go beyond the mind. This is the global understanding of the why of evil, the why of suffering.

Imagine a potter who brings wet clay and crushes it with his feet. In the beginning, if the clay could feel, it would be feeling pain because the potter is crushing it with his feet. But this crushing is necessary because at that stage the clay is in big lumps. The hardness, the resistance, the rigidity of the clay is broken by this crushing. And within half an hour the same lumpy clay will have become a beautiful vase. When the vase looks back it will thank the potter for having crushed the clay. This is the stage of evolution that man is in. When we surpass this mental consciousness we will thank both Nature and the Divine for taking us through these hardships and crushing circumstances, because we have become a beautiful vase of great use for the Divine. If there was only the unitarian process with no crushing or pain or pleasure we would be like that clay on the mountain, eternally in *tamas*.

Sri Aurobindo explains the situation like this:

In the egoistic human being, the mental person emergent out of the dim shell of matter, delight of existence is neutral, semi-latent, still in the shadow of the subconscious, hardly more than a concealed soil of plenty covered by desire with a luxuriant growth of poisonous weeds and hardly less poisonous flowers, the pains and pleasures of our egoistic existence.

When the divine conscious-force working secretly in us has devoured these growths of desire, when in the image of the Rig Veda the fire of God has burnt up the shoots of earth, that which is concealed at the roots of these pains and pleasures, their cause and secret being, the sap of delight in them, will emerge in new forms not of desire, but of self-existent satisfaction which will replace mortal pleasure by the Immortal's ecstasy.³⁵

Our desires are like weeds that cover the expression of delight and when they have been burnt off then only will the true being come forth.

Now I will end with a long passage from the Mother which gives us the best explanation. She says:

The spiritual life, the life of Yoga, has for its object to grow into the divine consciousness and for its result to purify, intensify, glorify and perfect what is in you. It makes you a power for manifesting of the Divine; it raises the character of each personality to its full value and brings it to its maximum expression; for this is part of the Divine plan. Morality proceeds by a mental construction and, with a few ideas of what is good and what is not, sets up an ideal type into which all must force themselves. This moral idea differs in its constituents and its ensemble at different times and different places. And yet it proclaims itself as a unique type, a categoric absolute; it admits of none other outside itself; it does not even admit a variation within itself. All are to be moulded according to its single ideal pattern, everybody is to be made uniformly and faultlessly the same. It is because morality is of this rigid unreal nature that it is in its principle and its working the contrary of the spiritual life. The spiritual life reveals the one essence in all, but reveals too its infinite diversity; it works for diversity in oneness and for perfection in that diversity. Morality lifts up one artificial standard contrary to the variety of life and the freedom of the spirit. Creating something mental, fixed and limited, it asks all to conform to it. All must labour to acquire the same qualities and the same ideal nature. Morality is not divine or of the Divine; it is of man and human. Morality takes for its basic element a fixed division into the good and the bad; but this is an arbitrary notion. It takes things that are relative and tries to impose them as absolutes; for this good and this bad differ in differing climates and times, epochs and countries. The moral notion goes so far as to say that there are good desires and bad desires and calls on you

to accept the one and reject the other. But the spiritual life demands that you should reject desire altogether. Its law is that you must cast aside all movements that draw you away from the Divine. You must reject them, not because they are bad in themselves,—for they may be good for another man or in another sphere,—but because they belong to the impulses or forces that, being unilluminated and ignorant, stand in the way of your approach to the Divine. All desires, whether good or bad, come within this description; for desire itself arises from an unilluminated vital being and its ignorance. On the other hand you must accept all movements that bring you into contact with the Divine. But you accept them, not because they are good in themselves, but because they bring you to the Divine. Accept then all that takes you to the Divine. Reject all that takes you away from it, but do not say that this is good and that is bad or try to impose your outlook on others; for, what you term bad may be the very thing that is good for your neighbor who is not trying to realise the Divine Life.³⁶

She goes on to give a wonderful example of a person who is generous and a person who is avaricious. The Mother says that in the spiritual life there is no such thing as a generous man or an avaricious man. One is no better than the other. She says that there is an aspect of the Divine which spreads, distributes and shares and that the generous man is only an instrument of this aspect of the Divine. There is also another aspect of the Divine which collects, which gathers, which keeps things safe and the avaricious man is an instrument of that aspect of the Divine. So from the spiritual angle one is no better than the other, but a generous man who is motivated by his own name and fame is inferior to the avaricious man who is doing his work as an offering to the Divine. The real question is who is trying to be an instrument of the Divine? Both types will have to purify themselves and change before they can make contact with something higher and express it in their nature.

In the same way you can take all the other personality types and trace them to some original intention of the divine force. Each is a caricature or a diminution of a type intended by the Divine, a mental and vital distortion of things that have a great spiritual value. It is the wrong movement that creates the distortion. Once this false impression is mastered, the right attitude taken, the right movement found, then all things reveal their divine values.

All are justified by the Truth that is in them. All are equally important, equally needed, different but indispensable instruments of the Divine manifestation.

The one who is moving toward the Divine is the true spiritual person, not necessarily the one who is generous or highly moral. I always give the example that the eldest brother of the Pandavas who never told a lie was not given the new law by Sri Krishna. Instead it was given to Arjuna who was never known for his morality. It is not always the moral person who is the best instrument of the Divine, but rather the person who loves the Divine. He may have one hundred defects, but he will be the true instrument for the Divine manifestation in the world.

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25. Ibid., p. 6.
26. Ibid., pp. 6-7.
27. *The Life Divine*, p. 97.
28. SABCL, Vol. 14 (*Foundations of Indian Culture*), Sri Aurobindo

- Ashram, Pondicherry, 1970, p. 91.
29. Ibid.
 30. Ibid., pp. 91-92.
 31. CWM, Vol. 16, (*Some Answers from the Mother*), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1979/1983, p. 131.
 32. *The Life Divine*, p. 98.
 33. *Some Answers from the Mother*, p. 296.
 34. *The Life Divine*, pp. 98-99.
 35. Ibid., p. 99.
 36. CWM, Vol. 3 (*Questions and Answers 1929*), Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1979/1983, pp. 118-119.

Lecture Notes

- I. If Delight is the basis of creation, then how to account for pain and evil?
 - a. Is the world full of suffering only? Exaggeration
 - b. Pleasure is our normal status and pain affects us because it is abnormal
- II. Theory of extra-cosmic God
 - a. If God inflicts suffering a pain, he is an immoral God
 - b. If pain is a punishment of moral evil, who created the moral evil?
- III. The Vedantic view
 - a. It is He that becomes suffering and evil
 - b. The question of evil and suffering in Sachchidananda is based on a dualistic conception of things
- IV. Stages of ethics
 - a. First stage: Matter—infra-ethical
 - b. Second stage: Animal—non-ethical
- V. Origin of ethics
 - a. Disapproval of what hurts man = Evil; approval of what helps man in his self-experience = Good
 - b. Ethics is only a stage in man's march towards the higher harmony
- VI. Delight—its secret workings in evolution.

Delight of Existence: The Solution

Once again Sri Aurobindo will start us off with a quote from the Upanishads; it says: “The name of That is the Delight; as the Delight we must worship and seek after It.”¹ He says that Delight is the essence of this creation. But how do we understand the discrepancy between this Delight and the world and the manifestation? It is not obvious that this world is a creation out of Delight. The first thing Sri Aurobindo does in this chapter is to take up the innate relation between Sachchidananda and this world. There are three views that come out of this analysis based on the three aspects Sat, Chit and Ananda. Sri Aurobindo takes up the relation of each one of these aspects to the world. Here in India, philosophies have looked at the world from each of these three different angles, and the resulting philosophies are very dominant in our culture.

So what are these three different views? The first one according to Sri Aurobindo is this:

if we regard world-existence only in its appearances and only in relation to its pure, infinite, indivisible, immutable Existence, we are entitled to regard it, describe it and realise it as Maya.²

So this is the first view: if you look at the world in relation to pure Existence, Sat, the conclusion reached is that the world is Maya. Shankaracharya’s view is that the world is Maya. But what do we understand by this word Maya? If we split the word the root would be ‘Ma’. ‘Ma’ is a very interesting word and let us analyse it further.

Now ‘Ma’ has several meanings. One of the important ones is ‘to measure’. Sri Aurobindo gives other meanings, which are measuring, limiting and formative. What does this imply? Well, for one thing it implies that Maya is the force that has measured the Supreme Sachchidananda. To illustrate this idea let’s use an example. When you go to the shop to buy material to make curtains the shopkeeper will ask you, “How much do you want, Sir? I have a roll of 100 meters.” You reply that you want five meters. So he measures out five meters, cuts it off and gives it to you. So out of those five meters of cloth you make a curtain. Now, one can’t make a curtain out of a 100 meter roll. To make a specific form you have to get a limited piece of cloth. In a similar

way, Sat or pure Existence has delimited itself into the forms of you and me, the ants and the anthill, the trees and the mountains, the whole universe. This is the function of Maya. It is the conscious energy that delimits the Supreme Existence, or as Sri Aurobindo puts it:

Maya in its original sense meant a comprehending and containing consciousness capable of embracing, measuring and limiting and therefore formative; it is that which outlines, measures out, moulds forms in the formless, psychologises and seems to make knowable the Unknowable, geometrises and seems to make measurable the limitless.³

This is the original meaning of Maya, but later on Shankaracharya preferred Maya to mean illusion. But it is not an illusion in the true sense. If I have taken five meters from a 100 meter roll and made a curtain out of it, is the curtain then an illusion? No it isn't. It is a specific form, but that doesn't mean the curtain is unreal.

Shankara apparently suited many words from the Upanishads to promote his own interpretation of reality. But I wouldn't say that this was done willfully. His experience was something real. The world appearing as unreal is a logical and experiential thing, not a trick or a twist or a perversion of words. Why? Because this world is *mithya*, that is, unreal in relation to Brahman who is the real. This word *mithya* describes the world in relation to Brahman; in relation to Brahman, the world is a *mithya*. If we say only *jaganmithya*, the world is unreal, then we are wrong. We must always say *brahma satyam jaganmithya*; they must go together. If you only say *jaganmithya*, Shankara would say, "Sorry. You are misquoting me." The world only seems to appear as something unreal in relation to the supreme experience of the Brahman consciousness. On an ordinary level we can understand this. If you have had a deep meditation and when you come out of it, you find that you hate to come out into the ordinary consciousness which is so very heavy, dark and dense. You wish that you could always be in a beautiful meditative mood. Similarly, a sense of unreality of the world creeps in when one has experienced the Brahman, not otherwise. Therefore, it was but natural that for Shankaracharya the world came to be viewed as an illusion, and that this word Maya came to be known as illusion.

Sri Aurobindo would like us to ask ourselves, "Is this world really Maya? Is

it really an illusion?” Sri Aurobindo himself takes up the argument. He tells us:

World is Maya. World is not unreal in the sense that it has no sort of existence; for even if it were only a dream of the Self, still it would exist in It as a dream, real to It in the present even while ultimately unreal. Nor ought we to say that world is unreal in the sense that it has no kind of eternal existence; for although particular worlds and particular forms may or do dissolve physically and return mentally from the consciousness of manifestation into the non-manifestation, yet Form in itself, World in itself are eternal.⁴

Shankara would say that this world is a dream reality. As long as we are in the dream we think that it is real, but once we come out of the dream we know it was a dream and therefore it was an illusion, something non-existing. Shankara would say that this world, this life is a dream and it is only when we get back to Brahman that we say, “Oh, I have been living in a long wretched dream.” Sri Aurobindo takes up this idea and asks, if this world is a dream reality, then whose dream is it? Who could be dreaming about the world except Brahman himself? Therefore Sri Aurobindo says that it must be a dream of the Self, of the Brahman, and so long as the Lord is dreaming about it, the world is a reality. It is not unreal. If we say that Auroville is a dream of the Supreme, as says the Mother, it does not mean that it is unreal or an illusion. In fact, Sri Aurobindo would say, the world is then much more a reality than all of our dreams because it is the Supreme himself who is dreaming. Perhaps He is dreaming of a beautiful ideal world, dreaming that the world will one day be supramentalised. One day His dream has to come true.

So the world is in fact real. Sri Aurobindo says that the world is Maya, but in the original sense of the word. By this he means that it is measured out of the Supreme; therefore, it is a real world. We have never said the world is unreal; only Shankara has said that. The world is real, but is it as real as Brahman? That is the question. This is where the misunderstanding comes in. The world is Maya because it is not an essential truth; it is only a phenomenal truth.

Now what does this mean? There were two stages: the unmanifest and the manifest. The unmanifest is Tat and the manifest is Sachchidananda. The

reality of the universe is that Sachchidananda brings the world out of Himself. The basic view of both Sri Aurobindo and the Upanishads is that it is by Chit-Tapas that the world has been brought forth. Before the manifestation took place there was only Tat, which means 'That'. The first truth, the absolute truth is Tat. Creation comes as a secondary step. So Sri Aurobindo says that the world is Maya because it is not the first truth. He says the world is real, but it is not the primary truth; it is a secondary truth of manifestation. Or to put it another way, one could say the world is not the essential truth of Tat, but rather is the phenomenal truth of multiplicity. This is the first relation to understand.

Sri Aurobindo now takes us to the second relation, that is, how do we see the world from the point of view of Chit? Chit is consciousness. Chit-Tapas is consciousness-force. If we were to say that the world is a manifestation of Chit-Tapas, then what is important? We have seen previously that this world is an eternal becoming, an eternal formation of the Supreme Chit consciousness. The force which becomes this multitude has got the Supreme consciousness behind and one of the manifestations of this Force is known as Prakriti, or Nature. All that we see around us is the constant becoming of Force. That is the second relation of the world to Sachchidananda.

The third relation is to Ananda. If we look at the world from the angle of Ananda, then what do we see? The world is seen as an eternal play of the Supreme. Sri Aurobindo puts it beautifully. He tells us: "What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden."⁵ When this was first published in the *Arya*, there were a lot of people who said that if it is at our expense that the Lord is playing a game, how cruel of Him! But this sentence refers to the concept of Lila. And this is the most prominent attitude that is taken in India. That the world is a formation of energy and force is more or less the western attitude. Of course, they do not recognise the consciousness behind the force, but they recognise force itself and conclude that the world is a creation of Prakriti. But in India the common man would view life as the Lila of the Divine. That is why we have Sri Krishna's *rasa lila*, the eternal game where he dances with the Gopikas. And you know the secret of the *rasa lila* is that Sri Krishna is there with each Gopika. That is a beautiful truth that the Supreme is ultimately playing with each one of us and that He is the guide in each one of us. He is not just

sitting there and making us dance; he has himself come down and is dancing with each one of us. This dancer with each one of us is the psychic being within us. That is why in the Gita we have the concept of the immanent Divine and Sri Krishna is that immanent Divine in each one of us. So this is the *rasa lila*.

In the previous chapter I had said that if a game is to be interesting and enjoyable it has to be amongst equals. Therefore Indians accept easily the wrong things that are happening as well as the good thing. They take them as the Lila of the Divine. One day you go through a bad period and another day you go through a good period, because the bad is like a shadow of the good; they are inseparable. This gives a kind of relaxed attitude. Indian psychology has this basic attitude of Divine Lila and western psychology has the attitude of Force as the basis of creation.

Although Shankara has given a great philosophy (and the Buddha as well in the same category), it has not affected the day-to-day living of most people. How many people have realised Shankara's sense of illusion in their day to day lives? I don't think many have. When we come to our university corridors and when we do our M.A. and Ph.D., we find strong supporters of Shankara. But in day to day life we don't have a strong sense of illusion. When there is pain in your body we run to a doctor. When we are hungry we go to a restaurant. We are much too grounded in life to be Shankarites.

Now, when trying to explain the origin of pain and suffering, why did Sri Aurobindo give us an explanation of these three philosophies? This paragraph has the answer:

Since, then, eternal and immutable delight of being moving out into infinite and variable delight of becoming is the root of the whole matter, we have to conceive one indivisible conscious Being behind all our experiences supporting them by its inalienable delight and effecting by its movement the variations of pleasure, pain and neutral indifference in our sensational existence.⁶

The conclusion here is that what we see may be Lila, or it could be Prakriti, or it could be Maya. And what is the essence of all these experiences? The essence is Sachchidananda. You may like to see the world this way or that way—it doesn't matter—but the world is essentially Sachchidananda. That cannot be denied. Therefore as Sri Aurobindo indicates, pain and suffering

have got to be an innate part of Sachchidananda. Remember, however, that something being innate doesn't mean it is a quality of Sachchidananda. Rather, it means that he is responsible for the pain and pleasure and suffering. Regardless of the way one looks at the world, we cannot deny that Sachchidananda has to explain our pain and pleasure and indifference. That is how Sri Aurobindo links up pain and suffering with Sachchidananda. He does not reject them as would an illusionist, he does not say that there is no pain or suffering. He says that pain and suffering are realities because the world is a reality. We cannot say that the world is Maya in the sense of an untruth; we have to accept that pain, suffering and evil come out of the absolute Existence.

The illusionist might say that as the world is an illusion, your suffering is an illusion, your pain is an illusion, evil is an illusion. But if you have this kind of attitude you cannot change this pain and suffering. So, as a metaphysician, the first thing that Sri Aurobindo has to establish is the reality of this world and that everything in this world—pain, suffering, pleasure, evil, etc.—are also real and existent. First you must accept the problem in order to solve it. If you say that there is no problem then there is no solution for it; you don't even try to get a solution. Sri Aurobindo, from a pragmatic angle, says we have a problem—that is, the existence of pain, suffering and evil—and we have to know how to solve it.

Whereas the first argument concerned itself with the reality of pain, pleasure, indifference and evil, the second argument concerns itself with the questions of who suffers and where is the suffering. If I go to a doctor because of pain, the doctor will ask me where exactly is the pain. Sri Aurobindo is asking precisely this same question. Where exactly is the pain in you? You say you have pain and suffering, but where exactly is the pain? Which part of your being? Well, it is in the mental, vital and physical obviously. But the next question is, is this mental, vital and physical conglomerate the whole of your being? No! The image of man's composition given to us by Sri Aurobindo includes the superconscient, the inconscient, the inmost (the soul), the subliminal, the ego and the outer mental-vital-physical conglomerate. The most outer part in which we experience this suffering is hardly ten percent of our being! So in regard to just one tenth of our being—which in our ignorance we regard as nine tenths of our being—

we make a big cry and fuss and go to sadhus, gurus, saints, temples and churches and say, "Please God! Relieve me of this pain!" What a perverted vision of life do we have! If only we knew who we are, what we are, we would perhaps feel ashamed that we make such a fuss over such a little thing. So let's not fuss over this problem which seems to be very simple and yet takes away so much of our consciousness, energy and focus.

In fact, I would say that in modern times we are spending more and more time getting pleasure and getting rid of pain. There are more and more doctors, more and more treatments. It seems all the time we want to get slimmer, more beautiful and have more pleasure. It seems that for one tenth of our being, we spend nine tenths of our consciousness! This imbalance has come into our life, and what will set this imbalance right is Integral Yoga. It's as simple as that.

We see that at the base of who we are, deep within, is the psychic being. I would like to read out a beautiful sentence here where Sri Aurobindo says:

Behind there must be something in us,—much vaster, profounder, truer than the superficial consciousness,—which takes delight impartially in all experiences; it is that delight which secretly supports the superficial mental being and enables it to persevere through all the labors, sufferings and ordeals in the agitated movement of the Becoming. That which we call ourselves is only a trembling ray on the surface...⁷

He says that on the surface we are only a trembling ray; deep within is the psychic being or *chaitya purusha*. The question we have to look into is this: what is the relation between the pain, pleasure and indifference of the mental-vital-physical conglomerate and the psychic being? This is important to know; otherwise we cannot find a meaning in what we are doing externally. The whole meaning of this yoga becomes nullified if there is no connection between what we do, what we feel, what we think and our inner psychic being.

How does it act? Well, it acts in a simple manner. All the experiences on the surface level trickle down into the psychic being. In this trickling down, there is a process of purification that takes place. We know that water is sometimes purified by having it trickle down through several pots placed one on top of the other, so that by the time it reaches the last pot the water is purified because of the filters in the intermediary pots. Similarly there are

filters in our being which make up the subliminal. These filters are the true mental, the true vital and the true physical. By the time something reaches the psychic being there is only the delight of the experience. All the sorrows and tragedies we have on the surface do not reach down there. These murky emotional tragedies are only experienced by our superficial being, but that doesn't mean they do not go down. They do go down. That is how our psychic being gets enriched from birth to birth, taking the essence of these experiences. And that essence is delight, which, of course, has its own depths and levels.

If there is an act based on the dense vital, then it takes a long time to filter in, and then these vibrations stay in our external being and disturb all the subliminal levels. If our external acts are those of purity, quietness, aesthetic beauty and joy, then there is no impurity in those actions. If you filter the water from the Ashram building it will percolate through very fast because it does not have any impurities. But if you filter water from the gutter it will take a long time to pass through and the whole filter will smell. It is not that our tragedies will not get into the psychic. Everyone's actions—the killer, the sinner, the saint, the common man—are tasted and enjoyed by the psychic. But the actions of the killer bring all the dirt and disturbances into the subliminal and it may take a long time to quieten down and reach the psychic.

This is the relation between our outermost actions and the psychic which takes their essence. The quieter we are on the surface, the richer our psychic being becomes, as well as the passages of the inner being; those become richer too. So we can see how much the external matters to the inner. To say that the psychic being has nothing to do with our external being is not right. The yogic force has to come into our day to day lives because it is only when we change this external mode of our being—our frustrations, our fears, our angers—that we can have the inner joy. We must start with the external world. This is the process. This is the inner relation.

To quickly review, Sri Aurobindo has established that it is Sachchidananda who is behind this creation and therefore the Delight of Existence is the basis of all our actions. Secondly, he has shown that this external mental-vital-physical conglomerate where all this pain and suffering occurs is only one little part of our conscious being. Then he has shown the connection

these external activities have with the inner consciousness. Although it is only a small part of our external being which responds to pain and suffering, Sri Aurobindo does not discount it. He is very pragmatic.

Next he takes up the question of pain itself. He tells us:

...this triple vibration of pleasure, pain, indifference, being superficial, being an arrangement and result of our imperfect evolution, can have in it no absoluteness, no necessity. There is no real obligation on us to return to a particular contact, a particular response of pleasure, pain or neutral reaction, there is only an obligation of habit. We feel pleasure or pain in a particular contact because that is the habit our nature has formed, because that is the constant relation the recipient has established with the contact.⁸

Sri Aurobindo's view is that pain is nothing but a habit. What do we understand by the word habit? Well, when I put my finger in a candle flame, what is the reaction? It jumps back. I withdraw my finger because I feel the intense pain. The impression that if I touch fire it will burn me, has been embedded in my mental-vital-physical consciousness by my parents and teachers. It is a habit that has been embedded in me since the time of the cave man in the Neanderthal Age. "But fire really burns," you say, "How is it a habit?" Have you not seen firewalkers? They actually walk on beds of burning charcoal and it is neither magic, nor mesmerism. I have witnessed it myself even though I have not tried it! A common person goes running across the coals and nothing happens to his feet—how is it? As Sri Aurobindo tells us: "It is within our competence to return quite the opposite, pleasure where we used to have pain, pain where we used to have pleasure."⁹ He says it is possible to train ourselves to respond in a different manner.

Now before we go further I would like to read something from the Mother. It is a short passage where she explains this in a lucid manner. She says:

For example, you have cut your finger, there's a nerve that has been affected, and so the nerve quickly goes to tell the brain, up there, that something has happened which is wrong, here. That is what gives you the pain to awaken your attention, to tell you: "You know, there's something wrong." Then the thought immediately feels anxious: "What is wrong? Oh! How it hurts", etc., etc.—then returns to the finger and tries to arrange what is not yet destroyed. Usually one puts a small bandage. But in order not to have the pain, if it hurts very much, you must simply cut the

connection by thought, saying to the nerve, “Now remain quiet, you have done your work, you have warned me, you don’t need to say anything any longer; ploff! I am stopping you.” And when you do it well, you suffer no longer, it is finished, you stop the pain completely. That is the best thing. It is infinitely preferable to telling yourself that it is painful.¹⁰

She says it is possible to cut off the physical pain by cutting off the conscious connection with the brain. That is a bit of an occult process and one can’t do it straight away. You have to train yourself to disconnect the nerve from the brain. This disconnection will stop the pain. So what we are essentially looking at here is the possibility of responding differently to situations, of changing our habits. Habitually we have pain; habitually we have pleasure. The Mother even explains that under certain circumstances what you call pleasure can become pain. The first beautiful sweet Rasagolla that I eat I like very much. The second, third and fourth ones are quite good as well. After the fifth one I start feeling a bit queasy and after the tenth I am in terrible pain! So what has happened? I have gone to excess and what was pleasurable is now painful. So there is somewhere a mechanism that can be brought in to change things. This habit is a thing that can be changed. Even death, the Mother says, is a habit that can be changed. This is a millennial habit but at some point some divine personality can change it. So regarding this pain, Sri Aurobindo tells us:

It is equally within our competence to accustom the superficial being to return instead of the mechanical reactions of pleasure, pain and indifference that free reply of inalienable delight which is the constant experience of the true and vast Bliss-Self within us. And this is a greater conquest, a still deeper and more complete self-possession than a glad and detached reception in the depths of the habitual reactions on the surface.¹¹

Now pain exists on two levels—the mental-vital level (we will combine these two together) and the physical. First Sri Aurobindo takes up mental and vital pain. He tells us:

In the things of the mind this pure habitual relativity of the reactions of pleasure and pain is not difficult to perceive. The nervous being in us, indeed, is accustomed to a certain fixedness, a false impression of absoluteness in these things. To it victory, success, honour, good fortune of all kinds are pleasant things in themselves, absolutely, and must

produce joy as sugar must taste sweet; defeat, failure, disappointment, disgrace, evil fortune of all kinds are unpleasant things in themselves, absolutely, and must produce grief as wormwood must taste bitter.¹²

This has been ingrained in us. The moment there is victory or success there is joy; the moment there is defeat—in a basketball game, or a football game—the one who gets defeated will hardly shake hands with others and will hardly look at the spectators. Sri Aurobindo would say that we are habituated to thinking like this. The Gita tells us that even defeat, disillusionment or tragedy need not lead to sorrow. If we practise detachment, then we can get over this habit but we have to practise it even when we have pleasure.

In fact there was a friend of the Mother—a Buddhist who had to a great extent achieved detachment—who told her that when somebody asked her if she had gotten over her reaction to criticism, she answered that she didn't feel anything when people criticised her; she was quite equal to it. Then she told the Mother that it was lucky that the person didn't ask her if she had got over praise. She said that it is much more difficult to get over praise than it is to get over blame, because blame and criticism are like strong arrows that hit your ego, so you can pull them out if you want to, but when praise comes it is like a carpet that is being removed from under your feet; it is stealthily taken out and suddenly you fall.

So praise is much more dangerous, much more subtle, subtly eroding your being. That is why the Gita says that you have to get over both praise and blame. And this is where Sri Aurobindo points out that on the mental level we have to get over this fixedness—'Let us celebrate the victory!' 'Let us celebrate my success!' 'Let us celebrate my marriage.' This is a thought-habit fixed in our nature. But Sri Aurobindo tells us:

To vary these responses is to it a departure from fact, abnormal and morbid; for the nervous being is a thing enslaved to habit and in itself the means devised by Nature for fixing constancy of reaction, sameness of experience, the settled scheme of man's relations to life.¹³

When you read Sri Aurobindo you can almost see the impartial Purusha who sees all sides of a problem. On one side he is saying that mind with its habits is dangerous because it has this fixedness. But at the same time he asks us why is it that ninety-nine percent of people will celebrate success and

bemoan failure? If something goes wrong in your project or in your work then you feel sad. Why is that? It is because this kind of reaction has become a fixed habit of humanity all over the world. Here he uses a beautiful word: ‘constancy’. Constancy is necessary, but it should not become too rigid; there has got to be an equilibrium.

Sri Aurobindo next takes up pain on the physical level, which is most interesting. He tells us:

We see it in the fact that men in periods of great excitement or high exultation remain physically indifferent to pain or unconscious of pain under contacts which ordinarily would inflict severe torture or suffering.¹⁴

I don’t know whether you have been in the army. Do you know how people in the army fight? A bullet goes through the shoulder of a soldier; he does not stop. He does not say, “Oh! What pain! Take me to the hospital!” He does not bother. Think of a man on a war front: a bullet goes through his arm, but he has no consciousness of it. The arm is bleeding and yet, where has the pain gone? Even physical pain is not constant; it depends on the situation. Sri Aurobindo brings it to our attention that:

In many cases it is only when the nerves are able to reassert themselves and remind the mentality of its habitual obligation to suffer that the sense of suffering returns. But this return to the habitual obligation is not inevitable; it is only habitual.¹⁵

So after the fight, they start looking at their injuries and say, “Look! I got hurt here!” Then what happens? The mind brings in the memory of the habit that because they were injured they should be getting pain.

The same happens when you are working hectically to finish a project. For example, you may be working all night—you don’t feel hungry or tired. Why? Because there is a suspension of the superficial mind which keeps the nervous memory of hunger. So the next morning when the project is over you feel tired and hungry. Why? Because the superficial memory returned and says, “Hey! You have not slept for two nights, you should be tired.”

Sri Aurobindo is telling us that things are not so simple as “I am suffering pain.” As a scientist he is trying to see where exactly the pain is. He sees it as a part of habitual memory that has come to us since millennia, not just now with our birth. It is a cellular memory in us that to touch fire means to get hurt and to have pain.

It is something that can be removed, as in hypnosis, for example. In hypnosis, the hypnotizer suspends the superficial mind of the subject. Once that is done, you can beat him and he will not get feelings of pain, and you can even order him to do anything. Sri Aurobindo is giving us these incidents not to tell us stories but to show us there is a possibility. Therefore he concludes by telling us:

But this freedom which is effected by hypnosis abnormally, rapidly, without true possession, by an alien will, may equally be won normally, gradually with true possession, by one's own will so as to effect partially or completely a victory of the mental being over the habitual nervous reactions of the body.¹⁶

What a hypnotist has done externally we can do willfully on ourselves by yoga. These exceptions only point to the possibility of the conquest of the pain, of the removal of the habit.

We have seen what Sri Aurobindo tells us regarding suffering on the mental plane as well as pain and pleasure on the level of the physical. He has given us instances which show it is possible—even in our day to day life—for pain and suffering to be forgotten or suspended. Such instances are only indications of future possibilities. What we do now in moments when we are out of control or in moments where an outsider, such as a hypnotist, controls our mind can be done out of freedom and self-control. Once that is done then we go beyond pain and suffering which belong to the region of the external mental, vital and physical which is hardly one tenth of our being but still has much importance because it is our point of contact with the external world.

Even though it is small its importance is immense because no other section of our being—the subliminal, the psychic, the superconscient, or the inconscient—has a surface contact with the world. We should not belittle it because it is the footstool of the superconscient to stand upon the earth. It is through this contact that the inner being is fed. You see, all the sensorial knowledge that comes into us comes through this one tenth of our being. Therefore Sri Aurobindo does not neglect it saying it is unimportant.

Here once again we have to see what the importance is of pain and suffering? Do they have any role to play? Sri Aurobindo tells us that:

Pain of mind and body is a device of Nature, that is to say, of Force in her

works, meant to subserve a definite transitional end in her upward evolution.¹⁷

This is a significant line. They have been brought upon us to subserve a definite transitional end. It is not perchance that we have pain and suffering; it is not a punishment that has been brought upon us. Nature has brought it with a definite end and purpose. I will give you an explanation of the Mother. As you have seen by now, this is the secret of our reading: the Mother explains Sri Aurobindo and Sri Aurobindo explains the Mother, because no one else can explain so well. If our reading is comprehensive enough we will not find anything difficult in Sri Aurobindo because the Mother in her seventeen volumes has covered all that Sri Aurobindo has given in his philosophy. She first gives a quotation from Sri Aurobindo's *The Supramental Manifestation*:

Pain and grief are Nature's reminder to the soul that the pleasure it enjoys is only a feeble hint of the real delight of existence. In each pain and torture of our being is the secret of a flame of rapture compared with which our greatest pleasures are only as dim flickerings. It is this secret which forms the attraction for the soul of the great ordeals, sufferings and fierce experiences of life which the nervous mind in us shuns and abhors.¹⁸

In explaining this passage, the Mother says:

Quite naturally we ask ourselves what this secret is, toward which pain leads us. For a superficial and imperfect understanding, one could believe that it is pain which the soul is seeking. Nothing of the kind. The very nature of the soul is divine Delight, constant, unvarying, unconditioned, ecstatic; but it is true that if one can face suffering with courage, endurance, an unshakable faith in the divine Grace, if one can, instead of shunning suffering when it comes, enter into it with this will, this aspiration to go through it and find the luminous truth, the unvarying delight which is at the core of all things, the door of pain is often more direct, more immediate than that of satisfaction or contentment.

I am not speaking of pleasure because pleasure turns its back constantly and almost completely on this profound divine Delight.

Pleasure is a deceptive and perverse disguise which turns us away from

our goal and we certainly should not seek it if we are eager to find the truth. Pleasure vaporises us; it deceives us, leads us astray.¹⁹

What a diametrically opposite view! Normally we seek pleasure and happiness, but it is an obstacle to our divine goal. “Pleasure vaporises us,”—what a wonderful phrase! How does it happen? Let’s imagine ourselves in a situation of pleasure. What happens during that time? We lose our individuality, as you may have noticed. Whatever the activity may be, it takes away your individuality. You forget yourself so much that you are ‘vaporised’. You are collective feelings, emotions, vibrations of pleasure; the individual is lost. Psychological pleasure is the weakest moment when the anti-divine forces enter us. It doesn’t only happen when there is gloom, though that is indeed a difficult thing which attracts and calls down the dark forces. Pleasure, however, causes you to lose yourself, creating a kind of vacancy, a vacuum. That is why pleasure is much more dangerous than moments of pain and suffering where you are under a dark cloud, no doubt, but the ‘you’ remains, whereas in a time of pleasure the ‘you’ vanishes. So the Mother says:

Pain brings us back to a deeper truth by obliging us to concentrate in order to be able to bear it, be able to face this thing that crushes us. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true strength again, when one is strong. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true faith again, the faith in something which is above and beyond all pain.²⁰

This is the explanation that Sri Aurobindo has given us; Nature has given us pain and suffering to serve a specific end. The Mother explains it in reference to yoga. Please remember that we are talking for those who have taken to yoga. In ordinary life also it will help, but there one may not be conscious, may not be self-aware of these happenings. In the path of yoga, however, if one wants to go towards the Divine, pain is a better protection. She continues:

When one enjoys oneself and forgets, when one takes things as they come, tries to avoid being serious and looking life in the face, in a word when one seeks to forget, to forget that there is a problem to solve, that there is something to find, that we have a reason for existing and living, that we are not here just to pass our time and go away without having learnt or done anything, then one really wastes one’s time, one misses the

opportunity that has been given to us, this—I cannot say unique, but marvelous opportunity for an existence which is the field of progress, which is the moment in eternity when you can discover the secret of life; for this physical, material existence is a wonderful opportunity, a possibility given to you to find the purpose of life, to make you advance one step towards this deeper truth, to make you discover this secret which puts you into contact with the eternal rapture of the divine life.²¹

But immediately, the Mother adds a caution. She says:

I have already told you many a time that to seek suffering and pain is a morbid attitude which must be avoided, but to run away from them through forgetfulness, through a superficial, frivolous movement, through diversion, is cowardice.²²

So to run away from sorrow through drinking, drugs, or any other vital activity is an act of cowardice. The Mother continues:

When pain comes, it comes to teach us something. The quicker we learn it, the more the need for pain diminishes, and when we know the secret, it will no longer be possible to suffer for that secret reveals to us the reason, the cause, the origin of suffering, and the way to pass beyond it.²³

And what is that secret?

The secret is to emerge from the ego, get out of its prison, unite ourselves with the Divine, merge into Him, not to allow anything to separate us from Him. Then, once one has discovered this secret and realises it in one's being, pain loses its justification and suffering disappears.²⁴

Remember these words: “pain loses its justification.” Sri Aurobindo tells us that pain has a valid existence, a *raison d'être*, but once that end is achieved it finds no reason to stay on. At least for you, it will disappear. By disappear I mean ‘withdraw’, because it has led you to the end for which it was created, and that end was to turn you towards the Divine. The moment we turn towards the Divine is the beginning of the disappearance of the ego.

To do this there are many exercises on the mental and emotional levels, but the one that is the safest and the most beneficial is to go towards the psychic. Why is it the best method? Because with the psychic what happens is that we are trying to be constantly aware of and thinking of the Divine, whereas in other exercises you are trying to be aware of one part of your being, either the mind, the heart, the body, etc. So why do we waste our time on different

healing systems and methods if the best way to heal ourselves is by focusing on the psychic? So with the psychic path we have a double advantage because it is a path that both takes you away from your ego and also puts you in contact with the Divine. One need not do specific methods, although we have been given lots of them. What has to be insisted upon is to go towards the psychic. As we do so, ego diminishes and pain and suffering diminish. This wonderful journey towards the psychic has multiple advantages over our day to day existence.

I am not saying that you should become an ascetic, that you meditate and get into the psychic and then live there. No, it is at the same time getting away from that problem which most bothers us, pain and suffering on different levels. If you start on this path you will see that these things automatically fall off. The Mother tells us,

It is an all powerful remedy, not only in the deeper parts of the being, in the soul, in the spiritual consciousness, but also in life and in the body. There is no illness, no disorder which can resist the discovery of this secret and the putting of it into practise, not only in the higher parts of the being but in the cells of the body.²⁵

What more do you want? Why do we go here and there from one system to another when the solution is right here? Can you believe in this method? I don't see why not. When you go to an allopathic doctor or a homeopath, what is the main thing that helps? It is your faith that this doctor is going to cure you. As the Mother tells us, it is ultimately faith that cures. There are dozens of allopathic doctors in town and you have to choose one. Sometimes you go for the big names, the best cardiologist, the best this or that. Even the best, however, can commit blunders, so you are basically going on faith. It is faith in a doctor that ultimately works, so I do not see why we cannot have faith in this spiritual system which is an integral system. That doesn't mean that everyone can jump into it overnight, even though there are people who have done that.

Faith is a word which by its definition includes the whole being. If it is only mental you call it a belief. If it is only emotional you call it bhakti. Faith isn't something that comes in a day; it has to grow. You start with a mental belief but if you have this aspiration you will see that the body itself will respond

to this aspiration and will seek its own energy from within. As the Mother says:

If one knows how to teach the cells the splendour that lies within them, if one knows how to make them understand the reality which makes them exist, gives them being, then they too enter the total harmony, and the physical disorder which causes the illness vanishes as do all other disorders of the being.

But for that one must be neither cowardly nor fearful. When the physical disorder comes, one must not be afraid; one must not run away from it, must face it with courage, calmness, confidence, with the certitude that illness is a falsehood and that if one turns entirely, in full confidence, with a complete quietude to the divine Grace, It will settle in these cells as It is established in the depths of the being, and the cells themselves will share in the eternal Truth and Delight.²⁶

Sri Aurobindo has also written in *Savitri* about the Divine's transmutation of pain:

There in the slumber of the cosmic Will
He saw the secret key of Nature's change.
A light was with him, an invisible hand
Was laid upon the error and the pain
Till it became a quivering ecstasy,
The shock of sweetness of an arm's embrace.²⁷
A Heart was felt in the spaces wide and bare,
A burning Love from white spiritual founts
Annulled the sorrow of the ignorant depths;
Suffering was lost in her immortal smile.
A Life from beyond grew conqueror here of Death;
To err no more was natural to mind;
Wrong could not come where all was light and love.²⁸

I will not go further into this as it will take us away from the subject at hand. Basically though, what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are telling us is that pain should be taken in the right manner, that is, with courage and as a divine grace. Remember, you should not take pain as a punishment. If there is any suffering, you should take it in the sense that the Divine has brought it to you for some purpose.

We now proceed to Sri Aurobindo's next argument:

The world is from the point of view of the individual a play and complex shock of multitudinous forces. In the midst of this complex play the individual stands as a limited constructed being with a limited amount of force exposed to numberless shocks which may wound, maim, break up or disintegrate the construction which he calls himself. Pain is in the nature of a nervous and physical recoil from a dangerous or harmful contact; it is a part of what the Upanishad calls *jugupsa*, the shrinking of the limited being from that which is not himself and not sympathetic or in harmony with himself...²⁹

The individual himself is a self-limitation of the supreme oneness, of the supreme consciousness; it is a purposeful self-limitation of the capacities of the Supreme. That is what is important. We are so limited, so narrow, so small, so incapacitated that we feel insecure; a sense of insecurity comes into us because we are so very weak. Being weak, we get apprehensive. We see in life that when a cowardly person confronts somebody with a strong physique, immediately he shivers; there is a recoil because he feels threatened that this mighty man may harm him. This sense of insecurity is there in all individuals—it does not matter if we have a strong body or a weak body—because being an individual means we are limited. Therefore the Upanishads tell us there is this *jugupsa*, this recoil. This recoil is basically what we call fear. Fear of the what? Fear of the other. I am not afraid of myself; I am afraid of the other.

If you are afraid of the other, what does that mean? It means you have a consciousness of division. The Mother would tell us that this sense of division between the other and me is the basic essence of our ignorance, our falsehood. Others are outside me and I am different, so there is a clash. If there are seventy people here then it is as if there are seventy forces attacking me because they are all outside of me. That is the basic underlying social thought of the individual.

Sri Aurobindo says that the feeling that the other is harmful is on the atomic level itself; the atoms, they clash with each other. But the sense of the other grows very sensitive on the level of life in the plants and the animals. And once we reach the level of the mind with man this sense of otherness is complete. The animal may feel the other as other but it may not be complete.

In human beings, however, this sense becomes so acute that this recoil, this sense of fear comes in and all our problems begin. At the mental level we have become a strong nodus of ego-sense, a closed ego being. The other is always a threat. This is the kind of psychological attitude we have and it is that which is causing illnesses and problems.

So what is the solution? It is the opposite viewpoint. Sri Aurobindo says:

...when Mind in man becomes capable of being free, unegoistic, in harmony with all other beings and with the play of the universal forces, the use and office of suffering diminishes, its *raison d'être* must finally cease to be and it can only continue as an atavism of Nature, a habit that has survived its use, a persistence of the lower in the as yet imperfect organisation of the higher. Its eventual elimination must be an essential point in the destined conquest of the soul over subjection to Matter and egoistic limitation in Mind.³⁰

This is related to what we quoted the Mother as saying about the elimination of pain and disorder by bringing into the cells the higher consciousness. When we go beyond this sense of ego we will find that there is no suffering. Why? Because we will have the experience of the universal consciousness. What is the experience of the universal consciousness? It is that others are all in me and I am in all others. We are one; there is no other. The moment we lose the sense of the other, the sense of fear, recoil, *jugupsa* decreases. The change of consciousness from the limited ego-centric consciousness to universalisation is a beautiful solution to pain and suffering.

The best way to facilitate this is to follow the Mother's advice and go towards the psychic, because then the consciousness automatically becomes expansive. As a result, suffering itself—mental, vital, physical—decreases. And if we are sufficiently expanded to stay in the universal consciousness, then pain will disappear completely because the only purpose of pain was to enlarge us by making us feel a bit uncomfortable, a bit suffocated. The day we awaken to this sense of suffocation in us is the day we start enlarging.

The solution to pain and suffering is egolessness, to move towards the psychic; they are one and the same movement. The more we are conscious of moving towards the inner, the more we get away from the ego. The consciousness enlarges and suffering decreases.

Now you understand why a lot of the saints and the yogis suffer less. If somebody is a false yogi, if he has not really enlarged his consciousness, if he has not really found his atman and just wears robes pretending that he is a yogi, you can find out from his own nature of suffering and pain. That itself shows that he is not universal in his mind, that he has not contacted the psychic being. There are ways to find out a true guru, a real spiritual guru. But at the same time, you should not make anything in spirituality an absolute law, there are exceptions. Sri Ramakrishna had cancer in the throat. How can one explain how such a great Avatar of a new consciousness came to have cancer in the throat? You might be tempted to say he was an ordinary man, but the truth of the matter is that a being like Sri Ramakrishna, who has universalised himself, takes on the sufferings and pain of others in order to salvage humanity. Christ went on the cross not for his own salvation but for others; he took on the pain, the sufferings, the guilt of humanity. So did Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. On their level, pain and suffering have a different dimension. It is undergone in order to purge humanity, whereas on our level we suffer because we have closed ourselves to the higher consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo has said so eloquently in *Savitri*,

The Great who came to save this suffering world
And rescue out of Time's shadow and the Law,
Must pass beneath the yoke of grief and pain;
They are caught by the Wheel that they had hoped to break,
On their shoulders they must bear man's load of fate.
Heaven's riches they bring, their sufferings count the price
Or they pay the gift of knowledge with their lives.
The Son of God born as the Son of man
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead's debt,
The debt the Eternal owes to the fallen kind
His will has bound to death and struggling life
That yearns in vain for rest and endless peace.
Now is the debt paid, wiped off the original score.
The Eternal suffers in a human form,
He has signed salvation's testament with his blood:
He has opened the doors of his undying peace.

The Deity compensates the creature's claim,
The Creator bears the law of pain and death;
A retribution smites the incarnate God.³¹

We have seen that the more universal we are in our consciousness, the more we get away from pain and suffering. Pain and suffering are due to our incapacity to receive the divine Delight. It's like touching a 1000 watt wire: you get a terrible shock. We are not capable of touching a wire with 1000 watts. But if we increase our capacity to be able to touch that wire, then nothing will happen to us. So basically it is the shock of our incapacity.

Sri Aurobindo's statement was philosophical, but what happens psychologically? Sri Aurobindo tells us:

For the universal soul all things and all contacts of things carry in them an essence of delight best described by the Sanskrit aesthetic term, *rasa*, which means at once sap or essence of a thing and its taste. It is because we do not seek the essence of the thing in its contact with us, but look only to the manner in which it affects our desires and fears, our cravings and shrinkings that grief and pain, imperfect and transient pleasure or indifference, that is to say, blank inability to seize the essence, are the forms taken by the Rasa.³²

So psychologically what happens is that when we open to the universal consciousness we gain the capacity to capture, to taste, to contact the Rasa, the sap of a thing. We could say that it is the basic delight of existence that is there in everything—in the tree, in the plant, in the atom, in the blade of grass, in man, everywhere. But why is it that only the universal consciousness can contact it? Let's illustrate this with an example. The fans above our heads are quite pleasant; we can bear and enjoy them. But imagine having the full blast of a huge fan on your face. It would be suffocating not because the fan is bad but because we are not capable of bearing it. As a simpler example, when we are healthy the full speed of the fan is okay, but when we have a fever it will cause suffering. So the more our incapacity increases, the more our capacity for delight decreases.

If we become universalised in consciousness, then we are able to contact the inner delight, the inner Rasa, the inner meaning of everything. And when we have this inner vision then we enjoy all of life. We no longer see it from the angle of our desires, our fears, our cravings and our shrinkings.

Let's look at an example to clarify this idea. Let's say that somebody in our household has died. We feel tremendous sorrow because that person was 'ours' so to speak. But if somebody died in the house next door, would the pain and suffering be as intense? At most we would go to the neighbour's house and pay our respects. Or if we see a headline in the newspaper about how someone was crushed under a lorry in some remote place, we may not even read the article. It is because of the 'I', the ego that the same event takes on a different intensity. But when we universalise we begin to lose the sense of 'I' as well as the desire, the craving, the personalised view of what is important. Even in our sorrow and suffering there is always the 'I'. I don't know if it happens in all countries but here I have often seen that when the husband dies the woman cries, saying, "You have gone away. It's nice for you but what will happen to me?" The suffering comes but not simply because the husband is dead but because there is no one to fend for the family. How will she live? How will the children live? I don't mean to tease anybody or the Indian mentality; I am just trying to give a realistic image.

Sri Aurobindo has put it quite wonderfully how we look at everything from the point of view of our cravings and shrinkings. And he further tells us that:

If we could be entirely disinterested in mind and heart and impose that detachment on the nervous being, the progressive elimination of these imperfect and perverse forms of Rasa would be possible and the true essential taste of the inalienable delight of existence in all its variations would be within our reach.³³

I don't know how many tragic movies there are nowadays. In bygone days there were many tragic stories and people saw them many times. Surely many of you have seen King Lear or Macbeth or Hamlet. We all enjoy these tragedies with the hero and the heroine; we too wept with them, and yet we said it was a good movie. Let's try to analyse this. Perhaps we have enjoyed the tragedy because it didn't happen to us. There is, of course, a kind of identification with the heroine and the hero, but it is still a distant thing on the screen while we are sitting there quite safe in the theatre. Nothing will happen to our mind or our body. So there is an enjoyment of the tragedy, but a kind of cathartic enjoyment, an extension of the 'I' but not the real 'I'.

Sri Aurobindo tells us:

We attain to something of this capacity for variable but universal delight in the aesthetic reception of things as represented by Art and Poetry, so that we enjoy there the Rasa or taste of the sorrowful, the terrible, even the horrible or repellent; and the reason is because we are detached, disinterested, not thinking of ourselves or of self-defence (*jugupsa*) but only of the thing and its essence.³⁴

There are eight Rasas in Indian aesthetics which we enjoy, including the sorrowful, the terrible, and the horrible. They are enjoyable because the 'I' is removed. Sri Aurobindo concludes by saying that:

Certainly, this aesthetic reception of contacts is not a precise image or reflection of the pure delight which is supramental and supra-aesthetic...³⁵

He would tell us that the full liberation can come to us only by a similar liberation in all our parts. The example of the enjoyment of tragedies shows us that if we truly want, if we really take up yoga in its intensity and seriousness, we can find delight in everything. The mind should not say it is impossible. How do you enjoy sorrow? It is a question of the 'I' being removed.

Now we come to the next argument. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

Since the nature of suffering is a failure of the conscious-force in us to meet the shocks of existence and a consequent shrinking and contraction and its root is an inequality of that receptive and possessing force due to our self-limitation by egoism consequent on the ignorance of our true Self, of Sachchidananda, the elimination of suffering must first proceed by the substitution of *titiksa*, the facing, enduring and conquest of all shocks of existence for *jugupsa*, the shrinking and contraction...³⁶

We have come to the pragmatic steps we must take to go beyond pain. Philosophically, we saw that we must go away from ego; we see here that we must practise this egolessness through endurance and perseverance. This is a great training given in the army. There you learn to endure pain, and that is a very good training because we learn to resist and not to give in to the pain. Right from the beginning we must tell our children not to fear small falls. We put too much fear into children: the child falls on the road and immediately the father says, "Come, I will take you to the hospital. You need an anti-tetanus shot." So the child has now got fear in him, fear that he will die of tetanus. Who is responsible for this fear? It is the parent.

It is not a question of being civilised. We think we are more civilised because we give our children antibiotics and anti-tetanus shots along with all the other medicine we dump in their mouths. The Mother once spoke about how poor people even drink dirty water and yet nothing happens to them. Whereas foreigners who come to India have to drink bottled water or they will get diarrhea. Every tourist book says that when you go to India you should drink only bottled water, and even we Indians have become vulnerable to this. I had such a great laugh recently at one of my relatives who lived here his entire life before going to the USA for three years. Now when he comes to India he drinks only bottled water. He has been brainwashed. What happens is that our endurance and self-confidence are lost, but if we can have faith and trust then nothing will happen.

My wife and I tour in India a lot, and when a hotel keeper brings us a glass of water we take the name of the Mother and pray that nothing wrong happens to us; then we drink the water. We have applied our faith that nothing will go wrong once we offer it to the Mother. I don't need a mantra. The only mantra I have is the Mother's name. I don't like to complicate things at all.

So basically it is a question of *titiksa*, of endurance, of self-confidence, of facing and conquering the shocks of existence. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

by this endurance and conquest we proceed to an equality which may be either an equal indifference to all contacts or an equal gladness in all contacts; and this equality again must find a firm foundation in the substitution of the Sachchidananda consciousness which is all-Bliss for the ego-consciousness which enjoys and suffers.³⁷

So what is the result of this endurance? We grow in equality. Now it could be an equality of indifference, but that is wrong. Rather there should be an equality of gladness. This is where the Gita comes in and says that we should accept everything gladly. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

The Sachchidananda consciousness may be transcendent of the universe and aloof from it, and to this state of distant Bliss the path is equal indifference; it is the path of the ascetic. Or the Sachchidananda consciousness may be at once transcendent and universal; and to this state of present and all-embracing Bliss the path is surrender and loss

of the ego in the universal and possession of an all-pervading equal delight; it is the path of the ancient Vedic sages.³⁸

If we take suffering with an attitude of confidence and surrender to the Mother then that will protect us. We don't understand how much grace there is. We go out in terrible traffic everyday and still we come home alive. It is only if we escape from an accident that we say the Mother was with us. But the divine grace is there all along. We are constantly bathed in the divine grace. The whole thing begins with this kind of attitude; it is what will get us away from the ego into a blissful situation, a glad situation which will bring us much closer to the essential divine delight. Here again I have a wonderful passage from the Mother addressing delight. She says:

There comes a time when one begins to be almost ready, when one can feel in everything, every object, in every movement, in every vibration, in all things around—not only people and conscious beings, but things, objects; not only trees and plants and living things, but simply any object one uses, the things around one—this delight, this delight of being, of being just as one is, simply being. And one sees that all this vibrates like that. One touches a thing and feels this delight. But naturally, I say, one must have followed the discipline I spoke about at the beginning; otherwise, so long as one has a desire, a preference, an attachment or affinities and repulsions and all that, one cannot—one cannot.

And so long as one finds pleasures—pleasures, well, yes, vital or physical pleasure in a thing—one cannot feel this delight. For this delight is everywhere. This delight is something very subtle. One moves in the midst of things and it is as though they were all singing to you their delight. There comes a time when it becomes very familiar in the life around you. Of course, I must admit that it is a little more difficult to feel it in human beings, because there are all their mental and vital formations which come into the field of perception and disturb it. There is too much of this kind of egoistic asperity which gets mixed with things, so it is more difficult to contact the Delight there. But even in animals one feels it; it is already a little more difficult than in plants. But in plants, in flowers, it is so wonderful! They speak all their joy, they express it. And as I said, in all familiar objects, the things around you, which you use, there is a state of consciousness in which each one is happy to be, just as it is. So at that

moment one knows one has touched true Delight. And it is not conditioned, I mean it does not depend upon...it depends on nothing. It does not depend on outer circumstances, does not depend on a more or less favorable state, it does not depend on anything: it is a communion with the *raison d'être* of the universe.

And when this comes it fills all the cells of the body. It is not even a thing which is thought out—one does not reason, does not analyse, it is not that: it is a state in which one lives. And when the body shares in it, it is so fresh—so fresh, so spontaneous, so...it no longer turns back upon itself, there is no longer any sense of self-observation, of self-analysis or of analysing things. All that is like a canticle of joyous vibrations, but very, very quiet, without violence, without passion, nothing of all that. It is very subtle and very intense at the same time, and when it comes, it seems that the whole universe is a marvelous harmony. Even what is to the ordinary human consciousness ugly, unpleasant, appears marvelous...

This demands a little work.

And this discipline I spoke about, which one must undergo, if it is practised with the aim of finding Delight, the result is delayed, for an egoistic element is introduced into it, it is done with an aim and is no longer an offering, it is a demand, and then... It comes, it will come, even if it takes much longer—when one asks nothing, expects nothing, hopes for nothing, when it is simply that, it is self-giving and aspiration, and the spontaneous need without any bargaining—the need to be divine, that's all.³⁹

Here we see the Mother reiterating that the essential divine Delight is in all things, especially the flowers and the plants, but as long as one has got ego one cannot taste that Delight. In fact, there are moments of our lives, especially when we are in Nature—I have seen this when we go to the Himalayas or to some beautiful forest in the mountains—that this Delight is so intense that it pulls us out of our ego. We cannot help ourselves because there is such wonder and beauty around us. There is a sign of egolessness: at that moment when you come out, when you break out, at that time you feel a tremendous Delight that is pervasive, silent and intense. It doesn't have to be in words. There is a distinct difference between the experience of delight and the experience of joy and pleasure. Joy and pleasure want to be expressed in a vociferous manner either through physical gestures or vital

gestures or through some kind of shouting or cry. But the higher we go in delight the more silent is the outer expression. It is like the deep sea. The deep sea doesn't have violent waves; it is only the surface of the sea that has waves. The deepest part of the sea is silent and quiet; Delight is of the same nature. It penetrates your mind, your body and your emotions so deeply that they become immobile in delight. Yes, that is it. They become immobile with delight. When there is a great experience of Ananda or Delight one feels the stillness that is there at the center of the universe. It is that stillness which sometimes you find in music; when you hear the Mother's music you often feel that kind of stillness.

This is the divine Delight which can be experienced when one moves away from the ego. If you truly want to be free from the basic problem of existence, that is, pain, suffering and evil, there is no other way. Sri Aurobindo tells us in a thousand different ways, "O aspirants, take the sunlit path of surrendering to the Divine." It ultimately is this surrender to the Divine which can lead us out of pain and suffering. It is the Divine which can take us to the Delight because ultimately it is the Divine who chooses to reveal himself to us. We only choose the first moment of turning, as human beings we have to consciously choose to turn, to say, "I have to take to this path." That is the resolution we have to take. If you can keep, despite all your waverings and meanderings, to that central faithfulness, then things will happen.

In the conclusion of the chapter, Sri Aurobindo returns to the main question, why the Divine should consent to pain and suffering in the world. He says,

If it then be asked why the One Existence should take delight in such a movement, the answer lies in the fact that all possibilities are inherent in Its infinity and that the delight of existence—in its mutable becoming, not in its immutable being,—lies precisely in the variable realisation of its possibilities. And the possibility worked out here in the universe of which we are a part, begins from the concealment of Sachchidananda in that which seems to be its own opposite and its self-finding even amid the terms of that opposite. Infinite being loses itself in the appearance of non-being and emerges in the appearance of a finite Soul; infinite consciousness loses itself in the appearance of a vast indeterminate

inconscience and emerges in the appearance of a superficial limited consciousness; infinite self-sustaining Force loses itself in the appearance of a chaos of atoms and emerges in the appearance of the insecure balance of a world; infinite Delight loses itself in the appearance of an insensible Matter and emerges in the appearance of a discordant rhythm of varied pain, pleasure and neutral feeling, love, hatred and indifference; infinite unity loses itself in the appearance of a chaos of multiplicity and emerges in a discord of forces and beings which seek to recover unity by possessing, dissolving and devouring each other. In this creation the real Sachchidananda has to emerge. Man, the individual, has to become and to live as a universal being; his limited mental consciousness has to widen to the superconscient unity in which each embraces all; his narrow heart has to learn the infinite embrace and replace its lusts and discords by universal love and his restricted vital being to become equal to the whole shock of the universe upon it and capable of universal delight; his very physical being has to know itself as no separate entity but as one with and sustaining in itself the whole flow of the indivisible Force that is all things; his whole nature has to reproduce in the individual the unity, the harmony, the oneness-in-all of the supreme Existence-Consciousness-Bliss.⁴⁰

Previously we have seen several other justifications for the Divine's sanction to the existence of pain and suffering. We have seen that the world in which pain and suffering are so much a part is not external to the Divine; it is not an imposition on someone or something other than the Divine himself. It is he himself who has accepted to undergo this pain and suffering. We have also seen that we often exaggerate the extent of pain because it is something exceptional or foreign to our ordinary state of happiness or contentment, and so we tend to focus on it. We have also seen that it is something that is confined primarily to the surface of our being, in our depths we do not experience this pain and suffering. If we suspend the normal activity of our outer mind which looks at the pain, we can avoid experiencing it, or even experience delight in its place. We have also seen that pain and suffering have a role to play, they are the goads which motivate us to grow and evolve, and not simply rest content in ignorance and incapacity. In this passage, Sri Aurobindo gives a more philosophical answer.

He says that the Divine contains all possibilities within itself. It is not limited to a state of essential oneness and Delight. One of these possibilities which is being expressed in our world is to gradually evolve its divine attributes out of their apparent opposites—nonbeing, inconscience and insensibility. Out of this nether matrix it is gradually revealing its truth of Sachchidananda. In the intermediate stages of this evolution in which we are situated, we experience this divided egoistic life, this ignorance, and this mixture of pleasure, pain and indifference. Our deliverance from pain, suffering and evil is in our further evolution, and for that we must let go of our egoism, go into the depths of our being, into the psychic, and surrender ourselves to the Divine, our true and greater Self.

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Lecture Notes

I. The World vis-à-vis Sachchidananda

- a. Sat: Definition of Maya; World is not Maya, is not Unreal; Form is eternal
- b. Chit: A movement of Force obeying a Will—Prakriti
- c. Ananda: Lila; the basis of all expression of Sachchidananda

II. Reasons for Pain / Pleasure / Indifference

- a. Subjection to these is due to the mind's habit, but we need not respond in the same manner; a self-conquest is required
- b. Mind has implanted fixed concepts on the nervous being: Good = Joy; Bad = suffering. The need of this fixing is to have a constancy of reaction
- c. Mental being can be free, it should not be dominated by the nervous being
- d. Pain on the level of physical being is more central; but the same contact can bring different experiences depending on our level of conscious, e.g., excitement/anger/hypnosis

III. Utility of Pain

- a. Nature's device to protect the individual in its formation through process of *jugupsa* = a recoil from the "other"
- b. It comes in only with life—grows with mind we look only to the manner in which things affect us with desire/fears/cravings
- c. Solution: detachment/Universal Soul/taste the Rasa; e.g., aesthetic experience in which the ego is not involved

IV. How to overcome Pain?

- a. *Titiksa* = Endurance
- b. Equality of Indifference (Ascetic)
- c. Equality of Gladness (Vedic surrender)

V. Why of Pain? The conversion that takes place is:

- a. Sat > Soul

- b. Chit > Limited Consciousness
- c. Tapas > Balanced World
- d. Delight > Pain, Pleasure, Indifference
- e. Unity > Discord of Forces
- f. Universal > Individual
- g. Supreme Unity > Mind
- h. Universal Love > Heart
- i. Equality > Vital
- j. One with Individual Force > Physical
- k. Unity > Nature
- l. Delight is the same in all