

# **Deliberations on**

## ***The Life Divine***

(Chapterwise Summary Talks)

Volume One

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

**Volume One**  
**Book One: Chapters I-VI**

**V. Ananda Reddy**



**Sri Aurobindo Centre for Advanced Research**  
**Puducherry, India**



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*Offered to  
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother  
and their children of tomorrow ...*



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

It was long back, almost four decades back, when as a student at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, I had been to the Mother on 10-2-1968 with the book of *The Life Divine* requesting her to sign on the magnum opus. She graciously gave her blessings on it and I felt that that was the day when She had also given me some capacity to go a little deeper into the cosmic and oceanic thought of *The Life Divine*.

I studied it then, meticulously, from 1968 to 1969, as part of my Higher Course studies. I was thrilled by its vision; I was enthralled by its heights and depths. The day I had completed my first reading of the book—that was on 21-9-1969—I wrote to the Mother about my 'great achievement'; and I remember, I had telegraphed the news to my father, V. Madhusudan Reddy at Hyderabad.

Such was the great joy I had experienced on completing my first reading of what I considered to be the profoundest book in the world! And caught by the wonder that is *The Life Divine* I went through the book many a time taking up the chapters at a random order.

Almost three decades later, in 1996, I had an opportunity to take classes on *The Life Divine* with a few devotees of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The class-strength increased steadily and it is continuing till date.

And for the benefit of those who do not live at Pondicherry but come to the Ashram mostly at the Darshan times I started at SACAR summary classes in 2000. Later, as many requests to publish the explanations came to us from different quarters, I took up this effort of publishing this book. I have decided to publish these talks in different convenient volumes.

It is these summary-class talks that were recorded (in the

early stages, the recordings were poor adding to the problem of transcriptions) and then transcribed and now, after long many ears of waiting and debating, this book 'Deliberations on *The Life Divine*, Volume One' has seen the light of day. It has gone undergone many stages of work—from the first stage of the transcription of my summary talks on *The Life Divine* given at SACAR during the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's birthday-weeks till the last stage of the corrections of the copyeditor—and at each stage it has undergone some changes and some definite improvements.

The focus of all the editorial work has been to maintain the tenor of the talks and not to turn it into a well-written book. The spoken word is direct, simple and it reaches as much the mind and the heart of the listener. And I tried to maintain the same flow of the language and thought while adding or deleting some phrases and sentences wherever necessary for the sake of greater clarity and better flow.

I have also included brief 'Lecture Notes' at the end of each chapter in order to help the reader to recapitulate the main arguments of the chapter. I hope it is useful to the readers.

In order to facilitate the reader, I have provided in my 'References,' given at the end of each chapter, the paragraph numbers pertaining to the respective chapter of *The Life Divine*.

Hence to make it easier for the reader to follow the para-numbers, it may be useful for the reader to number the paragraphs of each chapter in her/his own book before starting to read it. It is to be noted that the expansions of abbreviations 'SABCL' and 'CWM' used in the 'References,' at the end of each chapter, are 'Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library' and 'Collected Works of the Mother,' respectively.

I have selected to bring out only the first six chapters of *The Life Divine* in this Volume One, because I felt that the

chapters of Book One of *The Life Divine* fall into a flexible but natural thematic divisions. The theme covered here is: 'Man and the Universe'. Similarly, Volume Two would comprise of chapters VII–XII which emphasise on the 'Vedantic Knowledge of the Absolute'. Subsequent volumes would cover chapters XIII–XVIII, XIX–XXIII and XXIV–XXVIII of Book One. Transcriptions of all these chapters are ready and the editing work is in progress on Volume Two of this series of 'Deliberations on The Life Divine'. I plan to bring out the volumes of this series in short spans of time and not make the readers wait indefinitely!

I just hope and wish that this volume will be of help to those who would like to get some first understanding of this great book, *The Life Divine*. Even if a few are benefited by it and are inspired to read the original I shall consider it worth the publication.

In any case, it is my humble offering to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and I am sure they have consented to take this offering from their child. That alone matters to me; the rest is a consequence in the flow of time ...

30.10.2006

V. Ananda Reddy

Pondicherry

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In my effort to bring out this first book of mine I must acknowledge with deep gratitude the help rendered by many well-wishers, professionals and techno-experts.

I am grateful to Dr. Palani who did the most difficult job of the first transcription of the recordings of my talks on The Life Divine chapters. Then Jamshed Mavalwalla took over with great enthusiasm the editing of the transcriptions and prepared the first draft of the book. Then the draft passed through the hands of Dr. Girija Shettar, S. Sankaran, Deepshikha and Douglas McElheny, each of whom helped in perfecting the draft. G. Shantha completed the work by bringing in the final touches of a skilled copyeditor. My heartfelt gratitude to their sincere involvement in the work. Their labour will be amply rewarded when the book reaches out to the interested readers. I am also indeed thankful to the technical support given by Satya and to M. Gobi Shankar and Vladimir Nemchin for designing the book cover.

All this work of my colleagues could not have seen the light of day had not my well-wisher and friend, Isa Wagner from Berlin, offered the necessary funds to publish my very first book 'Deliberations on *The Life Divine*, Volume One'. I owe a lot to her unflinching help and goodwill for me.

I also express my deep gratitude to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust for permitting to quote from the works of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

My sastanga pranams at the feet of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for accepting the offering of this book at their feet.

## FOREWORD

Sri Aurobindo's main philosophical work *The Life Divine* is a difficult work not only to understand but also to go through without making great effort. The difficulty consists in not only the originality of the thought expressed in the book but also in the style of writing of its author. At the same time it must be admitted that if the book is read with the right kind of attention, it not only becomes capable of being understood but also of being enjoyed. What is necessary for developing the right kind of attention is not only effort of the mental reason but also a wider and deeper psychological discipline. The reader must push away from his mind all pre-conceptions and be ready to look at Sri Aurobindo's original ideas on subjects as old as the hills with a pair of eyes endowed with the power of fresh intellectual comprehension.

One of the difficulties the modern readers, both Western and Indian, committed to the idea that mental reason is the arbiter of all knowledge, will come up against in Sri Aurobindo's considered judgement that experience is the true means of right knowledge of anything and everything. Many a time he gives strong arguments for a thesis and then says that truly speaking it is experience which can decide the issue. Sri Aurobindo is first ayogi and then a philosopher. But he does not mean by experience only yogic and mystical and spiritual experience. The senses, the intellect, ethical sensibility and aesthetic enjoyment, all may and do contribute to the attainment to the integral knowledge of the reality.

Dr. Ananda Reddy has dealt with what I have briefly stated above more elaborately in his informative introduction. The reader should pay especial attention to what he says about how to read Sri Aurobindo's writings. He quotes the Mother and other authorities in this connection. The suggestions are of great importance and will be of great help to a reader who

is beginning to read *The Life Divine*. Dr. Reddy summarises the contents of the first six chapters of the book under study and also gives the arguments offered in their support. These will assist the reader to begin to understand the chief topics of Sri Aurobindo's doctrines in these six chapters and also the steps of his arguments. Dr. Reddy has rendered a signal service to the prospective reader of *The Life Divine* and also of Sri Aurobindo's other writings.

It is to be hoped that this book will be well received and will stimulate people to read Sri Aurobindo's writings in the original.

Arabinda Basu

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## INVOCATION

Let me begin with a prayer given by the Mother for studying the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

Sri Aurobindo, Mother,

Grant us your help in our endeavour to understand your teaching.<sup>1</sup>

In another message, the Mother says:

To understand his [Sri Aurobindo's] teaching better and try to put it into practice, is certainly the best way of showing our gratitude to him for all the light, knowledge and force which he has so generously brought to the earth.<sup>2</sup>

With this invocation to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, we shall take up the study of *The Life Divine*. We shall study the main arguments in brief in each chapter, and we shall endeavour to bring out their logical structure, so that at the end of the chapter, we will have more or less an idea of the contents as well as the arguments contained within. Let us be very clear that we shall in no way try to interpret it, for as we go deeper, we will understand that it is not possible to do so. Let us not have any such false expectations during the upcoming series of lectures on *The Life Divine*.

My endeavour is to be very faithful to Sri Aurobindo's own ideas, his own arguments. I will attempt with my limited understanding to present the arguments in an orderly and simple manner. Success at a mere intellectual level is not our aim. We are embarking on this programme, because it is an inner need for all of us to imbibe the integral truth of Sri Aurobindo's thought, and if it can benefit even a few individuals the purpose of this study of *The Life Divine* will have been fulfilled.

*The Life Divine* was started in 1914 as a series of articles published in *The Arya*. Since the time of its publication

in book form in 1939, thousands of people have read it. Many have come into contact with this magnum opus of Sri Aurobindo, and there have been many reactions and responses to this work—from absolute rejection (mostly because of non-understanding) to absolute adoration. In addition, there have been a vast array of commentaries written on this book.

Now, I shall share a few excerpts from some of those commentaries on *The Life Divine* in order to learn more about the different viewpoints that have been taken in relation to this work. To start with, let me give you a comment made by my father, V. Madhusudan Reddy. In his book *Purushottama Yoga*, he writes that *The Life Divine* is:

... not only a major enunciation of the Truth of truths but a magnum action of the Superconscient Supremo ... [It] not only unveils and unfolds the mystery of the material universe but also fulfils the secret and sacred mission of creation itself.<sup>3</sup>

Long ago, my father's teacher, S.K. Maitra, who was a Professor in Philosophy at the Banaras Hindu University, had come to Pondicherry to pay his respects to Sri Aurobindo. While here he told this to A.B. Purani:

I wanted to know the Reality, the ultimate Truth. But I wanted to know it only by my intellect, by my mind... When *The Life Divine* was published in the book form in 1939 ... I read it at a stretch, I could not leave it ... Here is somebody who allows full freedom to my intellect, answers all my questions and builds up a picture of Reality which no other philosopher has ever done.<sup>4</sup>

Those of you who have read a little bit of S.K. Maitra will acknowledge his mastery in philosophy. So he concluded:

It is an intellectual architecture like an ivory tower, solid and beautiful, having the golden coping of the Supermind...<sup>5</sup>

Closer home, we have A.B. Purani himself who stated:

I have looked upon *The Life Divine* as the harbinger of a new age. It is the dawn of a new age, an age in which man will consciously go beyond the attained formula of his nature, an age in which man will establish in himself, by constant effort of individual and groups, a new faculty which is greater than Mind. It is like a vast architecture in which you walk from room to room and forget the room which you left and even may lose your way. It is like the labyrinth through which you are led to a solution of the labyrinth.<sup>6</sup>

I am sure that this has been the common experience with all of us while reading *The Life Divine*.

In 1947, in his commentary on *The Life Divine*, Anilbaran Roy quotes the words of a Professor of Islamic Studies—Kalifa A. Hakim of Osmania University, Hyderabad—who had this to say:

To say the least, it [*The Life Divine*] is a marvellous book; the Heart of Reality pulsates in every line, it is Realisation trying to express itself through the imperfect medium of language and logic. I have been a student of Mysticism, Indian and Islamic, Neo-Platonic, Christian and Occidental for about a quarter of a century ... One of the soul- satisfying aspects of Sri Aurobindo's book is that he expounds Mysticism which seeks not to mystify but to clarify. The latest achievements of Physics as well as Psychology are accepted as corroborations, even atheism is accepted as a passing phase in the evolution of the Spirit.. ..Even in the darkest movements of Matter God is implicit. The material, the vital, the mental, the supramental and the spiritual are all gradations of one Being which according to the Koran is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Appearance and the Reality.. These great truths are expounded in the immortal book of Sri Aurobindo. I

sincerely believe that all seekers of Truth and all lovers of universal religion will greatly benefit by it.<sup>7</sup>

In his biography of Sri Aurobindo, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar writes that *The Life Divine* is the Supramental Manifesto of the future:

It is the supreme union of spiritual experience and intellectual activity in *The Life Divine* that makes it a superb declaration for the future, a sublime announcement of the coming greater Dawn, and a unique ‘supramental’ manifesto of the now evolving Gnostic Age of supermen and supernature.<sup>8</sup>

Now, let us look at the comments made by one whom we all know very well—Amal Kiran. In a beautiful passage, he writes:

*The Life Divine* expresses nothing except his [Sri Aurobindo’s] experience, his realisation. Having attained in constant waking life and not merely in a sealed samadhi the reality which he terms Gnosis, he has but laid out in intellectual exposition what the gnostic consciousness is and what yogic possibilities it holds and what the results of its full descent into our earth-existence will be... Sri Aurobindo’s intellect is an instrument used by a spiritual realisation: not one sentence anywhere is inspired by the intellect alone.<sup>9</sup>

And of course, I would like to read to you what Sri Aurobindo himself said about *The Life Divine* in a conversation with Nirodbaran way back in 1940:

What I have tried to give in the book [*The Life Divine*] is a metaphysical foundation of Yoga and a new view of life. Any book of philosophy has to be metaphysical ... it is not the language but the thought-substance that may be difficult to follow. If I had written about the Congress in the same language, then you would have understood.<sup>10</sup>

To end these comments on *The Life Divine*, I have chosen

a long paragraph written by Sri Aurobindo in reference to the Isha Upanishad, which, I think, resonates with the spirit of *The Life Divine*. So whenever you hear the name 'Isha Upanishad' please think of *The Life Divine*:

... the Isha Upanishad is one of the most perfectly worked out, one of the most finely and compactly stated inspired arguments the world possesses,—an argument not in the sense of a train of disputatious reasoning, logical not in the fashion of an intellectual passage from syllogism to syllogism, but a statement of inspired thought each part of which has been perfectly seen by the revelatory faculty and perfectly stated by inspired expression in itself, in relation to the others and in its place in the whole. Not only every Sloka but every word in each Sloka has been perfectly chosen and perfectly placed. There is a consummate harmony in the rhythm of the thought as well as in the rhythm of the language and the verse. The result is a whole system of knowledge and spiritual experience stated with the utmost brevity, with an epic massiveness and dignity, but yet in itself full and free from omission. We have in this Upanishad no string of incoherent thoughts thrown out at random, no loose transitions from one class of ideas to another, but a single subject greatly treated with completeness, with precision, with the inspiration of a poet possessed by divine truth and the skill of a consummate architect of thought and language. The Isha Upanishad is the gospel of a divine life in the world and a statement of the conditions under which it is possible and the spirit of its living.<sup>11</sup>

This master vision contained within the pages of *The Life Divine* has been given to us by one whose very "... life-task has been to realise the Divine by the Supermind and then to effect its descent in Mind, Life and Matter to help man become superman ..." — says Arabinda Basu. And he adds, "The day

is not far off when cosmic Nature will sing an endless paean of tribute to the Rishi, the Yogi, the Avatar—Sri Aurobindo.”<sup>12</sup>

## References

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4. A.B. Purani, *Sri Aurobindo's Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1989, pp. 1-2.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.
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## INTRODUCTION

What is the main subject of *The Life Divine*? The title itself tells you that Sri Aurobindo is here analysing the 'life' Divine and not the 'mind' Divine. What is needed is the transformation of 'the life' of man and not just a change in his intellectual idealism. How then to transform human life into a divine life? That is the focus of his philosophy. It is true that both the mind and the body have to be transformed, but 'life' here is the bridge between mind and body. The very title is the indicator of what he is going to speak about. It is not about Brahman or some abstract knowledge just for the sake of philosophic knowledge. All ideas that are discussed here are related to 'life'—a life that needs to be divinised.

There is hardly any other book that has brought down the overmental and spiritual experiences to the level of mind. There have been great yogis, great sages who have had great experiences, both spiritual and occult, but not many have brought them down to the level of rational mind. Because ours is the age of reason, Sri Aurobindo has brought the highest spiritual truths to the level of the mind, only to convince of the beyond.

There is one point in regard to style that I would like to take up before we start with the text. When we start reading *The Life Divine*, we will see long sentences, and very long paragraphs.

A.B. Purani has rightly called it 'a labyrinth.' If we read one sentence and go to the next one, we forget what was in the previous sentence. Is it that Sri Aurobindo is repeating himself? No! On the contrary, he has taken up, what could be termed, an overmental approach which is a massive and comprehensive one. Overmental truth is a truth of multiplicity; that is to say, Sri Aurobindo is trying to express truth in multiple ways. In fact, in the light of what the

Mother says, it is a 'spherical vision'. It is not a single, logical, straightforward approach going from one point to another, but a spherical approach looking at a single problem from varied angles.

Sri Aurobindo's technique is to take up an argument from one angle and to follow it to its logical conclusion. He then returns and approaches the argument from another angle. In this way, he presents a full evaluation of all sides of the argument, and ultimately reveals his own synthetic view of it. The Mother points out that Sri Aurobindo first reviews all the multiple viewpoints of the different philosophies, and then proceeds to a synthesis. Wherever there is a synthetic thought, we can be sure that it is Sri Aurobindo's point of view. Therefore, one can say that *The Life Divine* is written from the cosmic overmental consciousness translating itself into a rational language. Sri Aurobindo never rejects an argument or any major line of human thought, because his work is to synthesise all fundamental human experiences. *The Life Divine* is a great synthesis of all human thought, both eastern and western. This synthesis is given not only from the standpoint of Indian philosophy and spiritual experience, but also, and more importantly, from the standpoint of his own experiences. So we should not take up a paragraph of *The Life Divine* and say, 'this is what Sri Aurobindo says'. It may not necessarily be Sri Aurobindo's view. That is why the Mother often warns us not to take out of context any passage from *The Life Divine*.

This, I think, is an essential aspect of an overmental approach— never to reject any experience or truth, but to give validity to each and every truth while simultaneously maintaining the essence of all the truths in the hub of one's consciousness. This is the grandeur of *The Life Divine*. And if we understand this, perhaps a little window will open somewhere in our mind.

The Mother often told us to read Sri Aurobindo's works

slowly, paragraph by paragraph, and never to rush through them. In connection with this, I would like to share a small secret with you; it is not a personal one, but an open secret. I still remember Nolini Kanta Gupta explaining to us in one of his brief talks this letter from the Mother written in 1959 to a disciple:

To read what Sri Aurobindo writes is more difficult because the expression is highly intellectual and the language far more literary and philosophic. The brain needs a preparation to really be able to understand and generally this preparation takes time, unless one is specially gifted with an innate intuitive faculty.

In any case, I always advise reading *a little* at a time, keeping the mind as quiet as one can, without making an effort to understand, but keeping the head as silent as possible and letting *the force* contained in what one reads *enter deep inside*. This force, received in calm and silence, will do its work of illumining and will create in the brain, if necessary, the cells required for understanding. Thus, when one re-reads the same thing some months later, one finds that the thought expressed has become much clearer and closer and even at times quite familiar.

It is preferable to read regularly, a little every day and at a fixed hour if possible; this facilitates the brain's receptivity.<sup>1</sup>

It is my view that the 'cells' that the Mother is referring to absorb not only the meaning but also the light from Sri Aurobindo's writings. Absorbing his light means absorbing his consciousness. This absorption progressively brings us a greater mental clarity and vision.

Perhaps the best way to understand Sri Aurobindo is to follow the Mother's advice. She writes:

Who can understand Sri Aurobindo? He is as vast as the universe and his teaching is infinite .

The only way to come a little close to him is to love him sincerely and give oneself unreservedly to his work. Thus, each one does his best and contributes as much as he can to that transformation of the world which Sri Aurobindo has predicted.<sup>2</sup>

So do not be disappointed or disheartened if you do not initially understand the chapters of *The Life Divine*, because here is a book which, as you go along, enhances your consciousness and thereby enables you to gradually understand its secret knowledge.

Let this study of *The Life Divine* be our collective dedication to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

### **References**

- 1.CWM, vol. 16, p. 233.
- 2.CWM, vol. 12, p. 399.

## Chapter One

### The Human Aspiration

When we open the first chapter of *The Life Divine*, we see a very significant quotation from the Rig Veda. It is a very famous quotation on Usha, the Dawn. Interestingly, *Savitri* too opens with the canto named ‘The Symbol Dawn’. Perhaps, through both these books, Sri Aurobindo wants to show us a glimpse of the Dawn of a new age. The first quotation in the first chapter of *The Life Divine* reads:

She follows to the goal of those that are passing on beyond, she is the first in the eternal succession of the dawns that are coming, — Usha widens bringing out that which lives, awakening someone who was dead. .What is her scope when she harmonises with the dawns that shone out before and those that now must shine? She desires the ancient mornings and fulfils their light; projecting forwards her illumination she enters into communion with the rest that are to come. (*Kutsa Angirasa — Rig Veda*, I. 113. 8, 10)<sup>1</sup>

When I read this quotation, I felt that this is precisely what *The Life Divine* is all about. It is almost a single-line synopsis, a single quotation which tells us much about *The Life Divine*. Let us focus on these lines:

What is her scope when she harmonises with the dawns that shone out before and those that now must shine?

*The Life Divine* is a book that harmonises, at a deeper level, all the spiritual experiences expressed in man’s philosophical, occult and metaphysical thoughts that “shone out before” and “those that must now shine.” It is not only a synthesis of past experiences; it is also an announcer of the Dawns of the future. This portion of the quotation—”She desires the ancient mornings and fulfils their light” —is very apt in the context of

*The Life Divine*, especially the phrase “fulfils their light”, for *The Life Divine* too ‘fulfils’ the ‘ancient’ thought.

It is interesting to see how Sri Aurobindo analyses the different arguments from the different philosophers, those from the West as well as the Indian *acharyas* like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya. All of them seem to find their fulfilment in *The Life Divine*, because each of the major philosophical concepts or spiritual experiences, be it from the West or the East, that has passed the test of time and is useful for the next evolutionary step of mankind, finds its place in the total scheme of the book. *The Life Divine* is like a cosmic puzzle, and it is as if Sri Aurobindo puts together all the pieces of the puzzle. It is because he has completed the cosmic puzzle all the way up to the next level of evolution that there is a deeper fulfilment of each major philosophy in *The Life Divine*. This is precisely what Sri Aurobindo has done—every significant argument, every spiritual experience is seen in terms of its usefulness for the future. All that does not fall in line with the evolutionary pattern is rejected.

Like the goddess of Dawn, Usha, Sri Aurobindo, while harmonising the past philosophers, enters into communion with the future Dawns that are yet to come!

The very first paragraph of Chapter I is indeed a brilliant summary of the above-mentioned quotation from *Kutsa Angirasa*, especially in regard to this portion: “What is her scope when ... she enters into communion with the rest that are to come.” Sri Aurobindo writes:

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation, — for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment, — is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards

perfection, the search after pure Truth and unmixed Bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of Wisdom promises to be its last, — God, Light, Freedom, Immortality.<sup>2</sup>

This paragraph takes us almost from the beginning to the end of human evolution. The earliest preoccupation of man with “God, Light, Freedom, Immortality” has been there from time immemorial, right from the beginning, and man has pursued these ideals, consciously or unconsciously, not only in India or in the West, but in all civilisations, from the darkest ones to the most enlightened ones. Sri Aurobindo uses a precise phrase, “earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts,” only to stress that we should think not only of those Rishis meditating in secret caves but also of that portion of enlightened humanity which was awakened in its thoughts. The awakened ones are those who analyse and question the meaning of life—Why am I born? What is death? What is the aim of my birth? And so on. When we trace the evolutionary line in civilisation, we find that the pursuit of these four lofty and noble ideals (God, Light, Freedom and Immortality) has always preoccupied the awakened thought of humankind.

It is quite apparent that there is a contradiction between the human aspiration for “God, Light, Freedom, Immortality” and the present life of humanity. Normal life, as we experience it, is quite contrary to these higher and deeper aspirations. Constant pain and suffering, deep ignorance and falsehood and death surround us. How can we then really integrate all this in the light of what Sri Aurobindo is writing? Is it that Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher ignores or bypasses the present realities of human life? No! On the contrary, Sri Aurobindo

accepts fully the present state of human consciousness and the present conditions of human life. He does not hesitate to point out the contradictions in our consciousness and life, because despite these contradictions and constant failures of humankind, such as violence, wars, atrocities, hypocrisy and corruption of consciousness, man still aspires, and his aspiration “survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment.”

Sri Aurobindo indicates that man, in spite of all the failures in his attempts to realise his higher aspirations, has always returned to these original aspirations after ‘every banishment’. We see in history that there have been periods of excessive violence or an abyss of darkness and falsehood. Even in the present day, we are going through a never-ending upsurge of terrorism which has indications of globalising itself. But we see also that something happens after these dark periods, i.e., there is a renaissance, a rejuvenation. A new wave of energy or force takes over human consciousness. A greater light descends, and there is an apocalypse of a higher consciousness that brings new hope, new light, and once again humankind aspires for the next step in evolution. In brief, humankind seeks perfection eternally at every level.

This progress comes through revolutionary individuals, like Leonardo da Vinci, Albert Einstein, Swami Vivekananda and others. Or else, it comes through a period of general evolutionary progression like that of the ‘renaissance’ or the ‘enlightenment’ in Europe. Man’s innate efforts are to establish an infinite freedom, to establish peace and self-existent bliss and to establish immortality in a perishable formation of mind, life and body. This is Sri Aurobindo’s basic view regarding the world’s working. He accepts the hard reality of existence, but at the same time, he has the inner vision of things and happenings. He goes beyond the forms, in which existence presents itself on the surface level, and

deals with the fundamental truths of existence. It is because of this inner vision and understanding that he can write that “the direct opposition appears rather as part of Nature’s profoundest method and the seal of her completest sanction.”<sup>3</sup> In this manner, Sri Aurobindo is not only a metaphysician par excellence, or a thorough social psychologist, or a historian but also a deep-visioned spiritual pragmatist.

In fact, some of Sri Aurobindo’s major works, such as *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Secret of the Veda*, etc., strengthen his spiritual point of view: spirit is the fundamental truth of existence and all life and mind and body are only its manifestations. This seems to have been his central purpose in writing so deeply and extensively on sociology, philosophy, yoga, politics, etc.; it was to see if they were incompatible or inconsistent with the spiritual truths. In a way, it was an attempt to harmonise or synthesise the forms in which existence presents itself with his own integral vision of life, with his own new-found spiritual experience. His cosmic vision embraces the apparent contradictions of the present conditions of man’s life and the future possibilities that await him. So, it is clear that Sri Aurobindo does not shy away from the contradictions in the process of human evolution. These contradictions, in fact, are central to his concern.

Sri Aurobindo envisages that from the present animal and egoistic consciousness man shall attain the plenary supramental illumination; man shall discover in his body, which is subjected to death, an immortal life; man shall gain infinite bliss in his very being that is now a field of pain and suffering. However paradoxical and impossible such a transformation may seem, such contradictions are, on the contrary, Nature’s profoundest method of progress in evolution. The ordinary ‘material intellect’, i.e., those who are delimited by the outer consciousness, cannot accept

these apparent contradictions, but Sri Aurobindo with his inner vision sees beyond these paradoxes and for him the manifestation of God in Matter is the centre of his spiritual experience.

At the beginning of the third paragraph, we come across Sri Aurobindo's oft-quoted sentence: "For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony."<sup>4</sup> The word 'harmony' connotes multiplicity; we cannot speak of harmony within the non-dual One. So, wherever there is multiplicity, there is bound to be divergence, division and disharmony. This division is maintained by the ego, the individualising factor, and therefore, the dividing factor in us. The ego does not allow any movement towards harmony, for harmony, in the deeper sense of the word, implies sacrifice of one's ego. The average individuals, who think that their very existence and individuality depend solely upon their ego, are afraid to give up their ego. Therefore, he or she tries to avoid or run away from the problems of life for fear of losing this false 'self'. The practical person tries to make the best of the situation by making a "rough, utilitarian and unilluminated compromise."<sup>5</sup> In reality, this is no true solution, because no deeper harmony has been realised in this manner. Any unity achieved is at best a form of uniformity, or a semblance of temporary peace. It is only the awakened man or the true yogi who, by the sacrifice of his ego, brings down a higher consciousness which can alone bring true peace and a deep-seated permanent harmony. Such a process is seen not only on the human level, but is the basic and fundamental method of Nature in her universal striving.

In the middle of the third paragraph, Sri Aurobindo writes:

The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur...<sup>6</sup>

We have seen in our lives that when we are passing through difficulties, we are at the most receptive level of our consciousness if we take them in the proper spirit of sadhana. They almost seem to come to spur the human aspiration and endeavour towards progress and perfection. Otherwise, if we experienced no contradictions or disharmony, we might slump into lethargy and make no progress at all.

Now, what are the apparently irreconcilable oppositions that Sri Aurobindo is speaking of? Are they what we humans experience normally—night and day or life and death? No! He puts forward

these two deeper oppositions that Nature is trying to resolve:

1. Inanimate Matter versus an active Life.
2. Conscious Mind versus unconscious Matter and half-conscious Life.

### **Inanimate Matter versus an Active Life**

Sri Aurobindo points out that Nature was faced with deep oppositions which she had to reconcile in order to carry out evolution. First, she had to bring the Life principle into the inanimate Matter full of inertia and unconsciousness. One can easily see the opposition between Life and Matter—one is vibrant and active, the other dull and inert. Nature has taken millions of years to overcome this evolutionary hurdle and bring forth the apparent miracle of Life from seemingly lifeless and inanimate Matter.

At present, we possess all the qualities of Life, that is to say, we are alive, active and possess a self-consciousness. But the *tamas*, the inertia of Matter, pulls us downwards. We are unable to soar into the higher levels of consciousness in life. We are constantly dragged down by the lower tendencies of jealousy, anger, desire, etc. At all times there is a pervasive *tamas* and ignorance that surrounds us. Because of this inertia and resistance from Matter to change, the Life principle has

brought in a transitory solution— that of death. But this is only a temporary compromise.

What then is the ultimate solution? Are we to live always under the shadow of death? It need not be so! Sri Aurobindo says that the solution would be to achieve “the material immortality of a fully organised mind-supporting animal body.”<sup>7</sup> Until and unless we achieve such an immortality of the body, there will be no solution to this inertia-ridden life.

### **Conscious Mind versus Unconscious Matter and Half-conscious Life**

Regarding half-conscious life and unconscious matter versus conscious mind and conscious will, Sri Aurobindo writes that the solution to this opposition is to evolve a perfect instrument that possesses knowledge directly. He calls this instrument the supramental consciousness, or the Supermind.

Mind is only a seeker of knowledge, not a possessor of a perfected knowledge. Mind possesses knowledge only indirectly. It acquires a second-hand knowledge either through the imperfect senses or through mental images. Supermind, on the other hand, is a perfect instrument of direct knowledge, because objects are known by identity. For example, here is an incense holder carved out of the sacred ‘Service tree’ near the Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. I can feel it, value it, adore it, still on the other hand, it is an object outside of me. Supermind can have a direct identification with this incense holder and know it by identity. It would know exactly the spirit, the love, the spiritual aura that is there in this little portion of the Service tree.

From this example, we may venture a guess as to the main thesis of *The Life Divine*. It is the solution to these contradictions at the heart of our existence that Sri Aurobindo is presenting within the fifty-six chapters of the book. Ultimately, he deals with the question of how we can achieve

the immortality of the body itself through the possession of the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo has not merely given us just one more philosophy or one more revelation or one more spiritual experience. In fact, what he has given us is a permanent and integral solution to the millennial struggle of universal Nature which is endeavouring to bring forth ultimate solutions to these contradictions.

We may understand this better if we refer to Sri Aurobindo's book on yoga, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. There he writes that all life is Nature's own yoga and through yoga she evolves Life from Matter and Mind from Life. Within Matter is the hidden principle of Life, which has always been there for nothing can come out of nothing. The process of evolution can be exemplified by the analogy of an antenna within which are telescoped other antennas. From the basic antenna called Matter, Nature has pulled forth the antenna called Life, and inside Life there is the principle of Mind which was also pulled forth in the course of evolution. As Sri Aurobindo puts it: "Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness"<sup>8</sup> Now the antenna of Supermind, which is hidden in Nature, is also being pulled forth by Nature. Sri Aurobindo writes:

The animal is a living laboratory in which Nature has, it is said, worked out man. Man himself may well be a thinking and living laboratory in whom and with whose conscious co-operation she wills to work out the superman, the god. Or shall we not say, rather, to manifest God?<sup>9</sup>

So, we can easily conclude that Matter is bringing out from its womb the various layers of the hidden consciousness. Thus far, it has brought forth fully the levels of consciousness up to the level of Mind. But now, a new horizon in mankind's evolutionary march is being revealed by Sri Aurobindo. The Mother emphasises that Sri Aurobindo is not the acme of history; he is the future realising itself. For example, Leonardo

da Vinci marks a high point in history, one in whom we get not just a unique artist but also a glimpse of the peak of human consciousness in those times. But Sri Aurobindo is not simply another example of such a human excellence; he is the harbinger of the supramental future.

He marks more than a culmination of the past. In addition, his life marks the beginning of a new adventure beyond the human consciousness towards the Supermind.

As each level of consciousness brings forth an instrumentation appropriate to its self-expression, so too the supramental consciousness will bring about the “necessary organs and faculties”<sup>10</sup> that are suited to its own level of consciousness. For example, the supramental body will be light, plastic and luminous. It will have spherical vision, i.e., it will be able to see all sides of any object simultaneously, as well as the inside and outside of it. It will have cosmic hearing, i.e., the supramental being will be able to hear the ‘music of the spheres’ as well. Sri Aurobindo describes these supramental faculties at length in the last chapters of his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*. We shall take these up in greater detail when we come to the last six chapters of *The Life Divine*.

This is the new logic of evolution that Sri Aurobindo presents in this chapter which is in fact convincing enough for one to accept the possibility or at least the probability of the ‘life divine’ manifesting upon earth. Man may find it difficult to accept this eternal paradox of a divine life in an animal body and an ignorant mind, but the immortal aspiration of man has always returned to God, Light, Freedom and Immortality, and there can never be a permanent setback in this aspiration of man. Man may deny the new possibilities of the divine life, because it seems too remote and impossible, but Sri Aurobindo says:

The attempt to deny or stifle a truth because it is yet obscure in its outward workings and too often represented

by obscurantist superstition or a crude faith, is itself a kind of obscurantism.<sup>11</sup>

He continues:

The will to escape from a cosmic necessity because it is arduous, difficult to justify by immediate tangible results, slow in regulating its operations, must turn out eventually to have been no acceptance of the truth of Nature but a revolt against the secret, mightier will of the great Mother. It is better and more rational to accept what she will not allow us as a race to reject and lift it from the sphere of blind instinct, obscure intuition and random aspiration into the light of reason and an instructed and consciously self-guiding will.<sup>12</sup>

This is typical of Sri Aurobindo! Not to deny or stifle a truth because its manifestation is yet too obscure. At one time, science proclaimed itself to be a very rational and logical system, and religion was considered to be obscurantist because it could not prove God's existence. So, science rejected religion. Science has great openness of mind, but it has always rejected what it cannot see or what cannot be proven by the evidence of the senses. This is the trap of an old argument against which Sri Aurobindo is cautioning us. Just because we do not have immediate and tangible results, let us not reject any particular possibility, whether we accept it or not:

We cannot ... bid her [Nature] pause at a given stage of her evolution, nor have we the right to condemn with the religionist as perverse and presumptuous or with the rationalist as a disease or hallucination any intention she may evince or effort she may make to go beyond.<sup>13</sup>

Sri Aurobindo tells the religionists not to be 'presumptuous' by opposing the truth of another religion. Religionists keep criticising each other's doctrines out of a perverse sense of judgment that rejects something simply because it does not belong to you. Similarly, the rationalists reject views that

are contrary to their own as “disease or hallucination.” Sri Aurobindo is advising us to beware of such traps and to keep away from both the religionists and the rationalists.

Sri Aurobindo’s is indeed a revolutionary vision. It is the vision of the coming of the superman, the species beyond man. It may not be clearly visible at present, but right from the level of Matter itself there is an aspiration rising towards the greater heights of consciousness culminating in the next level of evolution, the Supermind. This is the truth of tomorrow, and by being blind to this truth we may delay its full operation in human consciousness! So, Sri Aurobindo concludes:

For it is likely that such is the next higher state of consciousness of which Mind is only a form and veil, and through the splendours of that light may lie the path of our progressive self-enlargement into whatever highest state is humanity’s ultimate resting-place.<sup>14</sup>

In this first chapter, we get an overview of the eternal human aspiration that has been there since the beginning and promises to remain until the end. This is followed by a review of the apparent contradictions in human life at present. Sri Aurobindo then enlightens us and explains that these contradictions are Nature’s own method of moving towards a harmony that will fructify ultimately in the transformation of mind, life and body through the light and power of a new consciousness, the emerging Supermind.

## References

- 1.SABCL , vol. 18, p. 1 (opening quote).
- 2.Ibid., p. 1 (para 1).
- 3.Ibid., p. 2 (para 2).
- 4.Ibid., p. 2 (para 3).
- 5.Ibid., p. 2 (para 3).
- 6.Ibid., p. 2 (para 3).
- 7.Ibid., p. 2 (para 3).

8. Ibid., p. 3 (para 4).
9. Ibid., pp. 3-4 (para 4).
10. Ibid., p. 3 (para 4).
11. Ibid., p. 4 (para 5).
12. Ibid., pp. 4-5 (para 5).
13. Ibid., p. 4 (para 4).
14. Ibid., p. 5 (para 5).

## Lecture Notes

### I. *sha, the Dawn and The Life Divine*

- (a) Quotation from Rig Veda regarding Usha as the Dawn that harmonises all the past Dawns.
- (b) *The Life Divine* too harmonises the past Dawns of human experience and then takes us into the noons of humanity's future.

### II. *Awakened man's quest*

- (a) Man's earliest aspiration for God, Light, Freedom and Immortality will also be his last.
- (b) There is a direct contradiction in life to this aspiration.
- (c) But to work through contradictions is the very method of Nature.
- (d) All problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony.

### III. *Oppositions in Nature*

“The greater the apparent disorder of the materials offered or the apparent disparateness, even to irreconcilable opposition, of the elements that have to be utilised, the stronger is the spur ...”

- (a) Inanimate Matter versus an active Life

*Solution:* Immortality of a fully organised mind-supporting animal body.

- (b) Conscious mind and will versus unconscious matter and half-conscious life.

*Solution:* Possession of a direct or perfect instrument of knowledge.

#### IV. *The inevitable evolution to Supermind*

- (a) All that is involved has to ultimately evolve and manifest itself— just as Life came out of Matter and Mind out of Life.
- (b) Mind is only the middle stage of evolution and it is bound to bring forth the hidden Supermind.
- (c) Nature has implanted in Life and Mind an aspiration, an impetus to move towards the evolution of Supermind. Man's eternal aspiration may be achieved by individual effort or by an evolutionary progress.
- (d) Just as the animal has been a laboratory for the working out of man, so man will be a laboratory for bringing forth superman.

#### V. *Obscurantism of science*

To deny or stifle a new truth because it is yet obscure is itself a kind of obscurantism of both science and religion. The new level of consciousness beyond Mind may surge from the mind itself and lead humanity to its highest intended evolution.

## Chapter Two

### The Two Negations: The Materialist Denial

Chapters II and III of *The Life Divine* have a common title, ‘The Two Negations’, but with very different subtitles, ‘The Materialist Denial’ and ‘The Refusal of the Ascetic’. These chapters along with Chapter IV form part of one unit. The second chapter ‘The Materialist Denial’ is a kind of thesis, the next chapter ‘The Refusal of the Ascetic’ forms the anti-thesis and the fourth chapter ‘Reality Omnipresent’ provides the synthesis. We will now take up Chapter II and see what is this thesis that is put forward by Sri Aurobindo.

The first paragraph starts this way:

The affirmation of a divine life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognise not only eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept Matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.<sup>1</sup>

The line, “... the inhabitant of this bodily mansion ...” echoes the first verse of the Isha Upanishad: “All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man’s possession.”<sup>2</sup> The Supreme Lord resides in this body, and this body is meant to be the habitation of the Lord. Just as a tenant takes the tenancy of a house, stays there for a month or a year, and then leaves it, so too the Lord lives within the human body as a temporary tenant in each life as “the wearer of this mutable robe”! This idea becomes clearer when we read in the Upanishads that all is Brahman and Brahman is the Reality of this world. And what is more important to us is the idea that we should accept: “Matter ...

as a fit and noble material out of which He weaves constantly His garbs” The point to be noted here is that Matter is a fit and noble material for the Lord out of which He weaves constantly His garbs and “builds recurrently the unending series of His mansions.” What does this imply? It implies that Matter is not only the place where the Lord resides, but also the substance out of which he weaves a perfect being, a perfect creature, a perfect instrument. It is said that out of this material he builds “the unending series of His mansions.” Here we get, right from the beginning, the idea of ‘evolution’ which is but a march of the spirit through an “unending series” of forms of Matter. In fact, in one of the Upanishads it is described how the Supreme weaves this universe out of itself like a spider that weaves its web out of its own body fluid. This is the very first thought that Sri Aurobindo brings in which, in its turn, will lead us towards the synthesis of Matter and Spirit.

To the rationalist, this Upanishadic reconciliation between Matter and Brahman may seem in reality to be an irreconcilable opposition for it is opposed to the logic of ‘facts’, and he may term it as irrational mysticism. But to the mystic vision of the Upanishadic Rishis and Sri Aurobindo, these two terms (Matter and Spirit) are perceived as indivisible for they see the interconnecting links between these apparently extreme terms of existence. These links are in the ascending series of Life, Mind and the grades that link Mind to Supermind. These links are normally beyond the grasp of the rationalist and his logic of the finite.

Sri Aurobindo, therefore, emphasises that if we do not reconcile these two terms of existence and if we continue to divide the creative consciousness into Purusha or God and Prakriti or Nature, we shall be living in a divided consciousness, and this division in thinking becomes the root cause of all our existential problems.

What is the problem? If we emphasise only the idea of the

pure spirit, then the world becomes an illusion. There are philosophies which take us to an extreme point of view and tell us that Nirguna Brahman is the only Existence. If that is so, logically, it is bound to culminate in the theory of Illusionism. But there is another possible outcome of this overemphasis on the Spirit, that is, we consider God alone as the eternal Bliss and the world, which is considered as a temporary habitation for the soul, as a place of eternal suffering. And such an attitude inevitably leads us to seek an escape from this world into some kind of Nirvana.

Thus, by bringing in oppositions between God and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti, we bring in a dichotomy between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. By focusing exclusively on the Purusha aspect, the only logical experiential result is the cessation of activity and withdrawal into the immutable Brahman. Or else, as in Shankaracharya's philosophy, the choice is inevitable and imperative: "the dissolution of the multitudinous illusion into the sole Truth of an eternal Silence."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, by focusing exclusively on the Saguna Brahman, one would be caught by the insatiable world of action and forget about the inner silence of the Atman. So, by an overemphasis on Nature or Prakriti, we shall inevitably be denying God. Accepting this world alone as Reality is to accept the world of senses as the sole truth. The physical senses would consider all that is beyond their reach as an illusion, and thereby, God or Spirit is rejected from the purview of Reality.

The perfect balance of these two extreme views would be an ideal synthetic vision. But in its evolutionary process, humanity has to take up these two truths and test them separately. Man has to go to the extremes before he can return fruitfully upon the whole. This is so, because man is not yet mentally or spiritually prepared to have an integral vision of

Reality and to accept the reality of both Matter and Spirit at the same time.

We may ask ourselves as to why this separate development is necessary. It is because man *cannot* have the total vision, not because it is the fault of any single man, but because this is the nature of mind itself. Man *cannot* have an integral understanding. In order to understand anything, he has first to divide it into parts. In fact, this is what we are doing in this lecture itself. We are not trying to bring out all the points of Chapters II-IV in a comprehensive vision. We are attempting to understand them in parts, argument by argument; we are trying to focus on single arguments, single ideas, etc., and not on the totality. That is the only way mind understands.

So, Sri Aurobindo says that humanity in general has divided these truths into two great opposites, ‘materialism’ and ‘asceticism’. The effect of this division is accurately summarised as:

In India, if the result has been a great heaping up of the treasures of the Spirit, — or of some of them, — it has also been a great bankruptcy of Life; in Europe, the fullness of riches and the triumphant mastery of this world’s powers and possessions have progressed towards an equal bankruptcy in the things of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

These two principles can meet on the higher plane of the Supermind which alone can provide an integral vision. Because of this integral vision of the Supermind, we see the possibility of the world getting united at some point in time.

Let us now take the first issue—that of the denial of the materialist. When we call someone a materialist or talk about materialism, what exactly do we mean? A very simple definition of this would be that a materialist believes that knowledge can be obtained only through the physical senses, and that the faculty of reason is bound to this domain alone

and dare not transgress it. This means that only the knowledge that one gets through the physical senses is true and all else is untrue or non-existent. This is the emphasis of the materialist, and he is not yet ready to accept anything beyond the senses or the existence of any worlds beyond the physical world. This basic stand of the materialist denies the existence of God or Spirit because they are beyond the reach of the physical senses.

Materialism has an innate weakness. The fact is that there are many supernatural truths which we experience in life that cannot be explained by the physical senses or reason. For example, there is a sudden intuition and an entirely new discovery is made, but it cannot be explained by reason. Also, in Sri Aurobindo's grand epic, *Savitri*, we have seen the description of other worlds which are beyond the reach of our senses. There are so many things that can be perceived by a consciousness which sees beyond the senses. Unfortunately, materialism insists that it will not acknowledge or recognise them. They even go to the extent of saying that the soul is nothing but a creation of electro-chemical impulses in the human brain! They try to drag everything down to the level of the physical senses. Such an attitude of the materialist is a great drawback, especially when we have undeniable proofs of many supraphysical experiences. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo explains this attitude of the materialist in a simple and logical manner:

It is evident that however much we may analyse the physical and sensible, we cannot by that means arrive at the Knowledge of the Self or of ourselves or of that which we call God. The telescope, the microscope, the scalpel, the retort and alembic cannot go beyond the physical, although they may arrive at subtler and subtler truths about the physical. If then we confine ourselves to what the senses and their physical aids reveal to us and refuse from the beginning to admit any other reality or any other means of

knowledge, we are obliged to conclude that nothing is real except the physical and that there is no Self in us or in the universe, no God within and without, no ourselves even except this aggregate of brain, nerves and body. But this we are only obliged to conclude because we have assumed it firmly from the beginning and therefore cannot but circle round to our original assumption.<sup>5</sup>

A hundred years or so ago, materialism was perhaps right, but today the world is advancing fast. Things of the subtle physical are frequent experiences these days, and yet, staunch materialists do not recognise them. In spite of their adamant standpoint,

Sri Aurobindo does not reject materialism or any human experience. On the contrary, he suggests that we have to recognise the utility of the rationalist materialism through which humanity has been passing.

The gains of materialism are very interesting to note and all of us know them, but we have perhaps never analysed them as did Sri Aurobindo. The most common advantage is the advancement of technology—its practical powers, the conquest of Nature, all the conveniences that we have in our life. We know all the day- to-day comforts that science has given us. After all, materialism has been a great philosophy of life. It has its own godheads just as all religions have their godheads. We may ask, what are the godheads of materialism? In an essay titled, ‘Materialism’, Sri Aurobindo tells us that there are five godheads of Materialism: “Reason, science, progress, freedom, humanity.”<sup>6</sup>

I will give you a short description of each based on Sri Aurobindo’s vision. The first godhead is reason. Reason is not the supreme light; yet, it is always a necessary light to purify us of our raw instincts, our impulses, our rash, perverse, crude and blind beliefs, our truths and prejudgments. The first thing that is emphasised in the modern world is the stress

on reason, and Sri Aurobindo agrees with it for he sees its perfect necessity in conducting our life. It is important to ask ourselves, ‘when did reason take over our life?’ It was a revolt against the dark ages of superstitious religions. Most of the religions had degraded to the level of superstition as if there were cobwebs spread over them. There was a dire need to clean them up. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

It became necessary for a time to make a clean sweep at once of the truth and its disguise in order that the road might be clear for a new departure and a surer advance. The rationalistic tendency of Materialism has done mankind this great service.<sup>7</sup>

Now, you can well imagine the role that rationalistic materialism has played in history—that of a torchbearer through the dark ages. Therefore, reason is the first godhead.

This is the beauty of evolution: all things have their utility in their own time. First, there was religion, which was necessary, but over the centuries it became a dark religion and ended in becoming a hindrance to the manifestation of a new life, a higher truth. So, the Divine brought in, as it were, this sweeping instrument called rationalism; and rationalism with its tremendous vigour and power swept off completely the cobwebs of religion. Unfortunately, in the East, this sweeping wave did not come in until the West introduced it through the process of colonisation.

The second godhead is science. The scientific approach brings the knowledge of the process. It is a detailed method of how research should be done which is driven by a need to understand clearly the underlying operations of things. This ‘how’ is the truth of science and will be useful in understanding evolution. This spirit of finding out ‘how’ will also be useful tomorrow when spirituality will be the predominant power of life. We believe that yoga, and more

specifically Integral Yoga, will be the basis of the spirituality of the future. And Integral Yoga in its long process of the transformation of the total being of man will incorporate this knowledge of the process given by science, though it will be employed on a psycho-physical level.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is the process of achieving transformation, and the scientific approach will prove useful for developing the spirituality of the future. So, you see how everything prepares mankind for a future evolution! As writes Sri Aurobindo:

Science is a right knowledge, in the end only of processes, but still the knowledge of processes too is a part of a total wisdom and essential to a wide and a clear approach towards the deeper Truth behind. If it has laboured mainly in the physical field, if it has limited itself and bordered or overshadowed its light with a certain cloud of wilful ignorance, still one had to begin this method somewhere and the physical field is the first, the nearest, the easiest for the kind and manner of inquiry undertaken ... Now that we have founded rigorously our knowledge of the physical, we can go forward with a much firmer step to a more open, secure and luminous repossession of mental and psychic knowledge. Even spiritual truths are likely to gain from it, not a loftier or more penetrating, — that is with difficulty possible,— but an ampler light and fuller self-expression.<sup>8</sup>

What science claims to be the only reality—namely that of matter—was also realised by the Vedantins thousands of years back. The Taittiriya Upanishad says that when Bhrigu went to his father Varuna and asked him, “Lord, teach me the Brahman”, he was told: “Energise (again) the conscious-energy in thee; for the Energy is Brahman.”<sup>9</sup> Bhrigu with this approach energised his consciousness and found out that Matter is Brahman:

. “Food and Prana and Eye and Ear and Mind — even

these.” Verily he said unto him, “Seek thou to know that from which these creatures are born, whereby being born they live and to which they go hence and enter again; for that is the Eternal.” And Bhrigu concentrated himself in thought and by the askesis of his brooding He knew food for the Eternal. For from food alone, it appears, are these creatures born and being born they live by food, and into food they depart and enter again.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond ‘food’ being the Eternal, there is a higher level of the truth of Brahman which was discovered by Bhrigu. It is that *prana* is the Eternal, that is, life is Brahman or life energy is Brahman: “For from Prana alone, it appears, are these creatures born and being born they live by Prana and to Prana they go hence and return”<sup>11</sup>

We see here an extraordinary pattern of evolution as if some superconscience is consciously conducting the evolution down to the smallest detail. Sri Aurobindo has given us in great detail the complete secret of this pattern of evolution.

This, in fact, is the true principle of teaching: to take us from a truth that is closer to us to a truth that is farther away from us, from the truth of Matter to the truth of the Spirit, dealing in between with all the intermediary levels of Truth. It is in this spirit of teaching that Sri Aurobindo accepts science and its truths as the first level of reality as was revealed by Varuna, the father of Bhrigu.

The third godhead is progress. “Outward progress was the greater part of its aim and the inward is the more essential, but the inward too is not complete if the outward is left out of account.”<sup>12</sup> The outward progress provides a sound basis for inner progress. Progress is what science has generated. It has brought about an outward progress, and this outward progress is what India is catching up with now. Though belated, it is a welcome and necessary step for India in the right direction if she has to emerge as the leader of humanity’s march towards a

higher spiritual consciousness. In *The Foundations of Indian Culture*,

Sri Aurobindo compares India to a big elephant; it takes time for it to wake up and start walking, but when it starts walking there is nothing to stop it. So this massive Indian consciousness, unlike the European consciousness, is initially slow in its movement because of its attempt to carry together its integral vision of Life and Spirit.

The fourth godhead is freedom. Sri Aurobindo says: “the essential is an inner freedom; but if without the inner realisation the outer attempt at liberty may prove at last a vain thing .,.”<sup>13</sup> Freedom in the inner and slavery in the outer is also of no use. This is an important thing to note: what science and rationalism have given us is the freedom of the individual, that is, freedom of action, freedom of speech, etc. We in India have spoken about the inner freedom, the soul’s freedom, but we have not spoken much about the external freedom. India has given to its individuals only an inner freedom and hardly any outer or social freedom that she can be proud of. What I mean by inner freedom is the freedom to pursue one’s spiritual path. There isn’t any rigidity in choosing one’s path; there is a great flexibility in this area. This is absent in other religious approaches. In India, a single family can have worshippers of different godheads.

To explain it further, we could point out that in India it was said that if one wants an external freedom one has to become a sannyasi. A sannyasi is someone who goes beyond social norms and duties and seeks exclusively his own salvation. As long as one is in society one has to follow the social dharma, but the moment one has put on the ochre robes and walks into the streets one is free, beyond the bindings of any social law. This was the kind of inner freedom given in India—but no outer freedom. Very interestingly, if we observe closely, just the opposite is true in western society. External freedom of

the individual is guaranteed, but inner freedom is not there. If one does not follow the rules and regulations of the religious order, one is excommunicated. If one does not go to the church on Sundays or confess all one's sins to the Father, one is considered to be an unfaithful Christian. Whereas in India there is the inner freedom but with a rigid outer binding. All this seems to be a beautiful design of the supreme Overseer who is developing the integral personality of man by giving him both the inner and the outer freedom through disparate cultures—the East (broadly India) and the West.

The fifth godhead is humanity. “The cult of humanity means an increasing kindness, tolerance, charity, helpfulness, solidarity, universality, unity, fullness of individual and collective growth ...”<sup>14</sup> Earlier religions like Christianity and Buddhism brought these ideals to the individual or to small groups, but later, materialism widened this base and brought these ideals closer to the masses. Humanitarianism, which is an outcome of the cult of humanity, is indeed one of the intermediary goals of the evolution of earth's consciousness.

These are the major gains of materialism that Sri Aurobindo recognises, and it is because of these ideals and tendencies, which materialism seeks to give mankind, that it has rendered a great service to mankind. Once these gains of materialism are well established in human consciousness, they will be of great help for a new departure and a surer advance towards a spiritual age which Sri Aurobindo envisages as the next step in man's social evolution. Thus, the broader the materialistic base, the higher will be the spiritual peaks of tomorrow.

Sri Aurobindo also admires the services that agnosticism and atheism have rendered in preparing the illimitable increase of knowledge. Agnostics accept that they do not know what is beyond the knowledge of senses, and true atheists do not believe in blind faith and superstitious dogmas. If both the agnostics and the atheists had a deeper quest to know what is

unknown, then they could have perhaps gone closer to God; but they seem to have a veil over their eyes. About atheists Sri Aurobindo writes in *Thoughts and Aphorisms*: “The Atheist is God playing at hide and seek with Himself; but is the Theist any other? Well, perhaps; for he has seen the shadow of God and clutched at it.”<sup>15</sup> So atheism has seen the darker side of ‘the highest perception of God’.

In fact, both Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo were once atheists. Their atheism, however, was not an intellectual atheism which is burdened with a sense of false pride saying to itself, ‘I don’t believe in God’. This is more a stance than anything else. But for Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, it was not a stance; it was a real deeper quest for knowing that which is unknown. It is in that sense that: “Atheism is the shadow or the dark side of the highest perception of God. Every formula we form about God, though always true as a symbol, becomes false when we accept it as a sufficient formula. The Atheist and Agnostic come to remind us of our error.”<sup>16</sup>

In another aphorism he writes: “Atheism is a necessary protest against the wickedness of the Churches and the narrowness of the creeds. God uses it as a stone to smash these soiled card- houses.”<sup>17</sup> The Mother explains that as long as religions exist, atheism will be indispensable to counterbalance them. Both must disappear to make way for a sincere and disinterested search for Truth and a total consecration to the object of this search.

Sri Aurobindo, in another aphorism, writes:

There are two for whom there is hope, the man who has felt God’s touch and been drawn to it and the sceptical seeker and self-convinced atheist; but for the formularists of all the religions and the parrots of free thought, they are dead souls who follow a death that they call living”<sup>18</sup>

This is an extraordinary phrase: “the parrots of free thought, they are dead souls ..” The theist and atheist are true in their inner seeking, whereas the rest of the people are called “parrots of free thought.” In the name of freedom of thought, speech and religion, just parroting quotations is not sufficient. It is imperative to have this deeper inner experience. And such people who get inner experience never fail to help mankind.

I have brought in these few sentences about atheism, because sometimes people miss out on these quotes. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have given a deeper meaning to atheism which needs to be studied further. That is why I have given just a taste of what they have said on the topic.

Sri Aurobindo then brings together these three different views of the ascetic, the materialist and the agnostic or the atheist and explains clearly their fundamental stand of the unknowableness either of God or of Matter. He writes:

When we speak of It as unknowable, we mean, really, that It escapes the grasp of our thought and speech, instruments which proceed always by the sense of difference and express by the way of definition; but if not knowable by thought, It is attainable by a supreme effort of consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, it is a question of development, not only of a particular consciousness, but also of corresponding faculties which are always existent in man. Till now these faculties have not been developed on the general level of humanity; they have been tapped more by

individual seekers or yogis. But in the evolutionary process, the innate impulse towards self-realisation is bound to bring forth these hidden faculties. To give an example, it will be a faculty of global hearing, global seeing, etc., which can get a direct knowledge by a consciousness of identity. This knowledge cannot be expressed in the present thought and speech, but it will find its own language of expression

in the future. This is what the Vedic restrainers meant when they said: “Forth now and push forward also in other fields” (Rig Veda. I.4.5)<sup>20</sup>

Next, Sri Aurobindo discusses the present trend of science. As the very soul of materialism is the search for knowledge, it will not be able to cry halt and science will go beyond its present boundaries of sense-knowledge. Today we speak of *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zukav and *The Third Wave* by Alvin Toffler, which have given us a bridge between science and spirituality. But even in Sri Aurobindo’s time there was a movement towards this integration for he tells us that science is rediscovering the Vedic and Vedantic truths that ‘knowledge is one’. One may go through science or through spirituality and either way one is bound to enter into the consciousness of the One, the knowledge of One. Now, science is doing the same thing that Vedanta did five to ten thousand years ago. The Vedantic truths have been rediscovered by science and spoken in a scientific language. They have a greater acceptability and are more forceful when accepted by general humanity. So, Sri Aurobindo praises science not only for rediscovering Vedanta but also for rediscovering Vedanta for the whole of humanity so that it will play a greater role in man’s collective life than it did thousands of years ago.

After this high praise for science, Sri Aurobindo now takes us into greater depths of science. He analyses the true nature of Matter. Here, I would like to read out two sentences which are extraordinary and are really the key sentences:

Significant, especially, is the drive of Science towards a Monism which is consistent with multiplicity, towards the Vedic idea of the one essence with its many becomings. Even if the dualistic appearance of Matter and Force be insisted on, it does not really stand in the way of this Monism.<sup>21</sup>

What Sri Aurobindo writes here is that ultimately science also speaks of a monism of Matter. What do we understand

by the word 'monism'? There is one supreme Reality, and according to the Upanishadic Rishis, this one supreme Reality becomes the multiplicity. The one supreme Existence, Sachchidananda, the Brahman, the Absolute chose to become the many. Truly there is only one existence, Brahman, which could be called 'the Monism of the Spirit'. So, the truth of monism is the concept of 'one reality'. That is what we know in the context of spirituality. But Sri Aurobindo takes up the monism of Matter itself. What modern scientists have told us is that if we analyse Matter, it basically reduces itself to one single element which we know as 'energy'. Science says that the essence of Matter is energy. Therefore, we have the famous equation  $E = MC^2$  which tells us that Matter can be converted into energy. If the spiritualists reduce the 'many' into one 'single existence', that is, the Brahman, then the scientists similarly reduce all forms of Matter into a 'single reality', that is, energy. So, in a way, the scientists and the spiritualists proclaim the same thing. That is to say, they believe in the existence of only 'one reality'.

This morning I was reading *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* by Gary Zukav, and there I read about Bells' theory which proves scientifically that there is absolutely no division amongst things and that all things in Matter are interconnected. And did not Vedanta also tell us that we are all interconnected and that we are not separate? It is only because of our ignorance that we think we are separate; in reality, there is an underlying continuum and unity of consciousness. So, as far as the essence goes, there is hardly any basic difference between the approaches of scientism, if I may say so, and spiritualism!

There is one more sentence that we shall take up:

For it will be evident that essential Matter is a thing nonexistent to the senses and only, like the Pradhana of the Sankhyas, a conceptual form of substance; and in fact the point is increasingly reached where only an arbitrary

distinction in thought divides form of substance from form of energy.<sup>22</sup>

Sri Aurobindo surprises us by writing that essential Matter is nonexistent to the senses. How is it so? Is Sri Aurobindo telling us, like Shankaracharya, that Matter is an illusion? Let us analyse this idea further using the structure of an atom as an example. What is interesting is that if the structure of an atom of Matter is considered, we see that more than 99.99% of the atom is emptiness. So where does an atom exist? There is only a small nucleus of protons and neutrons and the outer infinitesimal electrons which constitute 0.01% of the atom; the rest is emptiness. So imagine all the ignorance in saying that ‘this is Matter’! Where is Matter? In each atom there is almost only emptiness. In this manner, we almost end up with the theory that Matter too is an illusion! It is not a spiritual theory but a scientific truth that cannot be easily denied.

Sri Aurobindo adds to this sentence that what we experience is only “a conceptual form of substance.” Substance is a conceptual form—one cannot see it, one cannot touch it and one cannot realise it. Today’s scientist says that he cannot even observe the movement of an atom as an object that is not influenced by the subject. Then, where is objective Matter? The scientist seems to imply that there is no Matter, and Sri Aurobindo adds that there is only an arbitrary distinction in thought which divides form of substance and form of energy. There is hardly any difference; it is a kind of conception. We have formed a conception saying this is the nucleus, this is the electron, but actually, it is essential Matter.

How do we understand the phrase ‘essential Matter’ in the sentence that we quoted? What you and me see here as Matter is not Matter in reality, but only the quality of Matter. For example, when I ask ‘what is this in my hand?’ you may answer, ‘that is a piece of chalk’. How do we know that it is a piece of chalk? We then recount its qualities. We say that what

we see is a white form and that when we touch it we feel that it is hard, etc. So, what we are seeing are the qualities of Matter but not Matter itself because Matter is this 99.99% emptiness, and what our own senses are seeing is 0.01% Matter and its qualities. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo writes that “essential Matter is non-existent to the senses,” but for the sense experience it is there. The Mother, in one of her conversations, says that science has found the truth which Shankaracharya or Buddha realised and that by ‘diametrically opposite roads’ they have come to realise that Matter is an illusion.

If these atoms were not there, how could the Mother have taken the trouble of transforming the physical body? For it is these atoms which form into cells. The atoms are the miracle of this world. That is why we call an atom a reflection of the great universe—the universe in which the centre is the Brahman, and the emptiness gives us the sense of an illusion.

Now, shall we go a step further and find out what this energy is? Sri Aurobindo writes: “The Energy that creates the world can be nothing else than a Will, and Will is only consciousness applying itself to a work and a result.”<sup>23</sup>

We will try to understand what this means. He says that energy has an extra property—that of work-capacity. For example, we have coal, which is Matter, and by burning it, it turns into energy. This energy we can then use for a particular purpose such as driving an engine. Behind this concept of energy, we understand that there is the idea of a work-purpose. So, energy implies that there is a work-purpose; it is intended for a particular work or work-capacity. So the concept of energy has got the built-in idea of work-capacity.

When we say ‘work-capacity’, we also mean that somebody is going to do the work. When I say, ‘I want to work’, it means that there is an ‘I’ behind the work. When somebody decides to take up a work, that decision is called ‘will’. Even in normal life, if I want to do a certain work I have to put my

‘will’ behind it. Can ‘will’ exist without any base? No! It has got to be the ‘will’ of *somebody*. Here, ‘will’ is being supported by consciousness. For example, I have consciously ‘willed’ that today there will be *The Life Divine* class. So, when I consciously ‘willed’ it, I put my work- energy and effort behind it and it has resulted in this class.

In this chapter, Sri Aurobindo shows us that in reality Matter and Spirit are not truly divided, and that, in fact, there is a continuity of substance between them, and when they are seen from a deeper angle, Matter is Spirit and vice versa. They are like the two ends of a line—one end is A the other end is B. End A is Spirit and end B is Matter, but there are grades in between them which have been clearly and categorically distinguished by Sri Aurobindo as Life, Mind and Supermind, with some other levels between Mind and Supermind. This is his unique contribution to philosophy which is, of course, based upon his own experience.

In a way, Sri Aurobindo has shown scientifically the ‘how’ of the world, the ‘how’ of creation itself! What we mean by ‘how’ is the process. So once he has given us this extraordinary process, rationally, it becomes very convincing to the mind. Therefore, one need not convert oneself into a religious bigot or become a blind follower of Sri Aurobindo. There is no such need. Even if we try very hard we cannot turn Sri Aurobindo into a religion, because he is the process of evolution itself. “Sri Aurobindo’, as the Mother so beautifully puts it, “is the Future advancing towards its realisation.”<sup>24</sup> He is a consciousness realising itself—eternally realising itself right from the beginning, and he is the one evolving from age to age, from level to level. When Sri Aurobindo was once asked what he was doing in his previous lives, he replied that he was working for evolution. And he has been working not only for man’s evolution, but also for the evolution of the earth itself. So, he has come in

different forms to work out this evolution. He has thus been the eternal process of evolution itself.

Lastly, Sri Aurobindo talks about the future of science, and here are the prophetic sentences. For those who are scientists or those who like to do research in science, here is an extraordinary subject. He writes:

“Science itself begins to dream of the physical conquest of death, expresses an insatiable thirst for knowledge, is working out something like a terrestrial omnipotence for humanity. Space and Time are contracting to the vanishing-point in its works ..”<sup>25</sup>

Today we have e-mail, Internet and websites. Here, we can see the truth of what Sri Aurobindo foretold in 1915 the fact that “Space and Time are contracting to the vanishing-point ...” We have truly reached that vanishing-point with all our internetting, the miniature mobile phones, etc.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

... and it strives in a hundred ways to make man the master of circumstance and so lighten the fetters of causality. The idea of limit, of the impossible begins to grow a little shadowy and it appears instead that whatever man constantly wills, he must in the end be able to do; for the consciousness in the race eventually finds the means.<sup>26</sup>

In this light, we can now understand and accept what Sri Aurobindo tells us about the future, about the dawning of the Supermind and the new spiritual age. This is the greatness of human consciousness that through all its failures and defeats, ultimately, it finds its way out.

It is not in the individual that this omnipotence expresses itself, but the collective Will of mankind that works out with the individual as a means. And yet when we look more deeply, it is not any conscious Will of the collectivity,

but a superconscious Might that uses the individual as a centre and means, the collectivity as a condition and field.<sup>27</sup>

Right in the beginning of *The Life Divine*, in the second chapter itself, we have seen a most extraordinary vision of materialism, science, and what Matter is. Towards the end of this chapter, Sri Aurobindo writes that we, as a race, are moving towards the fulfilment of the great vision. There is a divine plan which is fulfilled by mankind as a race. True, it does start with an impulse in the individual, but it is indispensable that humanity itself be receptive to the Will of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo warns that if humanity does not consent to be spiritualised, it will be made to do so through crushing circumstances. In fact, it seems those crushing circumstances are already here. The Indo-Pak tension, the Middle-East problem, the eastern problem and the western problem are all examples of these crushing circumstances.

We, humanity, have been given enough time to give our consent to spirituality, but being immersed and lost in materialism, we have forgotten the Supreme's Will. Therefore, humanity is being crushed and forced to look up to its spiritual destiny—the destiny wherein lies the ultimate resting place of Peace and Ananda.

In the vision of Sri Aurobindo, this spiritual destiny of mankind is already on its way to fulfilment. One of its signs is that “the borders that divide the material from the immaterial”<sup>28</sup> are getting thinner and reduced, and it may be that in the not too distant a future the reduction of the difference between the physical and supraphysical, between the material and psychic will reach a vanishing-point. Science and technology have evolved immensely, and they have succeeded to a great length in removing this “sensible physical means for the intermediate transmission”<sup>29</sup> between the physical and the non-physical.

For example, in the case of telegraphy, there used to be

a physical means for the intermediary transmission, but now that is no longer necessary. Sri Aurobindo saw that, eventually, the human mind will be able to “seize on the physical energy”<sup>30</sup> and direct it towards its goal. This would be a beginning of a direct communication between the material and the immaterial— something like what we see in occultism. Sri Aurobindo sees such a trend in science and technology as one of the positive signs of the coming of the future spirituality.

This vanishing-point on the level of the physical could ultimately lead us to a vanishing-point on the psychological level where ego would be completely annulled and the multiplicity will be embraced by unity at the place “where the external draws into oneness with the internal”<sup>31</sup> and humanity will realise its divine nature. This would be the crowning realisation of what the Gita said long ago when it spoke of *Swarajya* and *Samrajya*, *Salokya mukti* (liberation by conscious existence in one world of being with the Divine) and *Sadharmya mukti* (liberation by assumption of the divine nature).

Thus, Sri Aurobindo’s synthetic vision embraces the denial of the materialist, seeing it as a necessary step in human evolution. It has resulted in a well-organised knowledge of Matter, a foundation upon which the future spirituality will stand. For the Everest-like peaks of the spirituality of the future, there will also be the necessity of the Himalayan base of Matter. That is the integral vision offered by Sri Aurobindo.

## References

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- 3.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 7 (para 3).
- 4.Ibid., p. 9 (para 7).
- 5.SABCL, vol. 20, p. 287.
- 6.SABCL, vol. 16, p. 247.

- 7.SABCL, vol. 18, pp. 10-11 (para 11).
- 8.SABCL, vol. 16, pp. 247-248.
- 9.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 6 (opening quote).
10. SABCL, vol. 12, pp. 337-338.
11. Ibid., vol. 12, p. 338.
12. SABCL, vol. 16, p. 248.
13. Ibid., vol. 16, p. 248.
14. Ibid., vol. 16, p. 248.
15. SABCL, vol. 17, p. 82.
16. Ibid., vol. 17, p. 146.
17. Ibid., vol. 17, p. 108.
18. Ibid., vol. 17, p. 96.
19. SABCL, vol. 18, p. 12 (para 15).
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21. Ibid., p. 14 (para 18).
22. Ibid., p. 14 (para 18).
23. Ibid., p. 14 (para 19).
24. CWM, vol. 13, p. 5.
25. SABCL, vol. 18, pp. 14-15 (para 20).
26. Ibid., p. 15 (para 20).
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29. Ibid., p. 15 (para 21).
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31. Ibid., p. 16 (para 22).

## LECTURE NOTES

### *I. Introduction*

- (a) As an analysis: Chapter II = thesis; Chapter III = antithesis; Chapter IV = synthesis.
- (b) Synthesis:
  - (i) The Eternal Spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the weaver of this mutable robe.

- (ii) Matter as a fit and noble material, out of which the Divine builds the unending series of his mansions.
  - (iii) A series of ascending terms: body, life, mind and Supermind.
- (c) By bringing in oppositions between God and Nature, Purusha and Prakriti, we bring in a dichotomy between *Nirguna Brahman* and *Saguna Brahman*.

By focusing exclusively on the Purusha aspect the only logical experiential result is the cessation of activity and withdrawal into the immutable Brahman. Or else, as in Shankaracharya's philosophy, a dissolution of the multiplicity into the Eternal Silence.

- (d) By and overemphasis on Nature or Prakriti we shall inevitably deny God. This is an illusion of the senses because senses would consider all that is beyond their reach as an illusion and thereby God or Spirit is deleted from the purview of being a Reality.

## II. *The denial of the materialist*

- (a) Once the rhythm is disturbed, it is necessary and helpful that man should test the great opposites separately. Man has to go to the extremes before he can return fruitfully upon the whole. This is because man cannot understand integrally and has to divide in parts.
- (b) The two great opposites:
  - (i) The negation of the materialist—the West.
  - (ii) The refusal of the ascetic—the East.
- (c) The premises of the materialist—physical senses are the sole means of knowledge and reason cannot escape beyond their domain.
- (d) Such a premise is too limited and as a result they ignore the vast field of experience/evidence that is beyond the senses. They refuse to investigate the supraphysical phenomena—this is the materialists' weakness.

### III. *The indispensable utility of rationalistic materialism*

- (a) Five godheads of materialism: reason, science, progress, freedom, humanity (Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation*, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, vol. 16, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1971, pp. 245— 248)—the gains of materialism.
- (b) The rationalist tendency has removed the cobwebs of superstitious religions, crude beliefs, blind truth and prejudgements.
- (c) Today, science has given us the knowledge of the process in the physical; this knowledge will be useful tomorrow when spirituality will be the predominant factor of life.
- (d) Matter is Brahman.
- (e) Both outward and inner progress is essential but inward progress is not complete if outward is left out. Inner freedom and outer freedom are essential for integral personality.
- (f) Humanitarianism brings out increasing kindness, tolerance, charity, etc.
- (g) Once these gains of materialism are well established, they would be of great help in the next evolutionary stage— which is the spiritual age. Broader the materialistic base, the higher would be the spiritual peaks of tomorrow.
- (h) Attitude of atheism and agnosticism: do not believe in blind faith and superstitious dogmas and the deeper quest for knowing that which is unknown.
- (i) If Reality is unknowable—that it escapes the grasp of our thought and speech, it is attainable by the supreme effort of consciousness and development of corresponding faculties. In the evolution of Nature,

its innate impulse towards self- realisation is bound to bring forth these hidden faculties.

#### IV. *Present trend of science*

- (a) In its search for knowledge, science will go beyond sense- knowledge.
- (b) Knowledge by whatever line tends to become one; example of science confirming the truths of Vedanta. Example: Alvin Toffler and Gary Zhukov.
- (c) Vedantic truths rediscovered and spoken of in the scientific language have a greater acceptability.
- (d) Monism of Matter, Matter = energy/force (convertible):  $E=MC^2$ . Vedic idea: Sachchidananda has become the many; so everything is essentially Brahman. So, in a way, the spiritualist and the materialist say the same thing.

#### V. *Nature of Matter*

- (a) Essential Matter is non-existent to the senses.
- (b) Energy-work-capacity-somebody-Will or intelligence. The concept of energy has got the built-in idea of work-capacity, which means somebody will do the work. This decision is Will. Science recognises this as Intelligence.

#### VI. *Future of science*

- (a) Science is working out something like a terrestrial omnipotence for humanity.
- (b) Ultimately Mind will find the means to seize on the physical energy and speed it accurately upon its errand. Beginning of a direct communication between the material and the immaterial—something like occultism.
- (c) Once the ego is annulled, multiplicity will be embraced by unity, and humanity would realise its divine nature.

## Chapter Three

### The Two Negations: The Refusal of the Ascetic

The 'Refusal of the Ascetic' is the second part of the 'The Two Negations.' Sri Aurobindo begins the chapter with these two quotes from the Mandukya Upanishad, verses 2 and 7:

All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman and the Self is fourfold.

Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still.<sup>1</sup>

The ideas presented here are a bit complicated. Their thought is too vast and deep for us to fathom. So, we will wait until we reach the end of the chapter and see if their meaning becomes clearer.

In Chapter II, we first saw that materialism speaks of the reality of matter alone. Materialists say that matter is the absolute final reality and they do not accept anything beyond the range of the external physical senses. Then, we saw the godheads of materialism, as well as the need and the utility of the materialist viewpoint and what they have contributed to the evolution. The major contribution of the materialist viewpoint has been the manner in which it turned the heavenward gaze of religion back towards the earth. Therefore, in a way, the materialists with their earthward bent of mind form a firm base for the many-tiered Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo starts the chapter with a cryptic sentence: And still there is a beyond.<sup>2</sup>

The beyond is not just one place or world beyond the material world; there are layers and layers of the beyond, levels and levels of the beyond. These are the levels which the sage Bhrigu progressively discovered by 'energising his

consciousness, until he reached the ultimate Reality, which he discovered was 'Bliss': "He knew Bliss for Eternal." <sup>3</sup> There are multiple levels of Reality in this universe, so we can't say 'matter is unreal', nor can we say 'matter alone is real'. Matter *is* real in its own way and on its own level. But Bhriгу, as described in the Taittiriya Upanishad, after meditating and energising his consciousness, ascends from one reality to another, going higher and higher, until he finally reaches Brahman. Of this Bliss Bhriгу says: "For from Bliss alone, it appears, are these creatures born and being born they live by Bliss and to Bliss they go hence and return" <sup>4</sup>

The ascetic is so enamoured with the beyond as Silence that he insists that Silence alone is the Reality. Now, if Silence or the Nirguna Brahman is a vaster Reality, should we accept that alone and reject matter? There have been ascetics and spiritualists who have realised this Silence and then insist that Silence or Nirguna Brahman is the one and only truth. On the other hand, the materialists insist that matter alone is the truth. Thus, we have these completely opposite views. What, if it indeed exists, is their meeting point?

First of all, let us examine the viewpoint of the materialists. Yesterday we saw the benefits of materialism and now we shall expose its drawbacks and weaknesses. Materialism, strictly speaking, is not wholly materialistic, because, as Sri Aurobindo points out, there are existences in the world of Matter that cannot be perceived by the five physical senses. Here we are not talking about the phenomena of the subtle worlds or of abstract ranges of a higher consciousness, nor are we referring to happenings in the vital (Pranamaya) or the mental (Manomaya) worlds, but to subtle realities present here in the material world itself. The problem with the materialist is that he recognises only the five physical senses. But Sri Aurobindo speaks of the existence of subtle or supraphysical senses, which are quite real and important. They

not only reveal the hidden realities of the physical world, but also “bring us into contact with other realities, supraphysical and belonging to another world ...”<sup>5</sup>

In Indian psychology these supraphysical senses are called *sukshma indriya*. They are subtle organs present in the *sukshma deha* or subtle body. Also present is the *sukshma dristi*, which is a means of subtle vision and experience. A common example of the working of these subtle organs is the hearing of a sound, such as the ringing of temple bells or the call of a melodious flute when there is nowhere a bell being rung or a flute being played. In fact, this was a real experience of an Indian army officer who had visited Sri Aurobindo’s room. He sat for meditation and while sitting there he heard the ringing of temple bells. From where did the bell-sounds come? There are dormant subtle physical senses in man, quite similar to the real senses of hearing, feeling or touch. But science at present is not ready to accept the existence of these subtle senses. But in modern psychology concepts are slowly changing since the time when Sri Aurobindo wrote about these subtle senses and it is now conceivable that there could be a bridging some day. In India, however, the existence of these subtle senses is already recognised, and it is quite common in Indian yogic practices for many yogis to hear and see the supraphysical or subtle sounds and forms. Sri Aurobindo says that the one thing that the scientists and the materialists miss out (as a result of the bias of scepticism) is the supraphysical reality.

We have a subatomic world which is accepted by science as a purely physical reality. Our senses cannot see what is within an atom, and yet it is the reality in matter. So, what Sri Aurobindo is telling us is that we have narrowed down the senses to such a limit that we are even missing out on a lot of the ‘physical’ reality. One simple example is that of the dog’s hearing capacity which is much sharper than that of a

human being's. It only goes to show that beyond the limits of our physical senses there do exist other ultra and infra ranges of sound which are not audible to the human being.

Sri Aurobindo narrates in a letter a very interesting incident regarding the supraphysical reality. It was the Mother's own experience of simultaneously being in two places and in two bodies (in the physical and subtle bodies) at once. He writes:

X probably referred to an experience in which the Mother being in Algiers appeared to a circle of friends sitting in Paris and took up a pencil and wrote a few words on a paper. Having satisfied herself that it was possible she did not develop it any further. That was at a time when she was practicing occultism with Theon in Algiers. Materialisation is possible but it does not happen easily — it demands a very rare and difficult concentration of forces ..<sup>6</sup>

We will have a look at another example given in the book *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Swami Paramahansa Yogananda. It is an extremely interesting case. As a young boy when Swami Yogananda was proceeding to Banaras (Varanasi) his father said to him:

“I have a business matter to propose to a Banaras friend, Kedar Nath Babu. Unfortunately I have lost his address. But I believe you will be able to get this letter to him through our common friend, Swami Pranabananda. The swami, my brother disciple, has attained an exalted spiritual stature. You will benefit by his company; this second note will serve as your introduction.”

Swami Yogananda continues with his narration (only a few selections from their conversation are provided here):

Reaching Banaras, I proceeded immediately to the swami's residence ... A rather stout man, wearing only a loincloth, was seated in lotus posture on a slightly raised platform . he greeted me as an old friend.

“*Baba anand* (bliss to my dear one)”. His welcome was given heartily in a childlike voice. I knelt and touched his feet.

“Are you Swami Pranabananda?”

He nodded. “Are you Bhagabati’s son?” His words were out before I had had time to get Father’s letter from my pocket. In astonishment, I handed him the note of introduction, which now seemed superfluous.

“Of course I will locate Kedar Nath Babu for you” The saint again surprised me by his clairvoyance.

Abruptly terminating our conversation, the saint became gravely motionless. He had not yet told me how I might meet Father’s friend. A trifle restlessly, I looked about me in the bare room, empty except for us two.

“Little sir, don’t get worried. The man you wish to see will be with you in half an hour.” The yogi was reading my mind—a feat not too difficult at the moment!

Again he fell into inscrutable silence. When my watch informed me that thirty minutes had elapsed, the swami aroused himself.

“I think Kedar Nath Babu is nearing the door,” he said. I heard somebody coming up the stairs. An amazed incomprehension arose suddenly; my thoughts raced in confusion: “How is it possible that Father’s friend has been summoned to this place without the help of a messenger? The swami has spoken to no one but me since my arrival.”

“Are you Kedar Nath Babu?” Excitement coloured my voice.

“Yes. Are you not Bhagabati’s son who has been waiting here to meet me?” He smiled in friendly fashion.

“Sir, how do you happen to come here?” I felt baffled resentment over his inexplicable presence.

“Everything is mysterious today! Less than an hour ago

I had just finished my bath in the Ganges when Swami Pranabananda approached me. I have no idea how he knew I was there at that time.

“ ‘Bhagabati’s son is waiting for you in my apartment,’ he said. ‘Will you come with me?’ I gladly agreed. As we proceeded hand in hand, the swami in his wooden sandals was strangely able to outpace me, though I wore these stout walking shoes.

“ ‘How long will it take you to reach my place?’ Pranabanandaji suddenly halted to ask me this question.

“ ‘About half an hour.’

“ ‘I have something else to do at present.’ He gave me an enigmatical glance. ‘I must leave you behind. You can join me in my house, where Bhagabati’s son and I will be awaiting you.’

“Before I could remonstrate, he dashed swiftly past me and disappeared in the crowd. I walked here as fast as possible.”

This explanation only increased my bewilderment. I inquired how long he had known the swami.

“We met a few times last year, but not recently. I was very glad to see him again today at the bathing *ghat*.”

“I cannot believe my ears! Am I losing my mind? Did you meet him in a vision, or did you actually see him, touch his hand, and hear the sound of his feet?”

“I don’t know what you’re driving at!” He flushed angrily. “I am not lying to you. Can’t you understand that only through the swami could I have known you were waiting at this place for me?”

“Why, that man, Swami Pranabananda, has not left my sight a moment since I first came about an hour ago.” I blurted out the whole story, and repeated the conversations the swami and I had had.

His eyes opened widely. "Are we living in this material age, or are we dreaming? I never expected to witness such a miracle in my life! I thought this swami was just an ordinary man, and now I find he can materialize an extra body and work through it!" Together we entered the saint's room.

Kedar Nath Babu pointed to the shoes under the platform seat.

"Look, those are the very sandals he was wearing at the *ghat*," he whispered. "He was clad only in a loincloth, just as I see him now."

"As the visitor bowed before him, the saint turned to me with a quizzical smile.

"Why are you stupefied at all this? The subtle unity of the phenomenal world is not hidden from true yogis. I instantly see and converse with my disciples in distant Calcutta. They can similarly transcend at will every obstacle of gross matter."<sup>7</sup>

So here are some of the possibilities which modern science and modern mentality will neither understand nor accept.

As another example, we have a very beautiful episode in the life of Anandamayi Ma. A photographer, eager to photograph her, took thirty-six snapshots of her. When he went home to develop the film, he found to his great amazement that Anandamayi Ma was not there even in one photograph! Remember that he was a professional photographer! While taking photographs he could see Anandamayi Ma, but the photographic film could not capture her image. So he went back and pleaded with Anandamayi Ma, telling her that he truly wanted to photograph her. She consented and only then was he able to develop photographs which contained her image. Is it not strange!

There are many mystical experiences and occult happenings which are not in the domain of the materialists. Sri Aurobindo tells us not to delimit our knowledge to only the five senses;

otherwise, we will be missing out on everything happening on the suprasensory level and in the supraphysical worlds. At the same time, we should be cautious. Since the incident of Swami Yogananda's is from a yogi who lived his teaching, we take it to be true, but there could be many 'fanciful' incidents narrated by egoistic persons. In such human beings, there is a tendency to exaggerate small supranormal experiences. Then it becomes a hoax, a falsity. There is also the possibility that some men will misuse these supraphysical capabilities. Sri Aurobindo warns us that these experiences must be well "scrutinised and arranged by the reason, rightly translated and rightly related, and their field, laws and processes determined."<sup>8</sup> That is, all this must come under the purview of an open and balanced mind. But we should not be 'fanatically' scientific either. Science is supposed to be the *avatar* of all inquiries. A scientist should not have a closed mind, but rather, one which inquires into all possible aspects of things. For example, Sri Aurobindo mentions that science did not initially accept telepathy, but now scientists are accepting telepathy as a phenomenon both proven and verified.

In this chapter, Sri Aurobindo tells us that if we have an attitude of open inquiry, we will be able to catch a glimpse of the worlds that exist beyond. There is a beautiful short sentence in this chapter, which says, "The worlds beyond exist ..."<sup>9</sup> Sri Aurobindo does not argue the point here, but allows the sentence to stand as a statement of fact. However, in *Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo has provided us with very clear descriptions of these "worlds beyond" The entire yoga of King Aswapati is a journey into these worlds. Sri Aurobindo has experientially verified the existence of all these worlds beyond. Our rational mind at present may find it difficult to accept this truth, but our faith in Sri Aurobindo and his scientific approach should open our mind to at least accepting the possibility of the existence of these "worlds beyond." In

*Savitri*, Sri Aurobindo makes us aware that the earth is not the only 'substance' body.

Beyond this earth there are subtle bodies 'of other substances' that are, in a way, enveloping and interpenetrating this physical earth.

So what is the relevance of these worlds to our world? Do they have any relation to our world? They most certainly do. In fact, beings from these worlds do come and contact us on earth and use earth-inhabitants, man, woman, beast and creature, for their own purposes, for their own fulfilment. So, we should not consider these worlds as domains cut-off from ours. In *Savitri*, there are lengthy descriptions which tell us how man is often made a pawn by the inhabitants of these worlds, who can be either benevolent or malevolent entities. The smallest feeling of jealousy, anger or greed is a manifestation of these malevolent entities, or forces or energies. If there is a weakness within, be it jealousy or greed or lust, etc., then entities from the vital worlds come and use our ignorance and we start feeling these urges within us. These urges do not really originate from within us, but are rather put into us by lower vital entities who are seeking their own satisfaction. So when we are open to them, are we not just puppets or victims in the hands of these forces? Yes! I am afraid that we are just that! In addition, all that we think and feel proud of as our great abilities, achievements and success, all that is nothing but a kind of reflection of these other worlds on this physical world. Hence, this physical world is only the grossest stage of the manifestation of many worlds.

So, we see how we are in a dangerous and precarious situation and herein comes the role and need of yoga. What we need to have is a ring of protection around us. If we call to the Supreme, if we invoke the Mother, if we can envelope ourselves with this ring of the Mother's protection, the Supreme-Consciousness-

Force's protection, then these beings and messengers cannot come and use us as victims and channels for the fulfilment of their desires. Otherwise, we are the helpless playthings of these hostile forces. To give an example, how many times have we not seen someone becoming angry suddenly, who just a moment before was all cool and calm! How does this happen? Now we seem to know why. So, there is a need, a necessity of a divine protection. One of the easiest methods to keep this ring of divine protection around us is through japa, nama-japa in particular. If one can have a constant mantric-japa of whatever mantra one chooses, or one is given, then one keeps this ring of protection around oneself. Then one is no more the playfield of all these hostile forces that are trying to make anyone their instrument. One is thus left to oneself to proceed towards the Divine. Otherwise, the lower nature will keep constantly dragging us down. This is why Sri Aurobindo has explained to us in *The Life Divine*, as well as in *Savitri*, that the existence of these other worlds cannot be ignored.

Sri Aurobindo now takes up a new point. What are the effects of the two views, namely, materialism and asceticism, on our life? First of all, we will have a look at the effect of the 'materialist's' view. What is the chief characteristic of the materialistic life? Sri Aurobindo describes it here in this wonderful sentence as "a feverish effort of the individual to snatch what he may from a transient existence ..."<sup>10</sup>

What is this "feverish effort" for getting as much as one can from this life? We notice that modern-day youngsters, by and large, want to move up in life as rapidly as possible, become rich as quickly as possible, gain experiences as fast as possible! And this has turned life into a rat-race. This is the feverishness which creates tension in the whole being. These youngsters are as if sold to the single ideal of snatching or gathering matter in the forms of money, comforts, pleasures, or in the form of power. So in this madness and in this rush, each one feels that

he must do whatever he can to grab this matter—matter in the form of gold, dollars, rupees, etc. The materialist says, ‘I am free to live my life as I want, use my riches as I want to and to get these riches by whatever means I can.’ This philosophy of ‘it is my life and I will live it as I want to’ is a kind of ‘freedom’ which the western world values very much. Individual independence has made each one responsible for his or her own fate. Right from the age of twelve or thirteen, one is not dependent on or answerable to anyone or any ideal. Even parents do not bother or interfere with their child’s life and they say, ‘he is free to do what he wants!’ This sense of fending for oneself has been so strongly ingrained from childhood in the western children that they do not like to take advice from anyone, be it parents, teachers or elders. Consequently, there is no social binding, no understanding of a collective family. They reject being guided by a guru or by a Shastra, because they do not know their inner aspiration. Unfortunately, this is also the tendency of every human being caught in materialistic values, be it in the West or the East.

But materialism has an altruistic side as well, which Sri Aurobindo describes as “a dispassionate and objectless service of the race and the individual ...”<sup>11</sup> This is a larger idea. If materialists propose a higher ideal, it would be that of charity, altruism, philanthropy, work for the race, work for the society, and work for the country. All this comes under the term ‘humanitarianism’. Let us work for the human race they say, after all, ‘what I have gained I shall not take with me, so let it be my gift to humanity’—that is the attitude. If a scientist has discovered something great, he knows that he has contributed something valuable to the race. This is the highest ideal a materialist can have: a dispassionate service to society in whatever form, be it a nation or a religion.

Sri Aurobindo then says: “We work or enjoy under the impulsion of a material energy which deceives us with the

brief delusion of life or with the nobler delusion of an ethical aim and a mental consummation”<sup>12</sup> If both of these things are delusions, then where does that land us? We land in a Maya of materialism! He writes: “Materialism like spiritual Monism arrives at a Maya ...”<sup>13</sup> What is this Maya? Here, the word ‘Maya’ is not used in its original sense. It means “that is and yet is not ...”<sup>14</sup> Materialism is real; we can see this feverishness that has now gripped every individual in the present days. So it is evident that Maya is there, materialism is there. But how is it ‘not there’? It is not there in the sense that it is temporal, not eternal. Materialism is something impermanent, temporary. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo uses the word ‘Maya’ in this new sense and explains in a refreshing manner how materialism also lands us in a kind of Maya, because individually, we are all bitten by this bug of materialism even though we are aware that all these material gains are only temporary. This is the Maya of the materialists.

Now let us examine the effect of the ascetic view on us. Asceticism, the opposite of materialism, arrives by a different means at a similar, but a still more trenchant conclusion. When one realises Brahman, it is said to be such a blissful and overwhelming experience that this world looks unreal, or to put it in another way, ‘all this is illusion.’ Once one knows Brahman to be the only truth, then, quite naturally, one tries to escape or withdraw from this ‘unreal’ world. Sri Aurobindo mentions that if the aim is to go to the Beyond, it is but logical that one will search for the shortest route to reach that consciousness or being called Brahman. ‘Why should we waste our time meandering in this labyrinthine world? Let us take up the path of renunciation, of the sannyasin, and get going on our way to Brahman as quickly as possible.’ This was the attitude which prevailed in India for nearly two thousand years, whereas in the Vedantic period, life as a whole was accepted as real. The latter asceticism had, for its bedrock, the Maya of Illusionism!

It is very clear that logically one cannot discuss or argue with Shankaracharya's final conclusion that this world is Maya. Nor can the Advaitin argue with the materialist, because both have a "hiatus of experience."<sup>15</sup> Each one puts forth a very strong logical argument based on an undeniable experience, but there is a huge gap between the two. So, Sri Aurobindo suggests that we should not argue on the level of the intellect, for there is no end to that. The solution is to bridge these two opposing views and make a synthesis. How can it be done? Only by an expansion of our consciousness into the cosmic consciousness can we solve this dilemma. But then what is this cosmic consciousness?

Sri Aurobindo writes that, basically, there are three levels of consciousness: the transcendental, the cosmic and the individual. He explains that at the individual level it is not possible to make the synthesis. We have to rise in our consciousness to a higher level. On the cosmic level, we have a realisation of the one existence, but this realisation of the one existence is not the same as the experience of the transcendental existence. In the cosmic consciousness one experiences that all thoughts, all feelings and even individual physical bodies have come from one source. There is one cosmic Mind to which all our 'minds' are receptive. We are not separate minds and intelligences; all are multiple entities of this one cosmic Mind. Similarly, there is cosmic Matter, as proved by Bell's Theory that all matter is one and it is inseparably one. Finally, the spiritualist also says that all matter is one unity from which all the bodies in the universe originate and multiply.

We will take a look at one example in order to understand this. We see the ocean and on its surface we see the multiple waves.

Behind all the waves, there exists this single ocean. Now, does the wave exist independently of the ocean? No! A wave is

only an expression—some are low and small, while others are large and violent; some are calm, while others are dancing. Yet each of these waves is nothing but part and parcel of the one ocean. Similarly, on the level of the cosmic consciousness, we realise that even our own body is nothing but an expression put forth by cosmic matter. My mind is nothing but a wave of the cosmic Mind. My feelings are nothing but waves of the cosmic forces. With this realisation, the entire view of life changes; negative feelings such as enmity, jealousy, animosity, smallness, pettiness and all other ignoble sentiments vanish into thin air. We know that we are this wave, and even if we think of this wave as separated, we know that behind us is the unifying cosmic consciousness. Then wave A and wave B are only apparently separate—like I am standing here and you are sitting there and we are separate, but what is uniting us is this space between us. Similarly, what is uniting waves A and B is the entire cosmic ocean. Then we realise that waves A and B are not separate; they are in one consciousness, they *are* one consciousness, and with this realisation begins a change of attitude. Can waves A and B fight with each other? They cannot! Will my left hand beat my right hand? It will not! Both the left hand and the right hand understand that they belong to the same body. This is what happens in the cosmic consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says that it affects our life movements as well as our social movements. Our feelings towards others are no longer antagonistic; rather, there is this cosmic, universal understanding of Oneness. Sri Aurobindo says that modern psychology is slowly recognising the cosmic consciousness. In the East, the recognition of it has always been present.

In the cosmic consciousness, we become aware of matter as one existence and we realise that individual bodies are its formations.

This is also the case with Life and Mind. When we live in this

consciousness our whole life changes producing effects not only on the moral and mental fields, but even in the physical world and its events. Living in the cosmic consciousness, we can access “means nearer to the Divine than those possible to our egoistic capacity.”<sup>16</sup>

In the cosmic consciousness, we not only understand the individual's oneness with the cosmic oneness, but we also get a glimpse and understanding of the transcendent. We can have both the higher experience of the transcendental and the lower experiences of the individual, not as separate things, but as one unified formation of the transcendent. We see “that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness ...”<sup>17</sup> To understand this at the cosmic level is a rich experience, for there one simultaneously holds the individual as well as the transcendental levels of consciousness. However, the ultimate experience of the transcendental is not the same experience as that of the cosmic consciousness.

Mind's understanding is based on division, and division implies individualisation (the materialist view). In the transcendental level of consciousness, there is oneness and unity, and there is no other being apart from the transcendent (the ascetic view). If one is at the cosmic level, which is in between the two, one can combine the two. On the one side, we see the transcendental consciousness, and on the other we see the individual consciousness. That is why the cosmic consciousness, Sri Aurobindo opines, is the perfect solution to bridge the transcendental and the individual, as well as Spirit and Matter.

The secret of this cosmic consciousness is that it does not perceive any difference between consciousness and being.

That is to say, there is no division between Chit-Tapas and Sat, whereas on our mental level, we see a complete division between consciousness and being. If we see matter

as separated from consciousness or energy, then we fall into falsehood or illusion. But such a unitary vision as that of the cosmic consciousness sees the truth of the world. It takes it as “real precisely because it exists only in consciousness; for it is a Conscious Energy one with Being that creates it.”<sup>18</sup>

This Being is, of course, the substance of the cosmic consciousness, the universe and the world, but it is at the same time beyond it. Therefore, one can say that the “World lives by That ...”<sup>19</sup> But since it exceeds the world and does not depend on it, we can say “That does not live by the world”<sup>20</sup> Is it possible then to remain in this Being beyond the world and have no further relation with the manifestation? Or can we maintain a link between the transcendent and the cosmic consciousness? That is the question that needs to be looked into.

Generally the transcendental consciousness is described as ‘bright like ten thousand suns’, and this brightness, luminosity and brilliance is blinding to the ascetics, sannyasins and yogis who shoot up into this transcendental consciousness. Even in common experience, if one looks at the bright midday sun—it is difficult to look at it—and then enters one’s room, one can hardly see anything in the room, and it takes a few seconds for the eyes to get readjusted. If this can happen in our physical world, one can imagine the magnitude of what could happen in a spiritual experience! The dazzling brilliance of the Supreme is so tremendous, that it is said that when Shankaracharya looked back at the earth-experience he experienced it as an illusion. So it is logical and not something irrational that owing to the blinding effect of the Supreme, the sannyasin considers the world as an illusion or non-existent.

Now does this mean that Sri Aurobindo did not realise the Supreme or that he was not blinded by the experience of the supreme Brahman? Sri Aurobindo wrote that he has been living in the Brahmic consciousness for many years. If that is so, then why doesn’t he call this world an illusion? Perhaps the

secret is that Sri Aurobindo travelled consciously through the intermediary levels of consciousness, whereas Shankaracharya took a straight 'Supersonic flight' to Brahman! For example, if one wants to bask in the sunlight on the terrace after climbing the stairs, one's eyes get accustomed to the light outside and he will not be dazzled. If he then returns to his room via the same staircase, once more his eyes get accustomed and he will be able to see everything in the room clearly without being blinded. Thus, Sri Aurobindo *did* reach the Supreme Brahman, but since he passed through all the intermediary levels consciously, he could trace back all the levels of consciousness in between the human and the Brahman. These intermediary levels are the secret of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the secret of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual experiences. He calls them a 'ladder' and detailed knowledge of the secrets of this 'ladder' is his greatest contribution to the future of world spirituality.

Sri Aurobindo, through his great *tapasya* discovered this ladder, not only for himself to climb up and down, but also for all of us, so that we too can climb up that staircase. He has discovered this staircase to reach the Beyond and discovered it all by himself. The path is now full of roses; Sri Aurobindo has taken out all the thorns along the path. The very first adventurer, the Avatar, has discovered the stairway, the upward path, so that we can tread on it easily and safely, protected and secure.

As I was telling you, in the case of Shankaracharya, he perhaps took a straight jump into the Brahmic consciousness and from that height found the world full of ignorance and falsehood.

But Sri Aurobindo travelled up step-by-step dispelling darkness and ignorance as he rose. As a result, even after reaching the summit he could look back and say that this entire world is true, all this too is Brahman. He always considered matter as Reality, and thus, he never lost sight of the world.

In Book Two of *Savitri*, entitled ‘The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds’, Sri Aurobindo gives beautiful descriptions of the different worlds—worlds such as ‘The Kingdom of Subtle Matter’, ‘The Kingdoms of the Little Life’, ‘The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Life’, ‘The World of Falsehood’, ‘The Paradise of the Life-Gods’, ‘The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Little Mind’, ‘The Kingdoms and Godheads of the Greater Mind’, ‘The Heavens of the Ideal’ and ‘The World- Soul’. King Aswapati travels through all these worlds while keeping earth as the centre of his consciousness, because it is the earth that needs the Supreme’s grace for its transformation.

So now we know and understand why the ascetics declare the world to be an illusion. Unfortunately, this outlook has had an even more perilous effect on the individual and collective consciousness than that of materialism. Why is it so? It is because once one has tasted the bliss, one does not want to come back to this earth any more. Once one reaches the transcendental luminosity, peace and bliss, who would like to come back to this suffering world? The materialists, who are stuck in this suffering, are not in danger, because they will always try to come out of it. So to get stuck in materialism is better than to get stuck in the bliss of Brahman. It does look paradoxical, but that is what the Isha Upanishad also says. It says that asceticism leads to a darker Ignorance than the ignorance in materialism. It says that one day this matter, this earth will deliver itself out of ignorance because of the constant impetus, the aspiration of the evolving spirit to rise upward.

This asceticism has had an unfortunate effect on the Indian ethos, and it has also left a very negative impact on the Indian psyche. The ideals of the chain of karma, the question of bondage to life, escape by Moksha and cessation from birth—these negative ideas—brought about the downfall of our

country by sucking away all the vitality and strength from this creative nation.

Sri Aurobindo, in his book *The Foundations of Indian Culture and The Renaissance in India* (SABCL 14), talks about India—how she was once prolific in her creativity with a creative vital and mental culture, and how she had material growth in abundance. Unfortunately, these negative attitudes towards life sucked away that vital energy rendering the mind dull and passive. Sri Aurobindo in one of his writings opined that India's downfall occurred because it had lost the capacity of its original thinking, and one cannot be sure if we have yet come out of this danger. Even now we act like a Xerox machine. New ideas come from Europe and USA, and we stamp 'Made in India' on them and we accept them as Indian ideas. Sri Aurobindo indicates that, although it is a reality, we should not attach too much importance to the physical poverty that we see around us in India. Instead, we should understand that the deeper poverty is the absence or dearth of original thinking. We are lethargic, tamasic, slumbering in the mind and happy to be mediocre. We imitate and borrow everything from the West. Sri Aurobindo inspires us to think originally by encouraging us to recognise the indispensable contributions made by a multitude of original thinkers in India's past. We see that while working for the 'Bande Mataram', Sri Aurobindo gave back to India her culture. He reminded us that we are capable of thinking on our own, that we too have been great creators of the materialistic world; so we need not imitate, because imitation, however good, is never original or real. As it is said that one man's

food is another man's poison, so is imitation our poison.

Thus, asceticism has caused a great drain on Indian thinking, and this ideal of a world beyond—the great Vaikuntha, Brahmaloaka or Nirvana—is something that the Indian mind has unfortunately been looking towards for

solutions to our problems for a long time. So, the urgent necessity for India is to reclaim her genius, her originality and to learn once again to think for herself based on her vast and rich foundations.

But this negative attitude, despite its limitations, is also a truth of existence which stands as a summit of spiritual realisation. Therefore, the ascetic spirit is an indispensable element in man, and it will continue to exist so long as man is bound to ignorance. The Reality which the sannyasin seeks has been grasped in its full height, but not in its entire comprehensiveness and profundity.

However, Sri Aurobindo does not leave us with a negative note. He tells us that even this asceticism has its advantages. The contributions of this ascetic attitude are as important as the contributions of the materialist. In *The Foundations of Indian Culture and The Renaissance in India*, he tells us that the Indian mind has a tendency of going to an extreme and then reverting back to the middle ground. That is why the Indian genius, when it took to spirituality, went confidently to the extreme, even to the extent of the exclusion of all life. Today India has a great gift, that of the great experience of the integral Infinite, and this is what she can now offer to the world. Similarly, the materialistic mentality has gone to the very depths of materialism and brought out the treasures of matter. The treasures of Matter and the treasures of the Spirit have been brought together and integrated in Sri Aurobindo. They are like the left hand and the right hand of Sri Aurobindo as his is the synthetic consciousness. He alone can hold them in both his palms and offer both the treasures for the supramental's working.

Sri Aurobindo reconciles these two truths of Reality using the Upanishadic formulas: "One without a second" and "All this is the Brahman"<sup>21</sup> The ascetics accept the Upanishadic formula "One without a second," which for them means

that the “One alone” exists and nothing else; there is no manifestation of the universe. The second truth, “All this is the Brahman”, which is the truth of the descent of the Brahman into the multiplicity, is not at all emphasised by the ascetics.

The underlying truth in the second formula emphasises the integral vision of the Brahman as the ‘All’, which is itself the multiplicity, the creation. The multiplicity and the Brahman are inseparable. Unfortunately, the meaning of the word ‘All’ has been taken as a multiplicity which is separated from Brahman, because it is unlike Brahman. For example, Shankaracharya would emphasise the first formula and treat the second formula as having only a secondary importance. He says that the word ‘All’ in the second formula is only a praise for Brahman and that it does not really connote any manifestation. This is because he does not believe in the absolute reality of this manifestation.

Sri Aurobindo comments:

Buddha and Shankara supposed the world to be radically false and miserable; therefore escape from the world was to them the only wisdom. But this world is Brahman, the world is God, the world is Satyam, the world is Ananda; it is our misreading of the world through mental egoism that is a falsehood and our wrong relation with God in the world that is a misery. There is no other falsity and no other cause of sorrow.<sup>22</sup>

In order to understand the thought-content of the second formula we could perhaps take the example of a football. We do not separate the outer form of a football from the inner space within it. The emptiness and the form put together make a football. Similarly, the world is but a form of Brahman and cannot be separated from Brahman. In a way, they are one and the same, although Brahman exceeds the universe in his transcendental aspect.

These ancient truths have been commented upon variously by different *acharyas* like Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya, and others. And each, according to his inner realisation, emphasised one aspect of the Upanishadic formula that we have quoted before.

It is basically these ideas that are expressed in the quotation from the Mandukya Upanishad, verses 2 and 7, that Sri Aurobindo has given in the beginning of this chapter. Let us now return to this quotation and try to see what it connotes:

All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman and the Self is fourfold.

Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still.

Out of the three principle intuitions that the Upanishads have given us, this one, “All this is the Brahman”, *Sarvam khalu idam Brahman*, focuses more on the manifest aspect of the Brahman. The unmanifest aspect is the one which is emphasised in the formula “One without a second”, *Ekam advitiam*. In both the unmanifest and the manifest, the sole Reality is the Brahman. The manifestation is the “All”, and all these creations are but the body of the Brahman. Thus, all is inseparable from Brahman. He is the sole existent behind all that is moving or stable, mutable or immutable.

Brahman is also seen as the Self in his status as the immanent Divine in the temporal manifestation. There is no essential difference between the Brahman in his transcendental aspect and in his immanent aspect. Thus, we may say that the Self is the Brahman.

What does the word ‘fourfold’ mean in this quote? It means that there are four states of this Self. Without going into the details we may say that the Self is the self of all that is ‘awake’, and is known as Vaishvanara or Visva on the individual level, and as Virat on the universal level. Similarly, the Self is the

self of all that 'dreams' and is known as the *Tajasa* on the individual level, and as *Hiranyagarbha* or *Hiranmaya* on the universal level. The Self is also the self of all that is 'asleep' and is known as *Prajna* and as *Isvara* on the individual and the universal levels, respectively. Lastly, the Self is known as the *Turiya* on both the individual and universal levels, for this is the state of the transcendent, which is "Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still."

This brings us to the conclusion that Matter and Spirit are only different degrees of Reality. It is only through such an integral vision that there can be a final harmony between the truths of materialism and asceticism.

Emphasising on this harmony, Sri Aurobindo writes :

The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation. Its meaning in Matter has not been so well understood as Its truth in the Spirit. The Reality which the Sannyasin seeks has been grasped in its full height, but not, as by the ancient Vedantins, in its full extent and comprehensiveness. But in our completer affirmation we must not minimise the part of the pure spiritual impulse. As we have seen how greatly Materialism has served the ends of the Divine, so we must acknowledge the still greater service rendered by Asceticism to Life. We shall preserve the truths of material Science and its real utilities in the final harmony, even if many or even if all of its existing forms have to be broken or left aside.<sup>23</sup>

This integral vision was, in fact, the truth of the Aryan past and it promises to become the Truth of tomorrow.

## References

- 1.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 17 (opening quote).
- 2.Ibid., p. 17 (para 1).

- 3.SABCL, vol. 12, p. 340.
- 4.SABCL, vol. 12, p. 340.
- 5.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 18 (para 4).
- 6.SABCL, vol. 25, p. 372.
- 7.*Courtesy*. Paramahansa Yogananda, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, Thirteenth Impression, 1997, pp. 19-22 (ISBN 81-7224-121-6).
- 8.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 19 (para 6).
- 9.Ibid., p. 19 (para 6).
- 10.Ibid., p. 20 (para 8).
- 11.Ibid., p. 20 (para 8).
- 12.Ibid., p. 20 (para 8).
- 13.Ibid., p. 20 (para 8).
- 14.Ibid., p. 20 (para 8).
- 15.Ibid., p. 20 (para 9).
- 16.Ibid., p. 22 (para 12).
- 17.Ibid., p. 22 (para 13).
- 18.Ibid., p. 22 (para 13).
- 19.Ibid., p. 22 (para 14).
- 20.Ibid., p. 22 (para 14).
- 21.Ibid., p. 24 (para 18).
- 22.SABCL, vol. 17, pp. 49-50.
- 23.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 24 (para 18).

### **Lecture Notes**

#### **I. Introduction**

- (a) "And still there is a beyond." There are many levels of the Beyond and Bhriḡu has discovered the ultimate Reality as 'Bliss'.
- (b) If the materialist is justified in insisting on the sole reality of matter, so also, the ascetic is justified in his insistence on the pure Spirit as the sole reality.

#### **II. Errors of the materialist**

- (a) Refuses to recognise all the realities even in the world

of matter. Examples: subatomic world; dog's capacity to hear far-off noises.

- (b) There are supraphysical senses beyond the five senses and they can bring us into contact with other realities belonging to other worlds. Examples: hearing ringing of temple bells or flute; the Mother materialising in another body at another place; Prananbananda materialising in another body; the photographer could not capture Anandamayi Ma's image.
- (c) The testimony of the supraphysical experiences has to be scrutinised by reason and arranged by an open mind and their laws and processes determined.
- (d) The worlds beyond exist—examples as described in *Savitri* and they exercise their influence on earth through their messengers.

### III. Influence of the two views on our life and values

#### (a) Materialist's view

- (i) A feverish effort of the individual to snatch what he may from a transient existence, to "live his life"! ^ A brief delusion of life.
- (ii) A dispassionate and objectless service of the race and the individual. A noble delusion of an ethical aim and mental consummation.
- (iii) We land in a Maya of materialism—Maya here means "that is and yet is not":  
—it is, for it is present and compelling, —it is not, for it is phenomenal and transitory in its works.

#### (b) Ascetic's view

- (i) Unreality and purposelessness of human existence.
- (ii) Return to the Nirguna Brahman and an escape from the meaningless tangle of life.

(iii) Maya of spiritualism.

#### *IV. Solution*

- (a) Logical arguments cannot solve this dichotomy because there is always a hiatus of experience.
- (b) Only by an expansion of our consciousness into the cosmic consciousness can we solve this dilemma.
- (c) Modern psychology is slowly recognising cosmic consciousness. In the East this recognition of cosmic consciousness has always been there.
- (d) In cosmic consciousness we become aware of matter as one existence and the individual bodies as its formations. So is the case with Life and Mind. When we live in the cosmic consciousness, our whole life changes producing effects not only in moral and mental being but even in the physical world and its events.
- (e) From the cosmic consciousness we see that consciousness and being are not separated, but all is a Supreme Consciousness. The world is real precisely because it is created by the Conscious Energy one with the Being.
- (f) The world lives by That; That does not live by the world. And we can enter into that world-transcending consciousness and become superior to all cosmic existence.

#### *V. Relation between the universe and the Beyond*

- (a) The luminosity and brilliance of the transcendental consciousness is blinding to the ascetics or sannyasins who have suddenly shot up without the intermediary levels— because of this blinding effect they consider the world as illusion.
- (b) As Sri Aurobindo had passed through the intermediary levels, he realised the world as Real. These intermediary

levels (ladder) are the greatest contribution by Sri Aurobindo to spirituality's future.

- (c) This experience of luminous transcendental consciousness leads to the refusal of the ascetic, which is more perilous in its effects on individual and collectivity than the denial of the materialist. Gets stuck in the Silence and Bliss. Then who needs to come back to suffering?
- (d) The revolt of the Spirit against matter dominated Indian mind for centuries. The ideals of chain of karma, bondage, birth, liberation, cessation from birth permeated the Indian life. So came up the life-negating ideals of Vaikuntha, Brahmaloaka, Nirvana, or Vrindavan.
- (e) This negative attitude is also a truth of existence which stands at the summit of our possibility. The ascetic spirit is an indispensable element in human perfection. It will continue to exist so long as man is bound to ignorance.
- (f) We seek a complete affirmation:
- (i) "One without a second" = accepted by ascetics.
    - (i) "One without a second" = accepted by ascetics = One alone exists.
    - (ii) "All this is Brahman" = is a truth of the descent of the Brahman into multiplicity (universe).
    - (iii) For Shankaracharya: 'All' is a 'praise' and not the multiplicity.
    - (iv) These two truths must be seen simultaneously as an integral truth, Truth of One and Truth of All.
- (g) The Reality which the sannyasin seeks has been grasped in its full height, but not, in its full extent and comprehensiveness.

## Chapter Four

### Reality Omnipresent

**T**oday we shall take up Chapter IV 'Reality Omnipresent'. In the first two paragraphs, Sri Aurobindo gives us a synopsis of the previous chapters. He says.

Since, then, we admit both the claim of the pure Spirit to manifest in us its absolute freedom and the claim of universal Matter to be the mould and condition of our manifestation, we have to find a truth that can entirely reconcile these antagonists and can give to both their due portion in Life and their due justification in Thought .. -<sup>1</sup>

These claims regarding either pure Spirit or universal Matter as the sole reality are no longer merely attitudes of East or West; they are now universal and eternal truths. The Spirit's claim, or the claim of the ascetic, is the truth of the One Reality, whereas the claim of the materialist is the truth of multiplicity. The One and the Many are both eternal truths of manifestation, and neither of them can be neglected. Therefore the assertions of both these views are necessary for an integral philosophical vision.

The Isha Upanishad says.

Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.<sup>2</sup>

It emphasises the fact that the consciousness of multiplicity alone is one of ignorance (Avidya), while the consciousness of Unity is one of Knowledge in its highest sense (Vidya). One is the knowledge of the Oneness of the Divine, the unity of the world, and the other is the knowledge of the multiplicity. But when this knowledge tends toward exclusiveness, it ends up being lop-sided and therefore, perilous. We often tend to

compromise when trying to find a solution which satisfies the claims of both Spirit and Matter. But it is only an uneasy bargain and not a true reconciliation. True reconciliation is always a mutual harmonisation which leads to an intimate oneness.

The meeting point of Spirit and Matter is the cosmic consciousness. This consciousness has the knowledge of the multiplicity and the knowledge of the Oneness (or the transcendental) simultaneously, because it is the reconciling consciousness. Therefore, when one is in this consciousness, one has the knowledge of both Spirit and Matter. In the cosmic consciousness, there is no disharmony, no paradox and no contraries; therefore, it can become the basis for an absolute synthesis.

*The Life Divine* itself is an example of a synthesis based on the outlook of the cosmic consciousness. In fact, the Mother herself points out as to how Sri Aurobindo first analyses the different views of different thinkers and philosophers and then binds all the divergent theories into a harmonious whole by presenting his own synthetic vision. Therefore, one could very well say that *The Life Divine* was written from the cosmic overmental consciousness.

It is as if this cosmic overmental consciousness has translated itself into a logical rational language, which Sri Aurobindo could use as his vehicle of expression in *The Life Divine*. Therefore, we are constantly faced with two simultaneous currents of thought— one of synthesis and another which presents the viewpoints of the different thinkers. This leads to a confusion in the reader's mind which is accustomed to the unilinear dimension of logic.

The solution to this limitation of the human mind is to expand the mental consciousness into the cosmic consciousness. In the cosmic consciousness, the mind is illuminated and perceives at once both the truth of unity and

the truth of multiplicity. Matter reveals itself as the figure and body of Spirit. Spirit in its self-formative extension reveals itself as the soul, the essence of Matter. This could be a satisfactory basis for a divine life:

In the light of this conception we can perceive the possibility of a divine life for man in the world which will at once justify Science by disclosing a living sense and intelligible aim for the cosmic and the terrestrial evolution and realise by the transfiguration of the human soul into the divine the great ideal dream of all high religions.<sup>3</sup>

Next, Sri Aurobindo takes up the problem of the dynamic and the silent Brahman. What is the basis of the realisation of the ascetics? The ascetics have realised the Silence, and they take this Silence to be the only Reality, the Supreme. So they posit that if Silence is the absolute, then the dynamic aspect of Brahman cannot be a reality; if Silence is the sole Reality then any dynamism or any activity cannot possibly be admitted. The reason why they hold this view is because the human mind cannot accept the simultaneous truth of the One and the Many or the comprehensive truth of both silence and dynamism or of passivity and activity. However, this is a mental logic which says it has to be either this or that; it cannot accept the apparent incompatibility of the two states of consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo does not regard them as opposites. He says.

The silent and the active Brahman are not different, opposite and irreconcilable entities, the one denying, the other affirming a cosmic illusion; they are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative, and each is necessary to the other.<sup>4</sup>

This is the integral truth—the truth of the one Brahman in its two aspects. Silence is the basis and support of creation. This Silence is nothing but a gathering of energy; it is not *Sunya* or nothingness. Silence is the ingathering of the

consciousness of energy or force; it is the ingathered poise of Brahman.

For example, before we start our class or any activity we have a moment of silence or concentration which is a time for ingathering, for focussing or concentrating all our energies at one point and praying to the Divine, offering ourselves to the Divine. All this is an inward movement, and after this meditative moment, we come out to act or express ourselves. Silence is the basis and sustainer of work. On a deeper level, without the Silence, there cannot be the 'Word'. The 'Word' is a kind of expression. For example, when we speak, what comes through our words? There is something that is gathered within, some thought, some consciousness which has been there already as if stored away. We retain that consciousness. That is why, it is said, that when we speak, the language we use, the gestures we make and the emotions we display—all convey the consciousness behind them. If this consciousness within is disturbed or perturbed, the words that come out have a different pace; we speak very fast at that time and the coherence of thought is lost. Just notice a yogi's speech; it is very quiet, radiating calm, love and joy. I remember how Nolini- da, a master yogi, spoke at the Playground; how he measured every word. It was a mesmerising experience. I heard him in the early sixties, and the impression has remained for forty years in my memory and is still fresh in my consciousness.

Thus, we understand Silence to be the basis of the Word, the Immutable to be the basis of the Mutable, passivity to be the basis of activity. The Mother once said, in her usual pragmatic manner, that if one does any action in a hurried manner one actually wastes more time, but if one can be controlled, quiet and indrawn, then the action outside is much more efficient and effective, because there is a different consciousness in the action.

It is not the speed of the action that matters; rather, it is the effectivity that is important, the effectivity of a quiet

and undisturbed consciousness or the power of a peace that supports effective action. So silence and activity are not contradictory to one another, but are, in fact, complimentary elements. To further demonstrate this principle of complementarity, I have taken a passage from Sri Aurobindo's *The Mother* in which he gives an apparently contradictory description of Mahakali. He says:

Her spirit is tameless, her vision and will are high and far-reaching like the flight of an eagle, her feet are rapid on the upward way and her hands are outstretched to strike and to succour. For she too is the Mother and her love is as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness.<sup>5</sup>

Let's look at the two apparent opposites—wrath and compassion. They are there in Mahakali, because they are not really opposite to each other; on the contrary, they act as the essential basis for each other.

Another example that comes to my mind is that of the statue of dancing Nataraja. The dance of Nataraja symbolises the dynamic creation of the universe. If we have a close look at his eyes, we see that they are absolutely immobile, withdrawn, peaceful, calm and unperturbed. This is the true basis of action. In fact, this is what we see in most of our Indian paintings and sculptures, etc. This is the essence of Indian art—the balance of inner quietness and the outer dynamism. If one reads Sri Aurobindo's book *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, we find that this is what Sri Aurobindo describes at length; this is the very expression of Indian culture—be it in painting, sculpture, dance or music. We have seen that Indian classical music starts with the *Alaap* which initially creates the silence of the inner being. It takes us within, and once we are established in the inner silence, it develops slowly the form of the *Raga*, reaching a peak of fast rhythmic harmony, until again, towards the end we experience solid immobility within a dynamic mobility. This is the beauty of the Indian

*Ragas*; they start with peace and stillness, then shift to a dynamism ending with peace and stillness, which is in a way, more intense than the peace of the initial stage. It is the peace of fulfilment. So this is the essence of the Indian culture—a balance of the inner and the outer— which is captured in the Mahakali description, as well as in the dancing Nataraja. Sri Aurobindo then tells us that this should be the basis of human life: a beautiful balance of inner peace coupled with an outer dynamism.

Sri Aurobindo now takes up the difficult concept of the Non- Being and the Being. In fact, it is the crux of this chapter. Let us first examine a quote from the Taittiriya Upanishad which says:

In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was thence that Being was born.<sup>6</sup>

Now if we say that out of Non-Being, Being appeared, it is almost impossible to believe the statement. How can anything appear out of nothing? How is it that the great Upanishad talks about the Non-Being and Being in the same breath? Buddhism has told us that there is no Being at all; it is Nihilism or it is *Sunya*. Here Sri Aurobindo provides a unique explanation—an explanation that truly gives us a full clarification of what Non-Being connotes. Non-Being does not mean non-existent. For example, if I say, ‘the red pen is not on my table’, does it mean that it does not exist at all? No! It only means that it is not here in this specific place. But it exists somewhere else. So in the same sense, we use the word ‘non’. Here Non-Being does not mean ‘no being at all’.

If I say that the teachings of the Buddha are ‘non’-understandable for me, what does it mean? Does it mean that these teachings do not exist? No! They are only non-understandable or incomprehensible for me, but their existence is not questioned. They exist in the consciousness of the Gautam Buddha, whereas my mind and consciousness are

not tuned to understand them. Now, superimpose this upon what we have said about the Non-Being, that it is not 'non-existent', but rather, 'non-comprehensible'. In other words, it is beyond our present comprehension.

Sri Aurobindo says: "Non-Being is only a word."<sup>7</sup> How dramatically he cancels the whole concept! Do not bother about the question of 'Non-Being' for it 'is only a word' he says. When we examine the facts, Non-Being represents what we can no longer cognise; it is something that is beyond this existence, beyond any manifestation. The Indian genius did not want to limit the concept of the Supreme by any expansion of man's imagination. We say Brahman is *iti iti*, or Brahman is *neti neti*. We try to use the positive and negative words and say Brahman 'is this' or Brahman is 'not this'. Sri Aurobindo says that one can give all possible negative terms or positive terms and still we will come to a point where the human mind and human experience comes to a halt and we cannot go beyond. Try to see this—it is a very subtle and unique idea of Indian philosophy. Other religions and concepts try to define or delimit the Supreme in some form or fashion, but Indian philosophy does not limit the Brahman in any manner. This has been possibly the widest possible conception and experience of the supreme Reality.

Here is the genius of the Indian spiritual masters. They have tried to describe the Unknowable in the widest possible terms. They have come up with this extraordinary concept, this supremely unique concept of the Non-Being, which is beyond any manifestation. When I use the word 'Being', it might refer to Sachchidananda, it might refer to Brahman or it might refer to the Purushottama. Thus, we can see the expansiveness of the concept of Being. In fact, in one of the Upanishads, it is said that just one ray of His billion rays has become the universes—not just this world but all these universes known or unknown to man. This is said in beautiful poetic

language, but according to Indian philosophers even such an awe-inspiring description is still limiting the Brahman. One cannot limit Sachchidananda to these worlds or even to a concept of pure abstract Being. So, Indian spirituality says that there must be something beyond Being, something beyond not only all these visible and invisible manifestations, but beyond all manifestation itself. The ancient sages referred to this unmanifest 'something' as Non-Being. And they further declared that this Non-Being is in fact the womb from which this world and all the universes have taken birth:

In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was thence that Being was born.—(II.7)<sup>8</sup>

So this Non-Being, which appears to our limited consciousness as a nothingness, is actually an absolute Fullness.

It is indeed a magnificent concept. From the point of view of human thinking we can see what a width and height of imagination the Rishis possessed! This is what the Vedas have passed on to us and because of this catholicity of thinking, we can embrace all thought and religions, all contraries and contradictions. This being the basis of our *Sanatana Dharma*, one can well imagine our luminous future. All the divisions and cults and creeds are only expressions of this catholicity of thought and belief.

Regarding this misunderstanding of the term 'Non-Being'—which is often taken to be 'Nothing'—Sri Aurobindo further writes:

We really mean by this Nothing something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and our most abstract or subtle experience of actual being as we know or conceive it while in this universe. This Nothing then is merely a something beyond positive conception.<sup>9</sup>

So this 'Nothing' is not 'nothingness'. On the contrary, it

denotes the ultimate border of our ideative conception or of our subtle experience of the Being. However much we may expand our thought or experience, we always reach the absolute end of “all that we can know and consciously are.”<sup>10</sup> In a way this ‘Nothing’ or ‘Nihil’ “is a zero which is All”<sup>11</sup> because, in reality, that is “the only true Existence.”<sup>12</sup>

Seen in this manner, this Non-Being is not a Void, but rather, that which “exceeds our idea or experience of existence ...”<sup>13</sup>

If we do not understand it in this way, we may fall into the trap of the rationalist who would ask: ‘How can Being be born out of that which has no existence?’ Or else, he may argue by saying “Being, it says, can only be born from Being.”<sup>14</sup>

This subtle concept of the Non-Being is further explained in:

We give the name of Non-Being to a contrary affirmation of Its freedom from all cosmic existence, — freedom, that is to say, from all positive terms of actual existence which consciousness in the universe can formulate to itself, even from the most abstract, even from the most transcendent. It does not deny them as a real expression of Itself, but It denies Its limitation by all expression or any expression whatsoever.<sup>15</sup>

The key-word here, as you may have noted, is ‘freedom’— “Its freedom from all cosmic existence”! The absolute Reality possesses the ‘freedom’ not to express itself, and this poise is called the Non- Being. When it chooses out of its inherent freedom ‘to express’ itself in manifestation or as manifestation, then it is known as the Being. That is why Sri Aurobindo writes: “The Non-Being permits the Being, even as the Silence permits the Activity.”<sup>16</sup>

Only an enlightened or awakened soul can have the simultaneous experience of the “conscious Self-being as a reality and the Unknowable beyond as the same Reality ...”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, it was possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act most powerfully in the world. Buddha travelled extensively during his life and created a great spiritual revolution which had profound effects on the ages of spirituality which followed. Buddha was impersonal in his inner consciousness and the action he generated from this impersonal self was so great that Sri Aurobindo says he was the most powerful personality—that we know of—that ever lived and produced such great results upon earth! The real ideal of the Buddha was “an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness ...”<sup>18</sup>

Perhaps, such a personality could be described in Sri Aurobindo’s words as a “completely conscious soul”. He says:

... the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and the activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the universe.<sup>19</sup>

Sri Aurobindo himself is a perfect example of such a “completely conscious soul.” Even after obtaining the experience of the Nirguna Brahman while in Kashmir, he did not give up the world as an illusion; on the contrary, afterwards he worked with a greater dynamism and purpose for the independence of India. Later on, he would labour just as dynamically and effectively for the liberation of humanity itself.

So there is the Non-Being which is beyond manifestation, and out of the Non-Being comes the Being which can be called Sat-Chit-Ananda. Then there is the ‘Becoming’ whence manifestation starts, the universe is released, the world comes into existence. Once the Being comes forth from the Non-Being, it is called Sachchidananda, the Parabrahman, the

Brahman, the Absolute or the Purushottama, depending on which term you prefer. Afterwards, this Being puts out its own consciousness, and this consciousness creates this world or becomes this world.

So what is the process of this becoming? This is a very complex concept, but it is not explained in this chapter; so, I will present here the explanation given in Book Two, Part I, Chapter II of *The Life Divine* in order to clarify the ultimate reconciliation between Non-Being and Being. Sri Aurobindo explains in this chapter how the Being passes through three different phases in its manifestation. These phases are that of the Brahman, Iswara and Purusha. These are his transcendental, cosmic and individual poises, respectively.

We could perhaps simplify this process of the becoming by positing that Sat or Existence becomes the Brahman, Ishwara and Purusha, while Chit-Tapas or Consciousness-Force translates itself into the complementary aspects of Maya, Shakti and Prakriti, which are the Ideatrix, the Creatrix and the Matrix, respectively. That is to say, there is creation first on the level of the concept or the idea (the Ideatrix). This comprehensive idea translates itself into manifestation, i.e., into Matter (the Matrix). The intermediary between the idea and its realisation is the Creatrix.

We can further consider the three poises of the Chit-Shakti as those of an infinite self-limitation (the role of Maya), an infinite self-variation (the role of Ishwari) and an infinite self-multiplication (the role of Prakriti).

The meaning of Maya is 'to measure', to delimit. She is the one who delimits that Infinite Existence (Brahman). This is the aspect of self-limitation, though it is as yet only on the level of the concept, the idea.

Ishwari or Shakti brings the higher down into the lower hemisphere of creation and takes the aspiration of the lower

up towards the higher hemisphere. Here there is a sense of a perfect collaboration and oneness between Ishwara and Ishwari. The symbol given to the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education is in fact a combination of both the symbols—that of the Mother superimposed upon that of Sri Aurobindo. It is only in a perfect unification of Ishwara and Ishwari that we can have a perfect manifestation.

In his book *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo writes gloriously, about the Ishwari, which is the universal aspect of the Mother:

The Mahashakti, the universal Mother, works out whatever is transmitted by her transcendent consciousness from the Supreme and enters into the worlds that she has made; her presence fills and supports them with the divine spirit and the divine all-sustaining force and delight without which they could not exist. That which we call Nature or Prakriti is only her most outward executive aspect; she marshals and arranges the harmony of her forces and processes, impels the operations of Nature and moves among them secret or manifest in all that can be seen or experienced or put into motion of life. Each of the worlds is nothing but one play of the Mahashakti of that system of worlds or universe, who is there as the cosmic Soul and Personality of the transcendent Mother. Each is something that she has seen in her vision, gathered into her heart of beauty and power and created in her Ananda.<sup>20</sup>

This long explanation is given only to reinforce the concept that there is a continuity between Non-Being and Being, that all are one without any division into Self and Not-Self, or the One and the Many.

That is why perhaps Sri Aurobindo entitles this chapter ‘Reality Omnipresent’ and not ‘Reality Omniscient’ or ‘Reality Omnipotent’. This Reality is omnipresent on all levels: on the level of Non-Being, on the level of the Being and on the level of Becoming (the universe). “An omnipresent reality is the

Brahman,”<sup>21</sup> says Sri Aurobindo. So this Non-Being, this Being and this Becoming (universe) are all aspects of ‘Reality Omnipresent’. So Brahman is transcendental, Brahman is universal, Brahman is this world, Brahman is you and me, Brahman is Matter!

What is most interesting about *The Life Divine* is this: as one keeps reading it, one gets deeper layers of meaning. Just this morning, while I was reading this chapter, I discovered a new meaning of the word omnipresent. I was really straining myself asking ‘Why did he use the word omnipresent?’ Suddenly, things opened up, as it were, and the reason became clear to me. It is perhaps the same with all of you as well. Reading constantly and sincerely will open our inner doors. The psychic door will have to open if we keep up the pressure. In yoga, the Mother asks us to keep up the pressure, and a similar pressure must be there in our reading. If one tells oneself that something is beyond my understanding or comprehension, it will most likely remain so. However, if one keeps up the pressure for understanding, in my personal experience, things do eventually open up in the mind. Now, of course, it goes without saying that along with this pressure for understanding there must also be a pressure of constant aspiration. We started this session with a prayer “Sri Aurobindo, Mother, Grant us your help in our endeavour to understand your teaching.”<sup>22</sup> That sincere aspiration must also continue to be there.

Now let us continue with the argument. The Advaitins could not conceive all this to be Brahman, because they said that if the supreme Brahman is omniscient and omnipotent, how could he have created so much pain and suffering in the world? If the Divine is omniscient and omnipotent, how can there be evil and suffering? If God is all powerful, how is it that he cannot take away pain and evil? Since they were not able to reconcile these contradictions they brought in

the concept of Maya as a saving grace, as though to protect Brahman himself! 'No, it is not Brahman who has brought the suffering! Don't blame him, blame Maya. She is the cause of this illusion, this pain and suffering in the world!' It is as if the Adwaitins were trying to protect Brahman from having to explain all the paradoxes of this world!

So it was left to Sri Aurobindo, the master philosopher, master yogi and master seer, to solve this paradox by the concept of 'Reality Omnipresent'. The Brahman is simultaneously present in all the triple levels as well as in all that is considered evil and pain and suffering—for He alone is, He alone exists in and as the manifestation! Brahman is Iswara, Brahman is you and me, and he is both the good and the evil. Brahman exists not only in his transcendental status; he is omnipresent in you, in me and in the whole world for he expresses himself through everything in his manifestation.

With such an understanding that all this is verily Brahman, we do not have the problem of evil and suffering. But the illusionist tells us with a great sense of rejection that the entire world is a dream, it is an illusion. Sri Aurobindo says, yes, that is true, the world is a dream, but it is a dream of the Divine. And the Mother has told us, in another context, that Auroville is the dream of the Divine and that such dreams have a greater reality for they belong to the Divine. So if the world is a dream, the Divine's dream, it does not mean that it is unreal; it is very real because it is made out of the very substance of the Divine. In Auroville, perhaps it is the substance of the Mother's own consciousness that is being moulded, and one of the forms into which it has been cast is the Matrimandir. So we cannot call the world a dream and push it away, for a divine dream is far more real than our own existence. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

If then the world is a dream or an illusion or a mistake, it is a dream originated and willed by the Self in its totality and not only originated and willed, but supported and

perpetually entertained. Moreover, it is a dream existing in a Reality and the stuff of which it is made is that Reality, for Brahman must be the material of the world as well as its base and continent.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed all this world is the supreme Brahman; he is both the content and the container; he is not only the one who is omnipresent, but he is also the very content of this world. We may not know or feel this 'content' because our consciousness is steeped in ignorance, but it is present nonetheless. It is analogous to what the Mother said after the descent of the Supramental consciousness in 1956. She said that the Supramental substance is pervading the earth atmosphere. We may not know it, we may not realise it, we don't even feel it, and we may not even think about it, but as the Mother tells us, by the very fact that we are here, born at this time, we are all physically breathing in the supramental substance. The word used is 'substance'; we are *literally* breathing in the supramental substance, just as we are taking in oxygen. Therefore, there is an automatic transformation taking place in our bodies. When we breathe in, we may not be conscious that we take in oxygen, but the substance of oxygen goes into the lungs and gets into the blood stream. From there it gets into the organs and activates the cells; it gets into the heart; it gets into our feelings. In the same manner, the Supermind is constantly rushing through us and it may be that this is how the general transformation of the physical (which has already taken place in the Mother) will take place in the world! We do not know it, nor do we understand it, but if by simply breathing in oxygen one feels energised and full of life, is it right to conclude that the breathing in of the supramental substance is something without consequence? Won't it have an effect on our body, on our thinking, on our yoga? I believe that it is bound to have its effect. My faith and inner intuition tell me that by breathing in the supramental substance our evolution will be accelerated towards our glorious future.

Sri Aurobindo concludes this chapter by saying that humanity is going to move into the Supermind. He says, however, that until we move into that consciousness, one of the things that must be kept alive is faith:

While we still labour under the stress of dualities, this perception must no doubt constantly support itself on an act of faith, but a faith which the highest Reason, the widest and most patient reflection do not deny, but rather affirm.<sup>24</sup>

This is how Sri Aurobindo brings to a close the main arguments of the first four chapters of *The Life Divine*. We have seen in a single vision how starting from the materialist denial he goes to the ascetic refusal. He then takes us into the understanding of the Non-Being and the Being and he concludes by showing us that the Brahman is the material of the world as well as its base and continent.

If one wants to believe what he says, it is fine; otherwise, it does not matter so much—we are already in a blessed world! The word ‘blessed’ is too limited, because it is normally used by human disciples to talk about their human gurus. I don’t think it is just a blessing; it is much more than a blessing! What I feel is that there is an extraordinary grace of the Aditi upon us, and nothing short of it! Otherwise, given the material that we are, the substance that we are at present, which is obviously and visibly a bundle of weaknesses and limitations, an encrusted egoistic consciousness and a very limited mentality, how do we explain this immense blessing? Let us not think that we who have chosen the path revealed by Sri Aurobindo are in anyway superior. We may be the most ordinary of the human lot, but the Supreme has been so very gracious to awaken in each one of us that deeper element called ‘Love for the Mother’. And as long as the love for the Mother remains, we have hope! As Sri Aurobindo says:

This creed is given, indeed, to humanity to support it on its journey, until it arrives at a stage of development when

faith will be turned into knowledge and perfect experience and Wisdom will be justified of her works.<sup>25</sup>

Well, that “stage of development” seems to be far away, but as the saying goes, a journey of a thousand steps has to begin with the first step. So, let us take this first step in all humility and with a luminous faith in the Divine.

## References

- 1.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 25 (para 1).
- 2.SABCL, vol. 12, p. 65.
- 3.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 26 (para 3).
- 4.Ibid., p. 26 (para 4).
- 5.SABCL, vol. 25, p. 29.
- 6.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 27 (Footnote 1 in para 6).
- 7.Ibid., p. 28 (para 7).
- 8.Ibid., p. 27 (Footnote 1 in para 6).
- 9.Ibid., p. 28 (para 7).
10. Ibid., p. 28 (para 7).
11. Ibid., p. 28 (para 7).
12. Ibid., p. 28 (para 7).
13. Ibid., p. 28 (Footnote 1 in para 7).
14. Ibid., p. 28 (Footnote 1 in para 7).
15. Ibid., pp. 28-29 (para 9).
16. Ibid. pp. 28-29 (para 9).
17. Ibid. pp. 28-29 (para 9).
18. Ibid., p. 30 (para 11).
19. Ibid. p. 30 (para 11).
20. SABCL, vol. 25, pp. 21-22.
21. SABCL, vol. 18, p. 30 (para 12).
22. CWM, vol. 17, p. 339.
23. SABCL, vol. 18, p. 32 (para 15).
24. Ibid., p. 32 (para 16).
25. Ibid., p. 32 (para 16).

## Lecture Notes

### I. *Introduction*

- (a) The claim of the pure Spirit to manifest in us its absolute freedom and the claim of Matter to be the mould of manifestation are justified.
- (b) In trying to find a satisfying solution to the problem of Spirit and Matter we often try to compromise. But it is only a bargain and not a true reconciliation. True reconciliation is a mutual comprehension, leading to an intimate Oneness.
- (c) In the cosmic consciousness we have a meeting point of Spirit and Matter. In this, Mind is illuminated so that it can at once perceive the truth of unity and the truth of multiplicity.
- (d) Matter reveals itself as the figure and body of Spirit— Spirit in its self-formative extension reveals itself as the soul of Matter.
- (e) This could be a satisfactory base for a divine life.

### II. *Reconciliation between the silent and active Brahman*

- (a) They are not opposites but only two aspects of one Brahman. Silence is the gathering of consciousness of energy. Examples: the calm eyes and the dynamic dance of Shiva; Mahakali—hands to strike and her love as intense as her wrath and she has a deep and passionate kindness.
- (b) This could be the base of man's own perfection: to have an absolute calm and passivity that may support an inexhaustible activity.
- (c) It is an error of the limited mind to say that silence rejects the world; it sustains it. It supports the activity and not the withdrawal from activity.

### III. Reconciliation between the Non-Being and Being

- (a) Out of the Non-Being appeared Being, say the Upanishads. But how can this be possible?
- (b) 'Non-Being' is only a word. Non-Being is not 'nothing'. Nothing or Nihil is something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our conception of the actual being. It is a poise of Brahman beyond manifestation.
- (c) Buddha is impersonal in consciousness. The real ideal of the Buddha was an entire motionless impersonality within doing outwardly the works of Love, Truth and Righteousness.

### IV. The true basis of monism, the true Adwaita

- (a) All things are the one Brahman without any division into Self and non-Self—for Brahman alone exists. So too all manifestation is himself including all the discord and the apparent evil of the world—which in Reality must be admitted but not submitted to as our eternal consciousness.
- (b) The process of becoming  
     Brahman—Transcendental = Maya—Self-  
     limitation Ishwara—Universal = Ishwari—Self-  
     variation Purusha—Individual = Prakriti—Self-  
     multiplication
- (c) This truth has to be admitted on the simple basis that Brahman could not have been compelled by anything overpowering outside of it or anything within to create the worlds. All things in this world are ultimately willed by Him alone.
- (d) Hence, if the world is a dream, it is a divine dream. The world is willed, supported and perpetually entertained by Brahman. He is the material as well as the continent—the content and the container both.

- (e) So the omnipresent Reality has for its obverse and reverse affirmations the Non-Being and the Being. So too our dualities of the universe will be resolved in the higher cosmic consciousness. Until then, faith has to be our support on our journey.

## Chapter Five

### The Destiny of the Individual

We have observed that in *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo gives, at the beginning of each chapter, a recap of the main ideas of the previous chapter. In this chapter too, he has recapitulated the basic ideas of Chapter IV, 'Reality Omnipresent'. The very first idea is that of the Vedic vision of Brahman: Brahman is One and indefinable. These two epithets emphasise that Brahman is the Alpha and Omega of creation; besides Brahman nothing else exists.

What do we understand by 'Brahman is One'? When we say One, do we mean that Brahman is number one in a serial order of first, second and third? Or do we mean that the oneness is of multiple things coming together and making a totality? In fact, it is neither. Here the meaning of One is one without a second and one beyond all particulars. There is Brahman and Brahman alone; there is nothing beyond him or besides him. There is only the One, and besides him there is none else. But this does not mean there is nothing else that exists. If we think that there is nothing else apart from Brahman, then we will end up with what Shankaracharya said about the world. It only means that whatever is, is Brahman. This is an apparent dichotomy about which we should be very clear. There is one Brahman, and all that exists is not apart from him, but exists in him. That is the concept of the One. What the Illusionists have told us—that there is only the Brahman and nothing else besides That—is inexact in the light of Sri Aurobindo who emphasises that there is Brahman and there is also the Many, and the Many is inherent in Brahman.

The second concept we should be clear about is that this One is indefinable. What do we understand by "Brahman is indefinable"? Sri Aurobindo writes here: "this unity is in

its nature indefinable.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, when we try to think of a definition of Brahman, how can we really describe him? There have been philosophies that have tried to describe Brahman in many different ways, and I am sure that each one of us here has a different description of Brahman based on our own ideas and imagination. Some of us may say that Brahman is all bliss, while others may say that he is all compassion, and those of us who have studied Indian philosophy may say that he is Saguna Brahman or Nirguna Brahman. There are approximately 6.65 billion people ([www.ibiblio.org/lunarbin/worldpop](http://www.ibiblio.org/lunarbin/worldpop), October 2006) around the world, and each one may give different attributes to Brahman, and yet we cannot exhaust the description of Brahman. Remember the phrase ‘cannot exhaust the description,’ because Brahman is always beyond all our descriptions. So, in this sense Brahman is indefinable. And yet Sri Aurobindo and Vedanta have described Brahman as Sat, Chit and Ananda. Is it not a contradiction? On the one hand we say that Brahman is indefinable and on the other we say that he is Sat, Chit and Ananda! How do we qualify this kind of description? Here, Vedanta as well as Sri Aurobindo explain that Brahman is indeed indefinable, but not beyond experience. This is where the difference lies. In Indian philosophy it is believed that one cannot define the Supreme, but one can *experience* him at different levels. When we say ‘experience,’ does it mean that I have to go to the Supermind consciousness before I can experience the Supreme as Sachchidananda? The Vedic Rishis reached great levels, and Sri Aurobindo could go to the Supermind, but can we, at the human level of experience, know Brahman? Yes, we can, though in a different manner. How then can we experience Brahman?

Brahman can be experienced—though not directly or consciously—as the western world is experiencing the ultimate Reality as Matter. But the West does not call Matter Brahman or *Annam Brahman* (the Sanskrit term

for Brahman as Matter). Brahman can be experienced not only as Sachchidananda but also as Matter itself. In the past two hundred years mankind has plunged into Matter and discovered Reality as Matter. But the whole problem is that this is only a partial aspect of Brahman; there are higher ranges of Reality. Sri Aurobindo reconfirmed this truth that was realised ages ago when sage Varuna asked Bhrigu ‘to go Beyond’ Matter in order to know Brahman. The Rishi told Bhrigu that one can realise Brahman as Life itself, and then one could go beyond and realise that Brahman as Mind. Sri Aurobindo has now shown us the next step—that of Brahman as the Supermind consciousness. I am telling you all this only to clarify that although Brahman cannot be defined as this or that, he can be experienced on different levels depending upon our own consciousness. So, this is the basic idea: Brahman is not definable but he is ‘experienceable’.

The Rishis and Indian philosophers have said that one can describe Brahman by innumerable names, but that he is *neti neti* (it is not this, it is not that) even while he is *iti iti* (it is this, it is this). Brahman is neither this nor that, but something beyond this and that.

In fact, the *Purusha Sukta* and the *Nasadiya Sukta* of the Rig Veda are examples of such a vision; one emphasises the *iti iti* formula and the other emphasises the *neti neti* formula of Brahman’s nature. Now, I would like to spend some time on these *Suktas* as I would like to give you an example of the ancient Vedic vision regarding Brahman and the creation.

Those of you who have read the *Purusha Sukta* know that it is one of the most marvellous *Suktas* born of the aspirations of Rishi Narayana and that it is found in the three Vedas—the *Sama Veda*, *Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*. We need to go deeper into these *Suktas*, because most of us here have heard about the great names of the *Purusha Sukta* and the *Nasadiya Sukta* without knowing what they really mean. What are they

actually? If one understands them well in all their profundity, then one will really understand the essence of the philosophy of Brahman in the Vedas. I will read them through, because I would like you to enjoy the mantric rhythm of the *Suktas*. When I start explaining these *Suktas*, we will see how close their vision is to that of Sri Aurobindo. The phrases and words used are different, but the essence of Sri Aurobindo's thought is present in these ancient *Suktas*. Upon reading these *Suktas*, we can understand that the Vedas and the Upanishads definitely had a fore-vision of the next step in evolution—that of the evolution of Supermind.

I am quite proud to say that one of the best interpretations of these *Suktas* is to be found in the *The Vedic Epiphany* which was written by my father, the late Prof. V. Madhusudan Reddy. He has given a wonderful rendering of them combining the ancient interpretation with that of Sri Aurobindo. First, let us read the *Purusha Sukta*:

A thousand heads has the Cosmic Person,  
 A thousand eyes and a thousand feet;  
 Encompassing the entire earth all around,  
 He exceeds it by a considerable span.

The Supreme Person is, indeed, this all,  
 What was and what shall be.  
 He is the Lord of Immortal worlds,  
 And of the mortal world that grows by food.

Such is the extent of His greatness,  
 And greater still is the Supreme Person.  
 All the beings are only a fourth of Him;  
 His three-fourths, that is immortal, is in Heaven.

With three-fourths of Him, the Perfect Being rose high,  
 The other one-fourth was again down here.  
 From this he spread out in all directions

As that which eats and that which eats not.

From Him was born the Shining One, Hiranyagarbha,  
 And from that took birth again the Cosmic Person.  
 As soon as born, He stretched out all over the earth,  
 And beyond it, and both behind and before.

With the Cosmic Person as their oblation,  
 The gods performed the primal sacrifice.  
 Spring served them as clarified butter,  
 Summer as the fuel, and Autumn as offering.

They besprinkled the fire-born Being  
 On the sacred grass, as to be sacrificed.  
 Thereupon they performed the unique sacrifice,  
 The gods, the *sadhya*s and the seers.

From this *sarvahut* sacrifice, when fully performed  
 Was gathered up curd mixed with butter.  
 Thereafter came the creatures of the air,  
 Animals of the forest and those of the village.

From this supreme sacrifice, when fully performed  
 Were born the *k* and the *samans*;  
 From this were born the various metres,  
 And were born the many ritualistic formulas.

From this were born horses, and all those creatures  
 Having teeth in both of their jaws;  
 From this were born different breeds of cattle;  
 And were born sheep and goats.

When they divided up the Perfect Being,  
 Into how many parts did they make Him?  
 What became of His mouth? What his arms?  
 What of his two legs? What his two feet?

His face became the priest; His arms  
 Became the warrior-king; His legs  
 The tradesman, and from His feet  
 Were born the lowly serf.

The moon was born from His mind;  
 The sun came into existence from his eye;  
 Indra and Agni came from His mouth,  
 And from His breath was born the wind.

From his navel issued the middle region,  
 From His head unfurled the heaven,  
 From His feet emerged the earth, and from the ear  
 The four directions. So the worlds were organised.

Seven were the enclosing sticks of sacrifice,  
 Thrice seven were made the fuel sticks  
 When the gods made ready for the sacrifice  
 With the Cosmic Person as the oblation.

With sacrifice the gods worshipped the Cosmic Person  
 The intended sacrifice; these were the first established  
 ordinances,  
 These mighty powers attain the heaven  
 Where abide the ancient Gods and the *sadhyas*.<sup>2</sup>

“*The Purusha Sukta*”, explains Prof. Reddy:

... is a hymn which deals with the condition prior to creation and manifestation. It is a condition both of change and immutability — *jagatus tasthanas*. It is an eternal process by which the Infinite becomes finite. The hymn deals with

the transformation of the Supreme Person and the process of world-formation. The whole process is conceived or, rather, ideated, effected and regulated by his inherent, infinite Power. It reveals the nature of the creative process which transforms the truth of formless existence into a fact of physical existence in the evolution of which the Supreme Lord, the devas and the universe are equal participants; the world is an evolutionary trust of which the chief promoters are the Cosmic Person, the gods, the Rishis and the earth itself. They are the creative constituents of the universe with a common focus on the latter's evolution.<sup>3</sup>

This eternal process by which the Infinite becomes the finite is essentially that of the supreme holocaust of the Purusha. Interestingly, in *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo writes that it is “much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.”<sup>4</sup>

Well, according to this *Sukta*:

The Purusha — the Cosmic Person is the total sacrifice. The sacrifice invests the universe with the nisus of evolution and the power to integrally manifest the Divine. This cosmic sacrifice has a twofold significance, for it not only implies the continual descent of the Divine into his creation but also the progressive ascent of humanity into the Integral All. The sacrifice is for the integral manifestation of the One in the Many.<sup>5</sup>

In this process of the integral manifestation of the One in the Many, the first step of the holocaust, if we may say so, is that in which the Absolute or the *Svayambhu* brings forth out of itself its “supreme personality of infinite divinity, Viraj.”<sup>6</sup> The second step of the sacrifice is the birth of the Cosmic Person, *Vairaja*, “from whom proceeded the universe of involutory manifestation.” So, the difference between the *Viraj* and *Vairaja* is this:

The *Viraj* is the one in whom diversity appears as a principle

of ideation in the infinite plenum of oneness ... It is in this Cosmic Person Vairaja that diversity gains the upper hand and life-activity gets precedence.<sup>7</sup>

In Sri Aurobindo's philosophical terminology, we could say that this is the involutory sacrifice. In his philosophy, we also have the triple status of the Supermind—the comprehending, the apprehending and the involved—which corresponds to the three stages of *Svayambhu*, *Viraj* and *Vairaja* in the Vedas. We could also draw parallels between the Vedic trinity and the three descending steps of the involution which are that of Tat turning itself into Sachchidananda, that of Sachchidananda moving into the status of the Supermind and that of Supermind manifesting as the Many.

This process of Involution, or the coming into existence of the universe, is the essence of the first five *riks* of the *Purusha Sukta*. In the sixth one we see a reversal, a kind of backward movement:

With the Cosmic Person as their oblation,  
The gods performed the primal sacrifice.

Here there is the clear idea of an evolutionary-sacrifice:

The universe comes into existence by the act of supreme self-sacrifice of the Supreme Purusha; again, the universe is set on its evolutionary journey by the sacrifice of the diversified cosmic Purusha. If the first act of sacrifice creates the universe, the second sacrifice recreates the universe in the nature of the Supreme — rather, is intended to transform it in the nature and consciousness of the Supreme.<sup>8</sup>

The gods who perform “the ritual of worship” to the Cosmic Person “by offering him into the sacrificial fire”<sup>9</sup> are the *sandhya devas* who, as Prof. Reddy suggests, are the sacramental godheads. This *Yajna* performed by the *sandhya*

*devas* “gives birth to numberless evolutionary Life forms, *prajas*.”<sup>10</sup>

Now, what is the sacrifice of the *sandhya devas*? In the *Purusha Sukta*, we have seen that Brahman enters Matter, enters the Inconscience and then there is a kind of an arrest which is the last point, a point of return. At that moment, begins the *Yajna* of the supramental godheads which is the oblation offered by them to the Absolute. What does this mean? It means that at that point of Inconscience, when there was to be the beginning of evolution, Brahman was aroused or awakened by the aspirations of the *sandhya devas*. Understood from a different angle, these supramental godheads awaken the Inconscience.

Once the supramental godheads awaken Brahman in the Inconscience—with the help of Agni and Indra—then the Inconscience gives birth to Matter. That means the beginning of the birth of forms. Matter takes forms like mountains, planets, etc. Matter and form are synonymous. These forms later give birth to what we call the *Prajas*. *Praja* is not ‘people’ in the way we understand the word. The original meaning of *Prajas* is ‘life-form’. By the help of Agni, Indra and other overmental godheads, the material forms give birth to life-forms.

This concept of the sacrifice of the Divine is beautifully brought out in simple words by the Mother. She explains:

... the Divine has sacrificed Himself in Matter to awaken consciousness in Matter, which had become inconscient. And it is this sacrifice, this giving of the Divine in Matter, that is to say, His dispersion in Matter, which justifies the sacrifice of Matter to the Divine and makes it obligatory; ... It is because the Divine has given Himself in Matter and scattered Himself everywhere in Matter to awaken it to the divine consciousness, that Matter is automatically under

the obligation to give itself to the Divine. It is a mutual and reciprocal sacrifice.

And this is the great secret of the Gita: the affirmation of the divine Presence in the very heart of Matter. And that is

why, Matter must sacrifice itself to the Divine, automatically, even unconsciously — whether one wants it or not ...<sup>n</sup>

Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother* seems to capture, especially in Chapter 6, the essence of the vision given in the *Purusha Sukta*. Sri Aurobindo stresses more on the holocaust of the Divine Mother, *Aditi*, than that of the *Purusha*. For him, *Aditi* is “the consciousness and force of the Supreme”<sup>12</sup> who:

In her deep and great love for her children she has consented to put on herself the cloak of this obscurity, condescended to bear the attacks and torturing influences of the powers of the Darkness and the Falsehood, borne to pass through the portals of the birth that is a death, taken upon herself the pangs and sorrows and sufferings of the creation, since it seemed that thus alone could it be lifted to the Light and Joy and Truth and eternal Life. This is the great sacrifice called sometimes the sacrifice of the Purusha, but much more deeply the holocaust of Prakriti, the sacrifice of the Divine Mother.<sup>13</sup>

And again, just as we have the *sandhya devas* (supramental godheads) in the *Purusha Sukta*, we have in *The Mother* the four aspects—Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati—who are the supramental energies and forms of the Mother. These are powers and personalities formed in the involutory level itself, and it is they who “have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play.”<sup>14</sup> They are:

Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their

Vibhūtis and shall find in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother.<sup>15</sup>

I have gone into this explanation of the *Purusha Sukta* in some detail, because I wanted to combine what Sri Aurobindo and the ancient Rishis of the *Suktas* have said. I wanted to bring out their common points. Now, we will take up the *Nasadiya Sukta*, which is again a—

... hymn of creation — of the origins of the universe of manifestation. It is an invocation to the Mystery Supreme that transcends all categories of knowledge ... it is a profound vision of the totality of Truth. It expresses a luminous awareness of the integral oneness of Being and Non-Being, the creator and the created, the eternal and the temporal ... The mystery is above Being and Non-Being, Existence and Non-Existence, beyond all dualities ... By a series of questions the Rishi makes us aware of the profundity of the subject.<sup>16</sup>

The *Purusha Sukta* emphasises the *iti iti* formula of defining Brahman, while the *Nasadiya Sukta* emphasises the *neti neti* formula. I will read out the *Sukta*:

Then was neither Existent nor Non-Existent.

The mid-world was not, nor the sky nor what is beyond.  
What enveloped it? And where? In whose protection?

What was the Water, unfathomable and deep?

Then was neither death nor deathlessness,

Nor any indication of day and night.

The One breathed without breath by its self-law.

Other than that was nothing else, nor aught beyond it.

In the beginning was darkness hidden by darkness,

And all was an ocean of Inconscience. When

That lay concealed by endless fragmentation, the One came

To be by the power of his infinite austerity.

In the beginning that moved as desire within,  
 Which was the first seed of mind.  
 The seers, having meditated in their hearts,  
 Discovered the connection of the Existent in the Non-  
 Existent.

A ray stretched out that cut the Existent from the Non-  
 Existent;  
 What was there below? What was above?  
 There were impregnators, there were mighty forces,  
 There was self-law below, and a Will above.

Who truly knows? Who here may declare it?  
 Whence it is born? Whence indeed this creation?  
 Even the gods were subsequent to the world's emergence;  
 Then who knows from whence it arose?

That out of which this creation has come into being,  
 Whether it upheld it or if it did not?  
 He who is the Lord of all this in the highest heaven  
 Surely knows it, or perhaps He does not!<sup>17</sup>

A fabulous phrase! I could have never imagined that such a phrase could be written. It suggests that the Supreme Himself may not know the origin of his own creation! The idea of the *Sukta* is to tell us not to stop at *iti iti* or *neti neti*, but to go beyond. That is the marvel of this great *Sukta*. The Rishi has broken all our mental boundaries by advising us not to be satisfied with any *iti* or *neti*, but to go beyond. This idea is indeed very beautifully brought out by saying that the Supreme surely knows the source of this creation, but— who knows?—perhaps he too does not know it! Apparent contradiction! But it is put in there purposely to highlight the mystery!

As Prof. Reddy explains:

... it cannot be said with any certainty that it is not known and is not knowable, for no one really knows the basis of all epistemology. As we do not know whether Reality is the subject of knowledge or its object, nothing related to it can either be asserted or denied. There must be something, supreme and beyond, out of which creation proceeds, but none really knows if it was an active creation brought about by any external factor or a natural evolution — rather, the manifestation of an innate potentiality . Only he who is himself beyond space, time and causation may know it, or he, too, does not quite know it, for verily there is no criterion or vouchsafing his knowledge of it ... The Rishis are given a glimpse into this supreme secret by His Grace.

Reality is a perpetual unfoldment as well as a secret fulfilment. It is both a process and the truth of the process ... The truth of the world-process escapes rational understanding; it can only be revealed to the intuitive minds and receptive hearts ... The Rishi, therefore, does not propose to answer the query . It is in the openness of this query that the infinite importance of the problem is implied.

The Veda posits no creator outside or distinct from creation. Creation is the process of actualisation of a potentiality inherent in the Divine; it is the manifestation of a dynamic life-principle which is essential to his nature.<sup>18</sup>

This long and detailed explanation of the *Purusha Sukta* and the *Nasadiya Sukta* shows us the very beginning of the concept and experience of Brahman in our Indian ethos. The root definition of Brahman is given in these *Suktas*, and it is this definition that was maintained down the ages through the Upanishads, the Gita and Sri Aurobindo who writes:

An omnipresent Reality is the truth of all life and existence whether absolute or relative, whether corporeal or incorporeal, whether animate or inanimate, whether

intelligent or unintelligent; and in all its infinitely varying and even constantly opposed self-expressions, from the contradictions nearest to our ordinary experience to those remotest antinomies which lose themselves on the verges of the Ineffable, the Reality is one and not a sum or concourse. From that all variations begin, in that all variations consist, to that all variations return. All affirmations are denied only to lead to a wider affirmation of the same Reality. All antinomies confront each other in order to recognise one Truth in their opposed aspects and embrace by the way of conflict their mutual Unity. Brahman is the Alpha and the Omega. Brahman is the One besides whom there is nothing else existent.

But this unity is in its nature indefinable. When we seek to envisage it by the mind we are compelled to proceed through an infinite series of conceptions and experiences. And yet in the end we are obliged to negate our largest conceptions, our most comprehensive experiences in order to affirm that the Reality exceeds all definitions.<sup>19</sup>

I have taken the help of two of the most ancient Vedic *Suktas* to elaborate upon the meaning and substance of what Sri Aurobindo has written in the opening argument of this chapter. We will now conclude this argument in his own words:

But if in our haste to arrive at a Unity that our mind can seize and hold, if in our insistence to confine the Infinite in our embrace we identify the Reality with any one definable state of being however pure and eternal, with any particular attribute however general and comprehensive, with any fixed formulation of consciousness however vast in its scope, with any energy or activity however boundless its application, and if we exclude all the rest, then our thoughts sin against Its unknowableness and arrive not at a true unity but at a division of the Indivisible.<sup>20</sup>

The Vedic seers erected Asat beyond Sachchidananda—as seen in the *Nasadiya Sukta* and *Purusha Sukta*—and they gave us a broad universal concept that does not restrict itself to one single thought or to one line of thinking. Sri Aurobindo says that they were so convinced of their idea that they “erected in their speculations or went on in their perceptions to an Asat, a Non- Being beyond ..”<sup>21</sup> We know that in the concept of Sachchidananda ‘Sat’ stands for ‘Existence’; that is the basic idea we have got from the Upanishads. But prior to them the Vedas gave us the concept of Asat. Strictly speaking Asat means Non-existence. But can there be anything that is Non-existent? It is simply to make us understand that Asat or Non-Being is beyond manifestation. That which is beyond the Being is Tat or That which does not come into manifestation directly. Imagine a state where there is no manifestation at all. When Tat comes into manifestation it is called Sachchidananda—the Being. So Sachchidananda can withdraw himself into that state of Tat. The Vedic Rishis have purposely given this idea, because even ‘Being’ or ‘to be’ is also a kind of restriction, a limitation; it is a kind of loss of freedom. One of the major things that we should remember about the Vedic Rishis and Sri Aurobindo is that they believe in the absolute freedom of the Absolute.

This is one of the fundamental ideas of Indian philosophy. One must remember that the Absolute is absolutely free. It is absolutely free to be or not to be, to become or not to become, to exist or not to exist. This is the basic concept behind the formulas of *neti neti* and *iti iti*. Most of the philosophers overlooked this particular aspect, and that is where the whole controversy between the ideas of ‘indeterminable’ and ‘determinable’ began in Indian philosophy. Here, Sri Aurobindo mentions that Buddhism speaks essentially of Asat, whereas the Upanishads take Asat and Sat as “the last antinomy through which we look up to the Unknowable.”<sup>22</sup> Buddha declined to speak about God, because he did not

accept even the concept of Being or of God, and therefore the Indian classical philosophers classify Buddhism as something different from Vedanta; they treat Buddha as non-Vedic. Sri Aurobindo says however that the Buddha took his stand on Asat. Hinduism emphasises the aspect of Sat, Brahman, Sachchidananda, but the Buddha took to the other aspect of Brahman, namely, that of Asat. So, how can Buddhism be alien to Vedanta? It should not be and cannot be, and it is not. Hinduism and Buddhism are only two wings of Vedic-Upanishadic thought. One has emphasised the Asat aspect, and the other emphasised both Sat and Asat; that is the essential difference between the two schools of thought.

Sri Aurobindo emphasises that Buddhism need not be and should not be segregated simply because it does not take the Vedas as its supreme authority. We know that our Indian classical philosophers have been divided in their view into those who believe in the Vedas as the ultimate authority and those who reject the authority of the Vedas. But that is a very superficial and divisive way of classifying the schools of thought. Once again, Sri Aurobindo makes a synthesis between Buddhism and Hinduism. He says that they are not contradictory or alien to each other; on the contrary, they constitute two views of the Vedantic concept of the Supreme: Asat and Sat.

Buddhism is an example of a philosophy that developed purely on the basis of realising one aspect of the Supreme (Asat). It accepts no God or soul, and therefore, it is not a religion at all. Here we see the whole paradox. Religion always centres on the concept of God. Buddhism has no God, and yet it is one of the largest religions in the world today! So clearly there has to be some deep spiritual truth in it, and this is the truth of Non-Being, the truth of the Impersonal Brahman. We will see, at the end of this chapter, how both the personal and impersonal aspects belong to the same supreme Reality.

Coming to the next point, we see that the Upanishads have given a very fine and balanced view; they are indeed a wonderful synthesis between different views. They say that there is Asat and Sat, but there is something else too. Sri Aurobindo writes:

Only, the positive and synthetic teaching of the Upanishads beheld Sat and Asat not as opposites destructive of each other, but as the last antinomy through which we look up to the Unknowable. And in the transactions of our positive consciousness, even Unity has to make its account with Multiplicity; for the Many also are Brahman.<sup>23</sup>

The Upanishads are more realistic in the sense that they have tried to synthesise this world and the world of the Superconscient. We all know that the most important synthesis that they have achieved is between the concepts of the One and the Many.

The One and the Many is one of the most difficult concepts to grasp. The whole puzzle revolves around two major questions: whether the One is more important than the Many (or vice versa), and which one came first, the One or the Many?

Let us take the example of a pomegranate. When you take off its skin, what do you see inside? Hundreds of beautiful red translucent seeds are all united, cluttered together and almost indivisible. They are all connected to each other, separated only by a thin film or veil. This one single pomegranate fruit has got hundreds of seeds. If you take away the seeds, will you have any pomegranate fruit left? No, you will not. When you remove the skin of this fruit, you will see all those numerous seeds existing together. What this example illustrates is that this one single fruit is constituted of many discrete entities. This is its essential quality.

The contents of the One are Many; this is the truth of

the One. It is because of the ‘Many’ that we call it *Saguna Brahman* or by hundreds of different names!

Let me give you another example. You all see me as one person standing here in front of you. This one being is made of different organs and billions of blood cells, and yet you call me Ananda, look at me as a single unit. What are the contents of this body? Millions of cells! Thus, we conclude that the One and the Many are essentially one in the sense that they are inseparable, indivisible. So, this is one of the main ideas of the Upanishads, but one which is somewhat confusingly understood in different ways by different schools of Indian thought in which each looks at this oneness from a different angle.

After dealing with this idea of Sat and Asat as only “the last antinomy,” the Upanishads have taken one more great step and clarified the concepts of knowledge and ignorance, Vidya and Avidya. Sri Aurobindo starts this chapter with this quotation from the Isha Upanishad:

By the Ignorance they cross beyond Death and by the Knowledge enjoy Immortality.... By the Non-Birth they cross beyond Death and by the Birth enjoy Immortality. (Isha Upanishad, Verses 11 and 14)<sup>24</sup>

I feel it is important to know why Sri Aurobindo has used this verse from the Isha Upanishad, which is the most synthetic verse of this great spiritual treatise. What is Vidya or knowledge? Here, knowledge is not merely general knowledge of life or science or the superficial existence. Some of you may be surprised to hear this. You may be thinking about how there is so much knowledge available if you open any website, and yet all that is not considered to be knowledge! I mean it is really something to ponder. In the Vedantic sense, everything a scientist knows about what is happening inside an atom or a doctor knows about the working of blood cells is not knowledge. Then what is all this? Is it ignorance? Yes, it

is ignorance. What is the difference between knowledge and ignorance? According to the Upanishads, Vidya or knowledge is the knowledge of the One, the supreme One. Or to put it a little differently, only when you have the realisation of Oneness, you get knowledge.

And what is ignorance? Surprisingly, ignorance in Vedantic thought is also a kind of knowledge. Avidya is knowledge, but it is the knowledge of the Many. That means all our scientific knowledge, all our computer knowledge, all our business knowledge, all the knowledge of history and everything else constitute ignorance. This is because it is exclusive knowledge and not knowledge that embraces the whole. We all concentrate on a particular field of knowledge. For example, a doctor is a specialist only for eyes, and another doctor is a specialist only in lung diseases, etc. We concentrate on parts, not on the whole. This is where the Isha Upanishad comes up with a unique definition: Avidya is 'limited knowledge', or to put it in another way, 'knowledge of the Many'. The 'Many' is what is limited. When the Supreme self-limits itself, that is called the Many. So in a way, all of us sitting here as well as every little thing that is here—the fan, the lights, the hall, everything—is Brahman essentially, because it is the Brahman who has limited himself as each of these forms.

Now to come back to this verse: "By the ignorance they cross beyond Death ...". How is it possible? Can we, ordinary and common people, in our ignorance cross beyond death? What all the great Rishis have done is exactly that. They have gone beyond death, meaning that they have realised their inner being, the Atman, which is beyond death. So human beings, who are living in this ignorance, can by their sadhana and tapasya, by self-effort and yoga transcend their limits to realise the Atman which is deathless. How is it 'deathless'? Because it is beyond birth too. Therefore, one can say that from the

ignorance, by the ignorance and through the ignorance one can cross to a region beyond death.

The Upanishad also states that one can “by the Knowledge enjoy Immortality” which means that if we have the knowledge of the One, then we can enjoy immortality. But what is meant here by the word immortality? It is not physical immortality but the immortality of consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo explains it:

By immortality is meant the consciousness which is beyond birth and death, beyond the chain of cause and effect, beyond all bondage and limitation, free, blissful, self-existent in conscious-being, the consciousness of the Lord, of the supreme Purusha, of Sachchidananda.<sup>25</sup>

For Sri Aurobindo, however, there is a different connotation of immortality. He explains that by bringing down the consciousness of immortality into Matter, one can transform Matter and Life and make this very body immortal. So, deathlessness and immortality are two different things. Deathlessness is the state of consciousness which is at the level of the Atman. But physical immortality can come only through the transformation of the body achieved by the transfiguring power of the Supermind. This body can be transformed by the force of the Supermind alone for no other force can effectuate such a transformation. Of course, such a transformation is preceded by the realisation of the inner self, i.e., the realisation of the psychic being!

In regard to the second part of the quotation from the Isha Upanishad which says, “By the Non-Birth they cross beyond Death and by the Birth enjoy Immortality” (Verse 14), I think it would be better if I read out to you Sri Aurobindo’s own explanation:

Thus by dissolution of ego and of the attachment to birth the soul crosses beyond death; it is liberated from all

limitation in the dualities. Having attained this liberation it accepts becoming as a process of Nature subject to the soul and not binding upon it and by this free and divine becoming enjoys Immortality.<sup>26</sup>

After touching upon these major concepts—of Sat and Asat, Vidya and Avidya, One and Many, Death and Immortality—which form the essence of the Upanishads in general, Sri Aurobindo concludes:

Such is the teaching, calm, wise and clear, of our most ancient sages. They had the patience and the strength to find and to know; they had also the clarity and humility to admit the limitation of our knowledge. They perceived the borders where it has to pass into something beyond itself.<sup>27</sup>

The Vedic Rishis had the humility to admit the limitation of knowledge, and it was only later that a divisive and exclusive consciousness appeared:

It was a later impatience of heart and mind, vehement attraction to an ultimate bliss or high masterfulness of pure experience and trenchant intelligence which sought the One to deny the Many ...<sup>28</sup>

There were great yogis, great masters of wisdom who took from the same Isha Upanishad two different verses and interpreted them completely differently—so very differently that they ended up as two different philosophies. This is what happened in the case of the great Shankaracharya, who, basing his analysis of the Isha Upanishad upon his own experience of the world as illusion, gave a completely different meaning to this Upanishad.

Let us take up as an example the first verse of the Isha Upanishad which states:

All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion.

By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.<sup>29</sup>

Commenting on the phrase "All this is for habitation" Sri Aurobindo writes:

There are three possible senses of *vasyam*, "to be clothed", "to be worn as a garment" and "to be inhabited". The first is the ordinarily accepted meaning. Shankara explains it in this significance, that we must lose the sense of this unreal objective universe in the sole perception of the pure Brahman. So explained the first line becomes a contradiction of the whole thought of the Upanishad which teaches the reconciliation, by the perception of essential Unity, of the apparently incompatible opposites, God and the World, Renunciation and Enjoyment, Action and internal Freedom, the One and the Many, Being and its Becomings, the passive divine Impersonality and the active divine Personality, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, the Becoming and the Not-Becoming, Life on earth and beyond and the supreme Immortality. The image is of the world either as a garment or as a dwelling-place for the informing and governing Spirit. The latter significance agrees better with the thought of the Upanishad.<sup>30</sup>

This phrase, *Isha vasyam*, is taken by Shankaracharya to mean that "all this" is "to be worn as a garment" by the Supreme. Vedanta takes it to mean that "all this" is "to be inhabited" by the Supreme, and this interpretation makes all the difference. If "all this" is only a cloak and a dress worn by the Supreme, then one can remove it for it is something external to it (the Supreme). One can say, 'I don't need it. I put it on temporarily. I can take it off when I want'. So the whole difference comes just by the interpretation of the words. Thus, it happened that in Indian spirituality there arose an "impatience of heart and mind" that sought for the bliss of the

beyond and “received the breath of the heights [and] scorned or recoiled from the secret of the depths.”<sup>31</sup>

Who would not be attracted to Bliss after experiencing the horrifying suffering of life? Ascetics in the past did not perhaps see as much of it in those days, but these days we see so much more suffering on every level—physical, mental, vital—and if some bliss is available at the price of giving up this world, then who would not pay this price? So, Sri Aurobindo writes that they had a “vehement attraction to an ultimate bliss or high masterfulness of pure experience and trenchant intelligence which sought the One to deny the Many ...”

Sri Aurobindo uses this phrase “trenchant intelligence” not for professors of philosophy in modern day universities but for those Acharyas who were brilliant in their arguments, who had very sharp intellects. They could argue keenly one against another and win or lose a battle of logic. We can understand that it is during the period of the development of the philosophical schools in India, that we lost for a while the essential vision of Vedanta. Having understood a little bit the essential synthetic spirit of Sri Aurobindo, I would say that even this kind of split in the interpretation of the Isha Upanishad or the emergence of different philosophies that were contradicting each other was also necessary. This exclusivity of views or opinions that we have nurtured was also a necessary process in the evolution. It is not that we have wavered from the Isha Upanishad or the Vedas, or that the essential vision has been lost forever. Sri Aurobindo indicates that even this losing of that single vision was part and parcel of the evolutionary process. It insured that each aspect of truth was experienced and analysed in depth. Those living in the heights of bliss may not have paid attention to Matter—at least we in India did not pay attention to the development of Matter after the first millennium. So, this kind of a branching

out of different ideas and the development of each idea and inner vision was also necessary.

At present everything has come to the acme of the development of the individual. We may be married, we may be fathers, we may be children, we may be husbands having all kinds of social relations, but today, in our conceptions and our perceptions, we are basically individualistic. Our movements are self-centred despite whatever little extension we may allow in the name of family or society or the nation. This is atomic individuality.

Now, it is clear that those who concentrate exclusively on one aspect—either on the One or the Many—are, respectively, the ascetics and the materialists. Different religious philosophies and different political philosophies were born out of these two broad trends of human thought and experience. In fact, it is interesting to know that even communism and democracy have their roots in these tendencies of human thought. The world, in fact, has been divided into these two tendencies of thought, and this is the foundation of all the socio-political philosophies. And Sri Aurobindo advises us not to reject any of them, because actually, the truth is on both sides. We may have all the idealism in the world, but all these ideals are more or less on the mental level, where it is difficult to truly harmonise them, regardless of whether it is a religious ideal, an ethical ideal or an aesthetic ideal.

By the experience of saints and sages, we have achieved great heights in the mental and supraphysical levels, but physically the world is still the same—full of violence, falsehood and all kinds of suffering. That is why, even in our normal life, unless and until a thing is established on the material and physical level, we do not find anything permanently established. To put it in Sri Aurobindo's emphatic language:

It is true that for this world of form in which we are set for our self-realisation, nothing is entirely valid until it

has possessed itself of our physical consciousness and manifested on the lowest levels in harmony with its manifestation on the highest summits.<sup>32</sup>

Unless and until the truth of an ideal is imprinted in Matter, it is not permanent; until it is imprinted in Matter, it is not even valid. That has been perhaps the primary reason why humanity has remained as it is for millennia. Philosophers, saints, yogis, Avatars—all have come and gone, but apparently, nothing has changed in human nature, and it has remained more or less on the mental level. At the same time, if we overemphasise the manifestation on the material level, then there could once again be an imbalance between the truth of Spirit and the truth of Matter. The truth of Materialism is very important, but at the same time, the Materialist should not forget that this stress on the physical world or life should not drag us down and bind us to Matter. What we have to understand is that Matter is the mould of the Spirit:

Form and matter can be valid only as shape and substance of manifestation for the incorporeal and immaterial. They are in their nature an act of divine consciousness, in their aim the representation of a status of the Spirit.<sup>33</sup>

What has become this Matter is the Spirit, and if we don't realise this integral truth, then we will lose the Upanishadic equilibrium between Spirit and Matter.

We can now take up the next argument which is that Brahman evolves through different stages. This is the real beginning of the argument regarding the destiny of the individual. Sri Aurobindo tells us:

... if Brahman has entered into form and represented Its being in material substance, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness. Brahman is in this world to represent Itself in the values of Life. Life exists in Brahman in order to discover Brahman in itself. Therefore man's importance

in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self- discovery becomes possible. To fulfil God in life is man's manhood. He starts from the animal vitality and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective.<sup>34</sup>

This is the central truth, the central argument: the higher spiritual truths must manifest in phenomenal consciousness and in Matter. What is the truth behind this? The truth is that it is Brahman who is evolving through the different stages. In evolution it is not just human beings who are evolving or nature that is evolving, but it is Brahman itself which is evolving, and we are all multiple units of this evolving Brahman.

Originally it is Brahman that became the Inconscient, and from the Inconscient level it is Brahman who became Matter. In this evolutionary process, it is again the same Brahman that emerges as Life out of Matter. Just as a plant bursts forth out of its seed or a mature baby is born from its mother's womb, Life emerges from Matter only after the maturation of Matter.

After the maturation of Matter, Life is born, and again, after millions and millions of years of maturation of Life, Mind is delivered. But in this maturation and birth, what is it that is born if not Brahman, though in a different form, a different shape, with a different capacity? It is Brahman that evolves as Matter, Life and then as Mind. But one thing that we need to remember here is that when Brahman entered Life, Matter was not abolished. Matter remained, Matter remains, and Matter will always remain. Although Matter today may be dark, dense, *tamasic* and with all the negative qualities of ignorance, it will always remain as the base, though much transformed, for future manifestations of Brahman. That is because, as Sri Aurobindo would clarify, in this process of creation or in this creation itself Matter is the base. There could have been creations where the base could have been some other

substance; it could have been fire or water or something else. But the basis of our creation is Matter. It will always remain so even when we have the supramental age and even beyond the Supermind. But of course, it would then be transformed Matter.

So, where does the individual fit into all this evolution of Brahman? Sri Aurobindo is driving home the point that although Brahman is evolving at different levels, its being has kept Life as the medium. Matter is the base, and Life is the medium of evolution. Life is between Matter and Mind, and it transfers the higher ideals of Mind to Matter. So Life is the perfect field of manifestation for the fulfilment of ideas that come from Mind and also for those that come from beyond the Mind. So, what we see here is that the life element becomes the most predominant aspect of the fulfilment. That is why Sri Aurobindo says, "To fulfil God in life is man's manhood."

The central point of evolution is the individual. Even in life forms there is not one form—there are infinite forms, ranging from the dinosaur to the tiny ant—and it is the individual form which becomes the experimental form in Brahman's evolution. That is why the individual is so very important; he is the hub of evolution. The Brahmic consciousness tries all its permutations and combinations in creation. Till now all the forms, such as those of the ant, dinosaur and elephant, were not conscious of themselves. But man is conscious, and he represents the higher consciousness which we call the Brahmic consciousness or the consciousness of the absolute Reality. So the responsibility of man in this evolution increases a hundredfold.

And what is this responsibility? In Sri Aurobindo's words, it is "to fulfil God in life." When we say "to fulfil God" what could it mean? "To fulfil" is to manifest God in his different aspects and attributes. It is to participate in his work upon earth. It is to be the instrument of God in this world. But

can man fulfil God? We say we want to fulfil our desires and ambitions. How do we fulfil the desires or ambitions of God? That is perhaps asking too much from us. But, in fact, it is not so. Remember the next two words: “in life.” The emphasis is to fulfil God “in life” not outside life, not beyond life. So to put it in a single sentence, we want the Integral Yoga, the integral philosophy, where “to fulfil God” is the first part. Had Sri Aurobindo said to fulfil God ‘in Mind’ or ‘in Matter’ it would have been different. Why did he not say ‘to fulfil God in Matter’? Isn’t Sri Aurobindo attempting to transform Matter? Yes he is, but we have seen that Life is the essential medium for changes to be passed into Matter. So whatever changes take place in Life will be transferred to Matter and to Mind as well.

Now, let us take up the second half of the sentence which says “to fulfil God in life is man’s manhood.” By saying ‘man’s manhood’, does Sri Aurobindo mean humankind’s destiny or the destiny of the individual? In the past, many yogis have realised Brahman, realised Sachchidananda; all that has already taken place. Then what does this word ‘manhood’ stand for? It is surely not the question of mere adulthood. ‘Manhood’ is his aim, his dharma. Sri Aurobindo seems to be telling us that if we want to call ourselves ‘true human beings’, we can do so only when we “fulfil God in life”. Otherwise, we will not be full-fledged human beings. We will only be relatively or partially developed human beings.

Next, Sri Aurobindo tells us not to abandon the lower nature to itself, but to transfigure it in the light of the higher consciousness. This is the essence of divine life. Sri Aurobindo says:

Brahman expresses Itself in many successive forms of consciousness, successive in their relation even if coexistent in being or coeval in Time, and Life in its self-unfolding must also rise to ever-new provinces of its own being. But if in passing from one domain to another we renounce

what has already been given us from eagerness for our new attainment, if in reaching the mental life we cast away or belittle the physical life which is our basis, or if we reject the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we do not fulfil God integrally ..<sup>35</sup>

So, that is the same thing; “to fulfil God in life” means to fulfil God integrally. How do we fulfil God integrally? If we understand what Brahman is integrally, only then can we understand the meaning of ‘fulfilling God integrally’. The integral definition of Brahman is what the Upanishads have given us—the One and the Many, Vidya and Avidya, the higher knowledge and the lower knowledge. ‘Integral’ means, in simple words, the lower as well as the higher consciousness. It is these spheres of consciousness (both the lower and the higher hemispheres), as Sri Aurobindo calls them, that must be integrated. It is by the integration of higher and lower, Vidya and Avidya, Immortality and Mortality that we get the integration and the integral vision. So, when we speak of integral vision, integral yoga or integral philosophy, it is not just a question of life, body and mind integrating around the psychic being; this is only an integration of the lower being. There is a second level of integration between the lower and the higher levels of consciousness for we have a higher nature also. Then, we have the third process where the higher integrates with the lower, which is the ultimate step. These are the three different kinds of integration. Integral Yoga is complete only when the third step is taken, that is, when the higher descends into the lower and is assimilated by it. We don’t “fulfil God” if we don’t effect this integration of life at different levels. Each time the higher integrates with the lower consciousness, the final outcome is that the two levels of consciousness become unified. If we want to give these processes specific names, we may call them psychicisation, spiritualisation, and supramentalisation.

Such an integral vision of life would act as a corrective to another major exaggeration of the ascetics which is the division of the three poises of the Supreme Being. Let us look into this next.

The ascetic view, like Sri Aurobindo's view, divides the three general forms of consciousness into the individual, the universal and the Transcendent. The salvation of the ascetic—but not of Sri Aurobindo—is an escape into the extracosmic. So what does the ascetic's division of these terms of consciousness entail? The division is like this. The ascetic says that only Brahman is important, and that the universal and the individual terms of consciousness are not important, because they are Maya, illusion or at best a temporary reality. So the distinctions made by the ascetic also entail choosing what is important, what is primary and fiercely rejecting all which is not that. This kind of segregation of life into greater and lesser elements leads to utter neglect of life, especially the humble material life. They have concluded that the most important aim of life is salvation, and salvation is to escape from the lower nature or material existence into the extracosmic realm of existence.

What is the meaning of 'extracosmic'? There is a difference between the supracosmic and the extracosmic. One more problem that has entered Indian and western thought is that, when we speak of the Supreme Reality, we presume it to be 'extracosmic', that is, outside Nature. We find this idea in the Bible which views God as a person who created this world in seven days and then watched over it from above. The idea of the Being is only as the creator; it is not connected with the cosmos. Most of us in fact have this idea about God; it is not foreign to us here in India. In the Puranas, it is said that God is watching us from the peak of a mountain; Shiva is sitting there on Mount Kailash and meditating! So separating God from the world is the origin of the concept of the extracosmic. But

the Divine is not extracosmic. He, in reality, is supracosmic, that is, he is beyond the cosmos, but not outside the cosmos. 'Supracosmic' means that the Divine is the world as well and much more than this world.

So this kind of thinking—of the extracosmic reality—has done us great harm. This is the only reason why Indians always think of salvation (*Mukti*) in terms of an extracosmic experience. These are very subtle ideas that have become so deeply entrenched in our thinking that we hardly ever differentiate between the supracosmic and the extracosmic. To seek for the supracosmic in this world—this is where integral philosophy comes in. The integral view does not divide the three poises of Brahman from one another; they are integrated into one. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

It is to this Transcendence that we give currently the name of God, who thus becomes to our conceptions not so much supracosmic as extracosmic. The belittling and degradation of both the individual and the universe is a natural consequence of this division: the cessation of both cosmos and individual by the attainment of the Transcendence would be logically its supreme conclusion.<sup>36</sup>

He also emphasises:

The integral view of the unity of Brahman avoids these consequences ... For the World-Transcendent embraces the universe, is one with it and does not exclude it, even as the universe embraces the individual, is one with him and does not exclude him.<sup>37</sup>

If we wish to understand this diagrammatically, we could say that a circle represents the Transcendent. Within the first circle, let us draw a second smaller circle which could represent the cosmos. Next, within the second circle, let us put many dots each of which represents an individual. This is the integral view. There is nothing outside the Transcendent, and at the same time, the Transcendent is both the cosmos and

the individual. When I say individuals make up the cosmos, it does not mean that if all individuals were destroyed or were withdrawn that the cosmos too would be withdrawn. No! The cosmos is beyond the individual, but at the same time, it is made up of individuals. The Transcendent embraces the cosmos, and the cosmos in its turn embraces the individual. This is the right understanding of the individual. The reason why Sri Aurobindo gives importance to the relationship between the individual and the Transcendent is because if we know what the individual really is, then we will understand its true function.

With this added understanding, we can now say that man can fulfil God, because God himself is simultaneously both the individual and the Transcendent. That is why Sri Aurobindo concludes:

The individual is still necessary to the action of the Transcendent in the universe and that action in him does not cease to be possible by his illumination. On the contrary, since the conscious manifestation of the Transcendent in the individual is the means by which the collective, the universal is also to become conscious of itself, the continuation of the illumined individual in the action of the world is an imperative need of the world play.<sup>38</sup>

It is the individual alone who can aspire for God. It is only the individual who has the privilege of aspiration. The Divine has created the individual for this purpose. So it is the responsibility of the individual, who is a part and parcel of the Transcendent itself, to aspire for the Divine. They are part and parcel of each other; the individual is part of the cosmos, the cosmos is part of the Transcendent and the three form a trinity—the individual, the cosmos, the Transcendent. If we understand the situation in this integral manner, then there is a meaning in saying ‘man must fulfil God’. We have seen that if the individual, the universal and the Transcendent are

separated, the individual's importance is lost. But if we have this integral view, there is a change in "the inview and the outview from the individual centre."<sup>39</sup> Unlike the experience of the ascetic, who by the realisation of the Transcendent relinquishes this world, there is in the integral view and in the integral experience a new relationship that is established between the trinity.

In this new relationship a new life dawns which brings a different balance. In it, one has to harmonise the inner spiritual life with the outer material life, one's individual life with the larger collective life, and all of us must coexist with the higher—the universal and the Transcendental realisations. With this new vision, life changes, but the individual continues to act. In the traditional yogas, when the individual achieved spiritual realisation, he withdrew into seclusion and then life ceased to have any purpose. So the individual lost his importance. Sri Aurobindo does not approve of this practice because—

If his inexorable removal through the very act of illumination is the law, then the world is condemned to remain eternally the scene of unredeemed darkness, death and suffering. And such a world can only be a ruthless ordeal or a mechanical illusion.<sup>40</sup>

If we think that by illumination, by salvation we are saved from all suffering and sorrow, that is fine, but the world would be a place eternally condemned to sorrow and suffering. The fact is that we have never made an attempt to make this world a better place to live in because we have always sought our own salvation away from this world.

Now we come to the next argument about the illusionist's view of the soul. We have heard about the exclusive view of the Mayavadin, the monistic view that the individual soul is one with the Supreme and that its sense of separation is sheer ignorance. So, they say escape from this ignorance is the only

salvation. The question then is: Who profits by one's salvation? Does the world profit by it? No! The world does not benefit, because one moves away from the world. The question then arises: If the Supreme is the sole reality, then who or what is it that is getting salvation? Philosophically, let us see where the Illusionist's argument is flawed. If the Supreme Brahman, Nirguna Brahman, is the sole and supreme Reality and the world is an illusion, then the questions are: Who is the person who is liberated? Who is it that is seeking salvation? It is the individual 'atman', it is said. But if the atman is essentially of the nature of Brahman, it means that it is essentially free. But how can one who is already free get liberated? That is why the argument, as Sri Aurobindo points out, leads us to an even more confusing and paradoxical argument than the problem it began with.

Secondly, from what does a person get liberated? From suffering? Death? Sorrow? But how can they be there when the world itself is an illusion? This is the second paradox. Freedom of the soul is meaningless. Freedom from the world has no basis. So where is the question of *mukti* Sri Aurobindo writes, "There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free."<sup>41</sup> Sri Aurobindo describes the whole paradox of this philosophy as lying in the fundamental belief that the soul is not bound. It is truly and eternally free; it is not trying and does not need to try to get freedom. If the Illusionist is asked 'From what does an individual gain his or her freedom?', the answer given is 'from Maya'. This world is like an image superimposed on Brahman. They say Brahman is like a white screen and the world is like a projection on that screen. But from where has this film come, for nothing can be outside of Brahman? Rationally, if one wants to project something onto Brahman, it has to exist outside Brahman, but how can there be anything outside of Brahman if Brahman is the sole Reality? How then to solve this problem? The Illusionists explain it away by saying that Maya is *anirvacanniya* (indescribable)—it

is and it is not! Thus “Maya meets us even in our escape and laughs at the triumphant logic which seemed to cut the knot of her mystery.”<sup>42</sup>

So Sri Aurobindo now comes to the integral vision which accepts unity as the basis of the Many. The Absolute is absolutely free and not even bound by its freedom. This is one of the most magnificent arguments given regarding the absoluteness of Brahman. I will read it:

It is “absolute” in the sense of being entirely free to include and arrange in its own way all possible terms of its self-expression.<sup>43</sup>

This is the central concept which one should understand once and for all. The Absolute is absolutely free. ‘Absolutely free’, that is to say, if one says Brahman is Nirguna, it is fine. We have no argument with that and we don’t challenge it. If Brahman is Saguna, we have no argument either; we don’t challenge it. But if Brahman cannot manifest this world, then it implies that it is restricted in its freedom. One argument is that whatever is dependent or divisible cannot be the ultimate Truth. This is one of the definitions of Brahman: Brahman is the sole Reality, and it is neither divisible nor dependent upon anything else; it is all powerful, omnipotent and omniscient. If that is so, how can one add a clause saying ‘Brahman cannot become this world’! The paradox is clear: ‘God can do anything and everything, but He cannot create the world’. To say this is to take away Brahman’s freedom, the freedom of the Absolute. ‘Absolute’ implies that it has absolute freedom to do or not to do anything it wishes. So how can we, without contradiction, superimpose certain conditions and say ‘Brahman can do everything, but He cannot become the universe’?

Secondly, how can we say that Brahman is dividing itself to create this universe? Brahman is not like the human mother who brings forth from her body the baby and thus divides

her being. Brahman does not divide itself. The universe is an extension of Brahman's infinite body. There is no division in Brahman. In fact, in one of his letters, Sri Aurobindo writes that a single ray of the Brahman has become these universes. So there is no question of division in Brahman.

Now we will see if there is dependence. I will give an example of my body. Can I say that my stomach is dependent on my lungs or my lungs are dependent on my stomach? No, each organ of my body is interdependent. So the argument of the Illusionists' question of divisibility and dependence is nullified. We can now state that Brahman is absolutely free, and in that absolute freedom, it has become Matter. That means that Brahman has become the universe and limited itself, because the Infinite has the freedom to limit itself. Why is it that we forget that Brahman, who is omnipresent, omniscient, infinite, eternal and immortal, also has absolute freedom and is not even bound by its own liberty? Sri Aurobindo concludes:

It is so free that it is not even bound by its liberty. It can play at being bound without incurring a real bondage. Its chain is a self-imposed convention, its limitation in the ego a transitional device that it uses in order to repeat its transcendence and universality in the scheme of the individual Brahman.<sup>44</sup>

Freedom means that nothing—absolutely nothing—binds Brahman. It is by this freedom that the Infinite becomes finite and the Eternal becomes time. Seen in this way, there is no contradiction in saying that Brahman has become this world and that this world is as real as Brahman itself. Can the mother who gives birth to her baby say that the baby is not real? How can the mother say that the baby is an illusion? It is from her flesh and blood that she has brought forth her baby! The difference between the mother and the baby is that of the capacities or incapacities of self-expression. Similarly,

this baby-universe is in its essentiality akin to the supreme Brahman, but it is limited in its present consciousness and self-expression. Brahman is not bound by its freedom. In its freedom Brahman establishes itself as the subconscious, the conscient and the superconscient. In its freedom it has become its very opposite in the inconscient.

In this chapter, the focus is on the individual. The individual soul's freedom is considered to be essential for it must have the freedom to unite not only vertically with the spiritual and divine consciousness, but horizontally too with the world. We have already discussed the aim of the individual. The human individual must "fulfil God in life." So each one of us here in this room follows our dharma, our *swadharna* in our own field of work and life where we express ourselves in relationships, in business and in the arts or commerce. Each one of us does this, but we must understand why we are doing this. I am not saying that all of us must be philosophers or that all of us must be businessmen, or artists, or musicians or writers, but each one of us must do whatever we do in life with the single purpose of wanting to manifest God. All of us here represent a facet of the Divine, but if we work for our own sake, for our own motives and enjoyments, then we are not fulfilling God in life.

Normally, we all seek to fulfil our desires and ambitions in life. But we can turn our desire into a divine fulfilment if we take the attitude that the Divine will manifest in each one of us in its own way. If a person is not fulfilling God, then he or she is not to be called a full-fledged human being. In the Gita, Lord Krishna repeatedly tells us in simple terms to be desireless, to have detachment. He is not telling us to be something like a superhuman, but simply to be full-fledged human beings. This in itself is a great thing to achieve. So the right definition of the 'human being' includes spiritual discipline and awareness. If one does good, is ethical and lives in a sattwic consciousness, it is all right, but it is not sufficient. One may be a good person, but this

does not mean that one is a spiritual person. Only when we start fulfilling God in life can we be true human beings!

“To fulfil God in life”—this idea has to be understood in the right way, for this is the essence of the whole philosophy of Integral Yoga. The question is whether we should realise this truth vertically or horizontally. Doing so vertically means realising the superconscient, and doing so horizontally means to expand in life. Let us take the case of an individual who has not only realised himself or herself vertically, but also unified his or her being horizontally. This is a true synthesis, for we would have the union of the subconscient and the superconscient. In fact, the psychic is the real nodus of the unification of these three levels of the being. In fact, the symbol of the cross in Christianity symbolises this union of the vertical and the horizontal levels.

What do we mean by horizontal progress? Does it mean going to help the people of Gujarat after the earthquake? Does it mean going to Orissa after the cyclone? It may mean this—it need not exclude it. But speaking in terms of consciousness, if the individual becomes one with the Transcendent and starts expanding his or her consciousness, then the individual consciousness embraces the world consciousness.

We now come to one of the boldest ideas in this chapter:

The divine soul reproduces itself in similar liberated souls as the animal reproduces itself in similar bodies. Therefore, whenever even a single soul is liberated, there is a tendency to an extension and even to an outburst of the same divine self-consciousness in other individual souls of our terrestrial humanity and, — who knows? — perhaps even beyond the terrestrial consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

Common human beings want to reproduce themselves physically. People want to have children, because they want their families to continue. Then what about the spiritual persons who do not necessarily get married? How can they

extend their family? Long back this question was asked to Sri Aurobindo: ‘What about the sadhakas, if they do not get married and if they do not have children, how will the family of spiritual beings grow?’ Sri Aurobindo said that spirituality is not a thing of inheritance that is passed from the father to the child. Rather, as he writes here in this chapter, a spiritual soul that has liberated itself, a soul that has unified itself with the higher consciousness to whatever extent—with Sachchidananda or Supermind, or at least with a greater consciousness than the human—such a “divine soul reproduces itself in similar liberated souls ...” What does he mean by “reproduces itself”? It seems to mean that if even a single person becomes spiritualised, it leads to innumerable other spiritual births. This is the deeper meaning of guruship. A spiritual guru may be married or unmarried, but they give birth to or awaken other souls. It is like a lamp lighting other lamps. This is what we call horizontal expansion. Sri Aurobindo gives a fine example of the great Buddha. The Buddha, when he was on the doorstep of the Non-Being (Asat) where he could have completely merged himself and left the world, chose instead to return to the world, for he felt that “so long as there was a single being upon earth undelivered from the knot of suffering, from the bondage of the ego”<sup>46</sup> he would not cross into the Non-Being but would remain on earth to help others. And once he returned to this world, he indeed gave birth to thousands of other spiritual beings. The very vibration of one spiritual person is more than thousands of rich people! Spiritual persons may not produce what money can give, but they give the peace, the bliss of the Divine. So, a rich man may have a lot of computers, a lot of money and can give lots of jobs to Indians longing to go to the West, but one seer and yogi, Sri Aurobindo, sitting here at Pondicherry, attracts the whole world, attracts all those who seek the inner joy, and he, with his achieved supramental consciousness, can single-handedly change the face of the world in the future.

A spiritual person sends out vibrations, and the yogins and sannyasins sitting in the Himalayas do in their own way a greater work for the earth than all the political leaders and social reformers of the world put together.

Even if an Avatar is enclosed in a single room, not exposed to the world, not going into the world or writing exclusively on spirituality, he still fulfils the work for which he has come. That is because he works through subtle vibrations. So is the need of a spiritual man who works silently but permanently, even though people may or may not recognise it today. In an international conference, a Russian woman asked me the use of spirituality. Can a spiritual man build a hundred hospitals? Well, a spiritual man may or may not build a hundred hospitals, I replied, but what the spiritual man gives to the world is beyond what the rich man can even think of. He can take away the very root of suffering itself, and then, in the long run, the hospitals may not be needed at all! So, this is the fundamental idea: horizontal identification enables a reproduction of similar liberated souls. But there is a catch here. Sri Aurobindo or other yogis are not going to transform us if we do not have the aspiration to be transformed. We must want it and consent to be spiritualised. The moment we turn to spirituality the influence of spiritual vibrations enters our being. So, the purpose of the guru, of the Avatar, of the descent of the Divine is to transform our lives.

Let us take up the line: "To be perfect as He is perfect is the condition of His integral attainment"<sup>47</sup> One can imagine what an extraordinarily high aim it is. It tells us in one sentence to 'Be like Brahman in the world'. As Brahman resides equally in the higher and in the lower, in the inner and in the outer, in the silent and in the dynamic, in the Purusha and in Prakriti, we too must live in this integral vision. The human being has ultimately to become like Brahman which means that we should not exclusively focus on the inner withdrawal, nor

must we lose ourselves in the movement of the outer world. We must ultimately acquire the nature of Brahman itself by uniting our individual selves with the universal and the Transcendental Self. So, the destiny of the individual is to become like Brahman, to be perfect as Brahman is perfect and to “become luminous centres of its conscious self- expression in humanity.”<sup>48</sup>

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### **Lecture Notes**

#### *I. The Vedic vision of the Brahman*

- (a) Brahman is One: One without a second; the Many are inherent in Brahman.
- (b) Brahman is indefinable: Brahman is beyond description but can be experienced at every level of existence.

## II. *Purusha Sukta and Nasadiya Sukta*

(a) The *Purusha Sukta* is an example of the Vedic vision of *iti iti* (it is this, it is that) approach to Brahman.

(i) The process by which the Infinite becomes the finite is essentially a sacrifice of the Spirit or Purusha. Sri Aurobindo emphasises the role of the Shakti in this primordial sacrifice.

(ii) The sacrifice manifests the Many out of the One. The process of involution in the *Purusha Sukta* is similar to Sri Aurobindo's view of world creation.

(iii) The Vedas also cover the progressive ascent of humanity into an Integral state of Being.

(iv) The Divine has sacrificed itself in Matter to ensure the awakening of consciousness in all the infinite elements that constitute Matter.

(v) The *sandhya devas* in the *Purusha Sukta* correspond to the supramental godheads, and/or the four aspects of the Mother.

(b) The *Nasadiya Sukta* is an example of the Vedic vision of *neti neti* (it is not this or that but something beyond) approach to Brahman.

(i) The *Nasadiya Sukta* expresses a luminous awareness of the integral oneness of Being and Non-Being.

(ii) The Vedas state that even the Supreme does not know the origin of its own creation. The verse is stating that we must not stop at *iti iti* or *neti neti*, but to go beyond both.

(iii) Creation is the process of the actualisation of potentialities inherent in the Divine.

## III. *Asat and Sat*

(a) Tat or Asat or Non-Being is beyond manifestation.

When it comes into manifestation it is called Sachchidananda.

- (b) The Absolute is absolutely free to be or not to be, to become or not to become, to exist or not to exist.
- (c) Buddhists speak essentially of Asat and do not accept God or Being, so they were called 'non-Vedic'.
- (d) The Upanishads take Asat and Sat as the last antinomy through which we look up to the Unknowable.
- (e) Hinduism and Buddhism are the two wings of Vedic-Upanishadic thought; the latter emphasised on the Asat aspect while the former embraced both the aspects, Sat and Asat.

#### IV. *The synthesis*

The Upanishads tried to synthesise the concepts of the One and the Many.

(a) The Many are Brahman. The content of the One is the Many.

(b) Vidya and Avidya

(i) Vidya is the knowledge of the One.

(ii) Avidya is the knowledge of the Many (e.g., knowledge gained by science, etc.)

(c) Deathlessness and immortality

(i) Human beings who are living in this ignorance, can, by *sadhana* and *tapasya*, by self-effort and yoga, transcend themselves to realise the 'Atman' which is deathless.

(ii) Atman, beyond birth is naturally beyond death too, so it is deathless.

(iii) By the knowledge of the One we can achieve immortality and by bringing down the

consciousness of immortality into Matter, we can transform this very body.

V. *The utility of the ascetic view*

- (a) The exclusive view of the ascetics was also a necessary process in the evolution of the individual's freedom from manifest reality. Now it needs to be established in the collective consciousness.
- (b) We need to realise the integral truth that it is Spirit that has become Matter.

VI. *To fulfil God in life is man's manhood*

- (a) Till now forms were not conscious of themselves. The individual is conscious, and represents the higher consciousness, so the responsibility of the human being in this evolution becomes hundredfold.
- (b) Life is the best medium for effecting change, so whatever changes take place in life, these are transferred to matter and to mind as well.
- (c) If we want to call ourselves 'a real man', we can do so only when we "fulfil God in life"; that is, "man's manhood".

VII. *To transfigure the lower in the light of the higher is the essence of a divine life*

VIII. *Individual, Universal and Transcendent are the three terms of Brahman*

- (a) The ascetic view makes a strong division between the Individual, Universal and Transcendental; therefore the inevitable result is escape into the supracosmic.
- (b) The integral view does not divide these three poises of Brahman. It treats them as a single unity. This changes our view of why work in the world is necessary for spiritual development.

*IX. Fallacy of illusionism*

The Illusionist's view regarding the soul: it is one with the Brahman. If so—

“There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be freed.”

This is the paradox faced by the Illusionist.

*X. Absolute freedom of Brahman*

- (a) The integral vision accepts unity as the basis of the Many. The Absolute is absolutely free, not even bound by its freedom.
- (b) In its freedom it establishes itself as the subconscious, conscient and superconscient.

*XI. Soul's progress*

- (a) The individual soul's freedom is essential. It must, however, unite not only vertically with the Transcendent but horizontally too with the world.
- (b) Horizontal identification enables the spiritual being to reproduce itself in other beings.
- (c) “To be perfect as He is perfect” is the aim of the integral vision of life divine

## Chapter Six

### Man in the Universe

**I**n the opening of this chapter, there is a quotation from the Svetaswatara Upanishad which says:

The Soul of man, a traveller, wanders in the cycle of Brahman, huge, a totality of lives, a totality of states, thinking itself different from the Impeller of the journey. Accepted by Him, it attains its goal of Immortality. [I.6]<sup>1</sup>

In this quotation, we have the basic outline of the ideas that we are going to discuss today about the supreme Reality, the Universe and Man.

The very first sentence of the chapter gives a summary of what has been said in the previous chapter:

The progressive revelation of a great, a transcendent, a luminous Reality with the multitudinous relativities of this world that we see and those other worlds that we do not see as means and material, condition and field, this would seem then to be the meaning of the universe, — since meaning and aim it has and is neither a purposeless illusion nor a fortuitous accident.<sup>2</sup>

So, the “meaning and aim” of this universe is the progressive revelation of the great, transcendent, luminous Reality; therefore, the monistic view—that this world is an illusion—cannot be right. Behind this world and in the universe there is a secret intelligence, a luminous consciousness that is moulding it at every moment. Science, though it started with the Big Bang theory as the origin of this universe, is now coming round to accept the existence of a supreme intelligence that makes possible the motion of the stars as well as the building of an ant-hill! As writes Sri Aurobindo:

An existence, wholly self-aware and therefore entirely

master of itself, possesses the phenomenal being in which it is involved, realises itself in form, unfolds itself in the individual.<sup>3</sup>

It is this supreme Reality which is gradually evolving, emerging. That is why Sri Aurobindo, as well as the Vedanta, calls it a “luminous Emergence.”<sup>4</sup> This word ‘Emergence’ is beautiful, because it applies to both metaphysics and science. Science also agrees that there is an evolution, that there is a movement forward, that there is an emergence of something which is hidden. Sri Aurobindo says: “That luminous Emergence is the dawn which the Aryan forefathers worshipped.”<sup>5</sup> Here Sri Aurobindo has used a neutral phrase — “luminous Emergence” (with a capital E)— instead of calling it Brahman or Sachchidananda or Reality. This ‘Emergence’ means the evolution or coming out of a hidden consciousness from one level to another, revealing itself in a greater intensity. In the previous chapter, Sri Aurobindo told us that in this ascent of the consciousness towards self-revelation man has a very important role. Until man evolved, this Emergence had been extremely slow, because there was no dynamic and conscious aspiration for such a growth. But when man came upon earth, this aspiration became an innate and inborn quality of Nature herself. The sole duty and responsibility of man seems to be to reveal, to fulfil and to manifest the Supreme. If we are even slightly conscious of ourselves and our purpose on earth, then we must know that “To fulfil God in life is man’s manhood.” This sentence with its intensity of meaning is like a mantra. If we can constantly remember it, it will give us great inner strength.

To continue with the same thought and emphasis:

The ascent to the divine Life is the human journey, the Work of works, the acceptable Sacrifice. 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.<sup>6</sup>

This is an incredibly severe sentence from Sri Aurobindo, and I feel, it is the strongest criticism of the unconscious man. If one is not trying to fulfil God in life, then one is no better than “an insect crawling among other ephemeral insects”! Sri Aurobindo could not be more blunt. He seems to be intentionally harsh so that we may take life more seriously, awoken to the call of the soul and take the first step of ascent to the divine life.

Sri Aurobindo does not give any credit to man if he does not attempt to exceed himself. Man is born, grows up, reproduces, ages and then dies! In other words, all that he has been doing so far is to merely fulfil his basic physical and vital urges and some mental ambitions. But if he fulfils God, then alone is his existence fulfilled. This is the only justification of man's existence; a true man is one who tries to “fulfil God in life”. There seems to be no other definition, no other compromise. In the ascent to the divine life, there is a long process. The least that one is expected to do is to turn towards this ascent, whatever be one's present situation. This turning towards the higher life is the only acceptable ‘sacrifice’ in man's life.

Sri Aurobindo has specifically chosen the word ‘sacrifice’, because ordinarily we use this term a lot—‘the parent's sacrifice for the child’, ‘the child's sacrifice for its parents’, ‘the teachers' sacrifice in the cause of uplifting others’, etc. Then there is the holy person's sacrifice for God. The ‘sacrifice for God’ does not imply the sacrifice of animals, but rather, a *yajna* of every thought, of every feeling. Does *yajna* mean only the pouring of *ghee* (clarified butter) and the placing of specially prepared food on the altar? They must symbolise our inner offering for without this they are ineffective. So, sacrifice is an offering, an oblation of our entire being. Here,

Sri Aurobindo is telling us that this “ascent to the divine life”, this offering of oneself, is the only acceptable sacrifice. All the rest, all other actions are ephemeral, temporal, for the satisfaction of one’s ego. We build mansions and say that we have done a great sacrifice for our children, but most of the children of modern times do not even acknowledge that the parents have sacrificed anything for them! This is in the social context where ‘sacrifice’ carries hardly any meaning. Sri Aurobindo has given us a very clear and strong dictum: man’s real business in the world is to manifest the ‘Becoming’ of Sachchidananda.

The names Sachchidananda, Brahman and the supreme Reality broadly mean the same thing. Whenever the supreme Reality or Sachchidananda evolves, we say there is an Emergence. How does it evolve and grow? Is it that it evolves through mind and ideas? No, for I may sit in my room and think that I have become a great *sadhu* or a yogi, that I have achieved great detachment, etc. I can imagine all this in my mind, but the moment I hear something bad about me, my ego is pricked and I retort. At this moment, it is clear to me that I have not become a yogi. Evolution is a growth through experience, which is why we say that Brahman grows in us through self-experience. This can be felt by us in everyday experiences. For example, when we face a problem in life, we find that a greater inner strength emerges from within us to tackle it. To know a certain thing is one thing, but to experience it is much more enriching. And this is precisely the manner in which Brahman grows. It too experiences itself. It has experienced what Matter is, and in order to experience it, it has become the vast body of Matter. It then experienced semi-consciousness by becoming the plant world, because Matter is still unconscious. Likewise, stage by stage, It experienced birds, monkeys, elephants, etc.—all the forms that are born on this earth. This is the self- experience of Brahman. Through various stages the hidden divinity evolves,

and it is man's ultimate business to manifest Sachchidananda through his knowledge, devotion and action.

For fulfilment of life or for transcendence of life, and whether purity, calm and freedom in the spirit be our aim or puissance, joy and perfection, Sachchidananda is the unknown, omnipresent, indispensable term for which the human consciousness, whether in knowledge and sentiment or in sensation and action, is eternally seeking.<sup>7</sup>

After this fourth paragraph, there is a new argument that is taken up. It is that of involution and evolution. Sri Aurobindo writes that there are two major processes in manifestation. The first is the process of involution, also known as the process of self-concealment or the process of descent. The second process is that of evolution, also known as the process of self-revelation or the process of ascent. Let us now try to understand how the process of self-concealment, involution or descent takes place. How does one conceal oneself? For example, I am standing here and if I want to conceal myself, what do I do? If I cover myself with a plastic sheet, I am partly concealed. You can still see me, but it reduces the visibility of my body to some extent. Then, if I put on a rain coat, you can still see my legs, arms and my form; you can still see a human being standing here. If I then hide myself in a big box, what happens? You completely lose sight of me and see only the big box. Thus, I have now completely concealed myself under these layers. I have hidden myself within these layers, and this is what is called self-concealment. Something very similar happens in the involution.

The supreme Reality is the centre, and it has put on itself the first veil which is that of the Overmind. Then there is a descent, and the next veil it covers itself with is the Mind. In the third involutory step, it veils itself by Life. In the fourth step, it veils itself by Matter. The fifth step is that of the Inconscient—the densest, darkest and the thickest veil—

because it does not want to reveal itself. Thus, the Supreme Consciousness has become the complete opposite of itself, forgetting itself in that last thickest veil—the Inconscient. So, what the Supreme has done is, starting from the most subtle form of itself, it has gradually turned itself into the densest form. This is the process of involution, and at each stage there is greater densification, a greater obscuration resulting in self-concealment. By the time the Supreme takes upon itself the veil of the Inconscient, the densification is so complete that there is absolute self-oblivion, a complete self-forgetfulness.

In evolution there is a reverse process of all the five stages—an unveiling. One veil after another is revealed:

Necessarily, the revelation takes the form of an ascent; and necessarily also the ascent and the revelation are both progressive. For each successive level in the descent of the Divine is to man a stage in an ascension; each veil that hides the unknown God becomes for the God-lover and God-seeker an instrument of His unveiling.<sup>8</sup>

But in this ascent, there is one important point to remember which is that of sublimation and integration. Sublimation and integration means that each time there is an ascent—from the Inconscient to the level of Matter, from Matter to Life or from Life to Mind—what happens is something that is pretty similar to what takes place in the womb of a mother when a child is born. When the mother's womb is ready to conceive, an ovum is produced, and it is ready to receive the sperm for fertilisation. Nine months after the sperm fertilises the ovum, a child is produced from the womb. Evolution undergoes the same process. First the hot molten mass that covered the earth cools down, and then, for millions of years Matter prepares itself. Matter then turns into mountains and plains fed by rivers and surrounded by oceans. When sufficient awakening or receptivity emerges, when the 'Matter-ovum' is ready, Life, like the sperm, descends from a higher involutionary level

and fertilises Matter. This coming down of the Life-principle is called the 'descent of the principle of Life'. It takes some time; there is a period of gestation, and slowly Matter gives birth to flora and fauna and other creatures. In the light of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, this process constitutes a descent of the higher planes of consciousness. Without this descent, Matter would remain the same forever—nothing would ever happen to it. For millions of years, Life experimented with all kinds of forms—including the enormous dinosaurs and reptiles, birds and mammals—all participating in the battle of the survival of the fittest. When there was sufficient biological complexity and growth, when Life itself was mature enough, the principle of Mind entered the womb of the 'Life-ovum. Life prepares itself gradually, possibly through many intermediary 'prototypes' such as we see in the case of the human being. There were several prototypes of a human being that were one by one discarded until the final version emerged—the *Homo sapiens*. Man took thousands of years to make stone instruments, and after that, for thousands of years, he did not make any better or more complex instruments, because the mind principle had not yet expressed itself completely. But once the mind started expressing itself fully, it burst forth. Today, within relatively few years, computerisation and advanced technology have both emerged and taken enormous strides. We now see how the mind principle has blossomed forth, expressing itself immeasurably. It has definitely matured to the point where it would be ready to receive the seed of Supermind. Sri Aurobindo writes:

But Mind takes up the work to continue, not to complete it. It is a labourer of acute but limited intelligence who takes the confused materials offered by Life and, having improved, adapted, varied, classified according to its power, hands them over to the supreme Artist of our divine manhood. That Artist dwells in Supermind; for Supermind is Superman. Therefore our world has yet to climb beyond

Mind to a higher principle, a higher status, a higher dynamism in which universe and individual become aware of and possess that which they both are and therefore stand explained to each other, in harmony with each other, unified.<sup>9</sup>

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have seen to it that Supermind descends and impregnates the 'Mind-ovum'. The question now raised is what then will happen to the body and what will be its form? This decision lies in the womb of Nature, so let us leave it at that.

The fundamental substance (Matter) will always remain, though perhaps not in the same way. When Life emerged in Matter, it had its specific effect on Matter; it made it more vibrant. Matter, lifeless and dumb for millions of years, suddenly became alive first as unicellular organisms, then as multicellular bodies such as insects and reptiles. Plants gave nourishment to the animals, and Matter changed; it, we could say, upgraded itself to animals. When the Mind principle manifested, it affected Life. It brought new life patterns of thought, of feelings, of ethics, of morality, of religious beliefs. Self-expressions such as poetry, literature, arts and systematised sciences have emerged—things which an animal- man could not have imagined. The recent wonders of mind and matter are computers, cell phones and the global communication and knowledge transference through the World Wide Web. We can sit at the computer and get connected with the whole world! This is precisely how matter has opened itself to mind and to the space beyond mind. So at every level of evolution, there is an effect of the higher principles on the lower ones, and because of this effect, there is a possibility of transformation.

If the effect of the higher principles on the lower ones constitutes the key process of transformation, then when the Supermind establishes itself it will affect the mind in the same

way. Similarly, life and matter will be affected to such an extent that even the body shall become a divinised matter. Matter, as we said earlier, will remain and will not vanish. When the Life-principle came, did Matter vanish? So, when Supermind comes Matter will not vanish, but it will change just like it has already changed with the coming of life and mind. This is a very crucial concept in

Sri Aurobindo's philosophy, and without this concept, it would be otiose to talk about transformation. It is not that all of a sudden matter will be transformed with the coming of the Supermind. The transformation is already taking place, but until Supermind is firmly established, matter cannot be divinised.

One may wonder if this idea of Sri Aurobindo is absolutely new or if our scriptures contained it. If one goes deep into the Vedas, one will see the same principle; they also talk about transformation. The eternal Vedas could not have missed this principle, being what they are. For me, the difference between the Vedic Rishis and Sri Aurobindo is not in their philosophy but in Sri Aurobindo's power of actualising the Vedic vision. In terms of vision, we have everything in the Vedas, though not in modern terminology or in the details which have been provided by Sri Aurobindo. It is as if Sri Aurobindo has come to fulfil the Vedas, to realise and concretise the highest vision of the Vedas.

So we see that our world has yet to climb beyond mind to the higher status of the Supermind in which the Universal and the Individual become aware of what they both are and are harmoniously unified. In Supermind, there will be a complete understanding of the Individual and of the Universal. The Vedic Rishis attained the universal but neglected the individual transformation, while the materialist progressed in the realisation of the individual fulfilment and rejected the universal. The marriage of the universal and the individual will take place only in the supramental consciousness, because

mind has not been given this capacity of a unitive vision. Even if the mind concentrates for decades in the most profound pursuits of a unitary consciousness, it can never achieve a union between the One and the Many unless it reaches the supramental consciousness.

In this chapter, Sri Aurobindo brings out another essential characteristic of Matter. “Matter below life and mind contains in itself the balance between a perfect poise of tranquillity” on one side “and the action of an immeasurable energy”<sup>10</sup> on the other side. Each atom in Matter is in motion and this movement is energy. That Matter is energy is a proven fact. But is there something tranquil in it? No! Tranquillity belongs to the deeper consciousness hidden within it. The tranquillity, which is seen at present in Matter, is only that of “a drugged and imprisoned consciousness.”<sup>11</sup> So this tranquillity is a negative state; it is only apparent as a drugged trance of matter. This is the nature of Matter. It is essentially an immeasurable energy that is frozen in a “sealed trance of consciousness”<sup>12</sup> Why is it that Sri Aurobindo is calling it a “drugged and imprisoned consciousness”? Just as a man who has taken drugs lies motionless and unconscious of his surroundings, matter is not really aware of this tremendous energy and this deeper tranquillity within it and it “does not possess that which it contains.”<sup>13</sup> This means that matter possesses these two aspects (of tranquillity and an immeasurable energy), but it is not aware of them. In other words, “it has not the awakened joy of its own harmonious energies.”<sup>14</sup>

Now, let us see what happens when Life emerges. What is the essential feature of Life? It is desire. When we see the birth of a little plant in the ground, we can see in it the great urge to grow up and reach the sun, to offer itself to the sun. The Mother, in fact, considered the blossoming of flowers as an expression of Nature’s aspiration to the Divine. So there is a kind of innate desire there, and the same thing is seen in animals too, i.e., there is an essential desire to grow, to enlarge, to be happy, and this desire is the first step “towards self-

knowledge and self-fulfilment.”<sup>15</sup> In fact, when somebody’s life is full of desires, we call that person animal-natured for the stamp of the animal is desire-consciousness.

When we come to the Mind, there is a seeking for knowledge. But when we are driven by desire, this desire restricts our capacity for knowledge. Here I do not mean knowledge of, for example, how to drive a car, how to increase one’s income or how to develop one’s outer personality, etc. For this is not the real knowledge. Real knowledge is knowledge of the Supreme Reality.

Man seeks to know more and more, and after a certain stage this seeking transcends mere curiosity and turns into an aspiration for something higher, something beyond him. What is that ‘something higher’? Mind basically tells us what is outside us. When man turns inside and wants to know what is within him or beyond him, then begins man’s ascent to levels beyond mind. Until then, he may be very brilliant like Einstein on the mental level, but his growth is only on the horizontal level. When he ascends the levels of consciousness, he may reach the level of the supramental consciousness where he will gain, as writes Sri Aurobindo:

... a tranquillity which is neither inertia nor a sealed trance of consciousness but the concentration of an absolute force and an absolute self-awareness, and an action of immeasurable energy which is at the same time an out-thrilling of ineffable bliss because its every act is the expression, not of a want and an ignorant straining, but of an absolute peace and self-mastery.<sup>16</sup>

It is only on this level of Supermind that whatever has been initiated in Matter, Life and Mind will find their acme, their fulfilment, their completion. On all the other levels—even in the Overmind—there is no fulfilment. Under the impact of Supermind, matter has the perception of trance and Peace, life (which strives for desire-fulfilment in ignorance as a

means to happiness) finds an inherent Bliss and mind (which seeks knowledge and awareness) finds in the end the absolute Chit- Tapas. So, there is an absolute necessity to grow into the Supermind. The concept that it is only the higher that can fulfil the lower is fundamental to Sri Aurobindo's metaphysical thought; it is a basic tenet of his philosophy that the lower by itself cannot fulfil itself. So, man's growth into the higher consciousness becomes absolutely imperative. To transfigure the lower in the light of the higher is the true destiny of Nature, and in the process of such transfiguration, we fulfil God integrally.

Let us now read the first two sentences of paragraph eight: "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."<sup>17</sup>

We see that in these sentences Sri Aurobindo has taken up the relation between the Universal and the Individual. When the Supreme—let us call it Sachchidananda—manifests itself, it does so through a process. Sri Aurobindo describes it in three steps. First, the Transcendent becomes the Universe. In the Vedic language, we could say that Truth (*Satyam*), by its own Divine Law (*Ritam*), becomes Vastness (*Brhat*), i.e., extension and diffusion. When we talk about the Big Bang Theory, we say that the original little dot of material energy began to expand at a particular point in time. The expansion and diffusion of that single point contains the idea of the Truth manifesting itself in extension. This single point is infinitesimally small, and yet, it contains all the future multitudes of universes! This is an extraordinary vision! This infinite expansion, this diffusion is the very first step of materialised Nature (*Prakriti*). Along with this diffusion begins Time, because Time goes hand in hand with Space. But the Supreme then made, as it were, a halt and seems to have said to itself: 'If I keep on expanding myself infinitely, where

can I possibly see myself, how can I see myself?’ Sri Aurobindo defines it very clearly:

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.<sup>18</sup>

The Supreme then took the second step—that of individualisation: “Universe is a diffusion of the divine All in infinite Space and Time, the individual its concentration within limits of Space and Time.”<sup>19</sup> Individualisation does not stop with you and me; it reaches the subatomic levels. “Therefore it creates,” writes Sri Aurobindo, “in itself a self-conscious concentration of the All through which it can aspire.”<sup>20</sup> This is the infinitesimal individualisation. This so-called Matter became atomic individuality, and that is the ultimate of individualisation.

Why did Sachchidananda become the Individual? We said the other day that the Individual serves two purposes. Atomic individualisation is infinite; it is not countable as in the case of human beings. So Matter is ‘atomic Brahman’. So, the first purpose of individualisation is to fulfil what Brahman wanted to become —the infinitely numerous, the infinitely numberless, the myriad, the Many. What is the second purpose? These individual atoms return from this ultimate divisiveness and go back towards Oneness. From the study of chemistry and biology we come to know that this coming together of the atoms is the basic movement of evolution. The first atoms combined together to form a little living cell. Then, from single-cell organisms, multicellular organisms evolved such as plants, animals and the complex human beings. This shows the essential drive towards unification. So Matter has achieved some kind of unification, and that is the first contribution of Matter. Life has now to fulfil its mission on its

own level. We know that the essence of life is desire, and the nodus of desire is the ego. Just as the atoms first formed into a cell and then later into the complex unity of a multicellular body, so too the individual egos have to unite into a larger unity. In fact, this process has already begun and it is seen in the gradual forming of a family unit, a caste or clan unit, a village unit, a city unit and then the nation unit. Still, all this expansion of the ego has not brought in any psychological unity in mankind. That may be because there is a great fear of losing oneself in a larger unification. This fear may have been there at the level of the atoms itself! When they came together to form a molecule there was perhaps a fear that they would lose their individuality, and that fear was the fear of death.

Actually, what is death? It is losing one's individuality; it is the feeling that one is not going to be there any longer, and this fear of self-loss, which has come into our vital and mental makeup, originated from the first atomic movement. Imagine the same situation on the level of the ego. We are all tremendously egoistic, and we are afraid that by uniting with others we will lose our individuality. Sri Aurobindo and many other great yogis have come to tell us that we have to grow into a greater universal cosmic consciousness where we would experience greater unity with others. Sri Aurobindo says that the individual is an absolute concentration of the Supreme Consciousness, while the Universal is the diffusion or extension of the same Consciousness. The individual is the concentration of consciousness, but it is now seen only as the concentration of egos! Our egos are like atomic cells that exist on the life-plane. Through the centuries and ages, every yogi has asked us to come together just as the material atoms did long before to form the beautiful 'body of man'. If our egos combine and come together, unify in a universal consciousness, then we will have another superior body. This body will be more supple, much more plastic and luminous, and stronger than our present body, for it would be 'the

life-body' of human oneness. Humanity will become one humanity, one body, just as Matter became one! Everything that man has done till now has been based on divisiveness. Now, Sri Aurobindo is emphasising that humankind must come together on the 'egoistic' life-level, and that this oneness will lead us towards the Supermind. Therefore, the next step in evolution is the universal consciousness, and it is only through this universal consciousness that man can rise to the Transcendent. That is why Sri Aurobindo writes:

"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."<sup>21</sup>

Let us take up the example of clouds and compare it with the universal aspect of the Supreme. When the cloud showers down rain, each drop of rain is individualised cloud. These drops of rain are in nature similar to the cloud; they carry the very consciousness of the cloud. Similarly, man is the individualised form of universal consciousness and has the same consciousness as the Universal. The microcosm contains all that the macrocosm has in essence and is never separate from it.

In the reverse movement, we see that it is due to the Sun's heat that the clouds are formed; the water drops on earth rise and reformulate into clouds. Similarly, the individual has once again to become the Universal by the *tapas* and the energy of the Supramental Sun.

Therefore, the individual and the universal are necessary to each other. If one wants to realise the Transcendent, wants to reach the supreme Sachchidananda, the only way, the only passage is through the universal. That is the way of spiritual life. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo tell us to enlarge our consciousness— to enlarge our mental consciousness, enlarge our inner consciousness and enlarge our physical consciousness. What is this enlarging? The Mother had

enlarged her subtle physical body—if I am right in my understanding—and it became as big as the earth. On our level, we could perhaps enlarge on the emotional level, but this does not mean an enlargement by sympathy with others. For example, we may have sympathy for the earthquake victims in Gujarat or the flood victims in Orissa and believe that we have become enlarged in our consciousness. But that is not an enlargement of our consciousness; it is only that a part of our emotion or thinking sympathises with the people who are suffering. Furthermore, we cannot be sure how genuine is our sympathy.

It is very interesting to study the emotion called sympathy. We see that there are different shades of sympathy. Sometimes it manifests as a kind of self-sympathy. It is not really love for the other; it is actually love for oneself. It could be expressed thus: ‘What if something similar happens to me tomorrow and I too need help from others? So let me help today’. That is often at the root of our sympathy. True sympathy is only possible for a yogi for he or she is truly impersonal, beyond the ego. He or she alone can have true sympathy for others and love them because such a person—or such a consciousness—has no need of anything and stands to gain nothing by this emotional action either materially or psychologically.

So, the individual should truly become the universal. To be universal in the true sense is to identify oneself with one’s psychic being. Strictly speaking, identifying oneself with the psychic being is the first step of universalisation. But the psychic contact is just the beginning and not the end of universalisation. Sri Aurobindo says:

On the other hand, it is by means of the universe that the individual is impelled to realise himself. Not only is it his foundation, his means, his field, the stuff of the divine Work; but also, since the concentration of the universal Life which he is takes place within limits and is not like

the intensive unity of Brahman free from all conception of bound and term, he must necessarily universalise and impersonalise himself in order to manifest the divine All which is his reality ... Otherwise he has missed his goal, the problem set to him has not been solved, the divine work for which he accepted birth has not been done.<sup>22</sup>

Why does the universal or Supreme need the individual? We have explained how the individual atom became life and then how, through life and its instrumentation of desire, it attained the mind. Here on the level of mind, the question of 'will' comes into play. When a man seeks the Beyond, he begins to aspire. But, actually, who aspires? Only those who want to manifest the Divine in work, in the being and in life. The rest of us don't aspire; we pray for ourselves, for our family and for acquiring things. But the Divine is waiting for the aspiration from the individual, so that he may manifest himself. A yogi, a sadhak who aspires, says: 'O God, let thy will manifest, let the true fulfilment of God be the aim of my life'. All others are in the by-lanes of yoga; the true highway of yoga begins when from the innermost being we can, like Draupadi, lift both our hands and say, 'May Thy Will manifest in me O Lord'!

Now, Sri Aurobindo takes up a different aspect of man; he describes a positive quality of the human being. Man can be distinguished from other creatures of the earth, not because of any specific development, but because of one basic element in him. What is this basic element in man? It is discontentment! Man is the only creature on the surface of this earth who is dissatisfied with what he is or what he has. And that is the greatest quality or *guna* of the human being. The very first man who wanted to produce an agricultural product was dissatisfied with the animal food or perhaps he was not able to procure it. So, there began a search, because he was discontented. And this is the most positive element in man. If man were satisfied with what he had, he would never

have evolved to this stage. These days this is very obvious. Almost every year we see a new upgraded computer, because the present model is not capable enough to meet a greater challenge, providing a faster and 'vaster intelligence'. This is the beauty of man's consciousness: that by the time he reaches his aim, fulfils his desire, it becomes a thing of the past. This is a kind of expansive movement eternally present in man, and this is what really distinguishes man from all other creatures who are happy as they are. The rose is a perfect creation of God, the lion is a perfect animal, the elephant is absolutely happy with itself. There is no aspiration or greater will in them. The animals follow their own rhythm in looking after themselves—their food, their shelter, their reproductive needs—and they are happy. Sri Aurobindo says in a poetic sentence, "The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity"<sup>23</sup> and it does not have any other desire. He also says "the gods are content with their splendours."<sup>24</sup> The gods have all the comforts, all the splendours and all the power they want. All their desires are fulfilled; they do not need anything more.

But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the divine frenzy for a remote ideal.<sup>25</sup>

When one begins to aspire deeply, one is caught by the madness of God. To be caught by an ideal is the greatness of man. For example, in Auroville in the initial stages, we did not have proper food, we did not have electricity, we did not have easy access to water, but what made us live happily was the frenzy, the high ideal of Auroville. If an ideal for a divine living can catch man, then that is the right kind of aspiration. That person alone can be called a real human being. Until then, it is all a negative or very ordinary living. Man must aspire for the Supreme; man must be caught by the ideal of God!

Then, there is a powerful sentence describing what kind of man Sri Aurobindo is speaking about. He is not talking about the ordinary man; he is talking about “Man, the Purusha”:

It is the Son of Man who is supremely capable of incarnating God. This Man is the Manu, the thinker, the Manomaya Purusha, mental person or soul in mind of the ancient sages.<sup>26</sup>

What this means is that we must first become the mental creature. What he is saying is that by developing our mind, our intelligence and our discriminatory capacity, we become ‘man’. What man has inherited is the Manomaya Purusha, so if we do not develop the mental being, we have no right to call ourselves ‘man’. Millions and millions of human beings are not yet ‘man’ in this sense, because they have not yet realised the Manomaya Purusha. The Manomaya Purusha is the inner mental being, not the external intelligence. All that I do ordinarily is more or less the workings of Prakriti (Nature); it is the common intelligence of the outer mind. The Manomaya Purusha is the pure mental being, the Purusha of the mind. It is this man who has to evolve upward. Here is another wonderful description:

No mere superior mammal is he, but a conceptive soul basing itself on the animal body in Matter. He is conscious Name or Numen accepting and utilising form as a medium through which Person can deal with substance. The animal life emerging out of Matter is only the inferior term of his existence. The life of thought, feeling, will, conscious impulsion, that which we name in its totality Mind, that which strives to seize upon Matter and its vital energies and subject them to the law of its own progressive transformation, is the middle term in which he takes his effectual station. But there is equally a supreme term which Mind in man searches after so that having found he may affirm it in his mental and bodily existence. This practical

affirmation of something essentially superior to his present self is the basis of the divine life in the human being.<sup>27</sup>

The “supreme term,” which the mind in man searches for and which is superior to his present self, is the soul. It is the Manomaya Purusha in man which, when awakened, begins to fulfil God. Now, this has already been done by those great yogis, sadhaks and saints of the past. What they have done is that they have been caught by “the divine frenzy” as Sri Aurobindo calls it, and they went in search of the divinity beyond mind. They soared high, and some were even caught by the glorious ‘supramental sun’.

So, this is what happened to those Vedic yogis: they went in search of the Supreme, the Absolute, and when they went up, they realised what we call the Godhead, but very interestingly, they saw something beyond God, beyond Sachchidananda! When they went beyond Sachchidananda, there was absolute darkness, an absolute Nihil, the Asat, the Non-Being, and they were nonplussed, as it were, by ‘a mightier darkness beyond’. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

... it appears to him as if poised between two negations of itself ... yet does this sun of his seeing appear to shine between a double Night, — a darkness below, a mightier darkness beyond.<sup>28</sup>

So man is caught between the double negation of what is beyond in the superconscient and what is below in the inconscient. This negation is non-understandable for man, and does not constitute the solution for man’s integral evolution. That is why Shankaracharya when he was face to face with the light of the million suns of the Brahman became ‘blinded’, we could say, and when he looked back, he could not see the earth at all. He saw no universe and concluded that this universe is an illusion.

So, this is how the yogis aspired and went into the Beyond

where he found a Mystery in which even the thought of the universe vanishes. Imagine a state where Sat, Chit and Ananda vanish from all levels of your experience. That is the level Buddha seems to have reached. What Buddha saw was a bit like what we may call the dark side of the moon. The moon has two faces—bright and dark—and since we cannot see the other side, we call it the dark side. The Buddha saw the dark side of the moon. But even Sachchidananda's 'dark' side—the Unknowable, the Formless, the unfathomable Non-Being (Asat)—is full of great bliss and beauty.

Sri Aurobindo then gives us a description of the darkness below which was a hurdle in his yogic efforts. He speaks of the yogi treading the path of transformation:

Here also, in the world, in himself, and around himself, he is met always by the opposites of his affirmation. Death is ever with him, limitation invests his being and his experience, error, inconscience, weakness, inertia, grief, pain, evil are constant oppressors of his effort. Here also he is driven to deny God, or at least the Divine seems to negate or to hide itself in some appearance or outcome which is other than its true and eternal reality.<sup>29</sup>

Then he says:

To deny entirely its reality or to seek an escape from it as a mere disastrous illusion is to put away from us the problem and to shun our work.<sup>30</sup>

Having said this, Sri Aurobindo comes to the last argument and his conclusion. He tells us that man must find the right relation between these two negations. It is of course not a question of rejecting one at the cost of the other. He says:

... they are the result or rather the inseparable accompaniments, not of an illusion, but of a wrong relation, wrong because it is founded on a false view of what the individual is in the universe and therefore a false

attitude both towards God and Nature, towards self and environment.<sup>31</sup>

We have to find out the real relation between the individual and the universe, but the most important question is: Can we find it? It is the most fundamental thing to be achieved. It may be possible for us to theoretically reconcile the two and say that between the darkneses—the higher darkness of the Asat and the lower darkness of the Inconscient—there is the oneness. But is it possible to reconcile this sorrow and evil and this unconsciousness with Sat, Chit and Ananda? Is it possible at all? We have an answer here:

Because that which he has become is out of harmony both with what the world of his habitation is and what he himself should be and is to be, therefore man is subject to these contradictions of the secret Truth of things. In that case they are not the punishment of a fall, but the conditions of a progress. They are the first elements of the work he has to fulfil, the price he has to pay for the crown which he hopes to win, the narrow way by which Nature escapes out of Matter into consciousness; they are at once her ransom and her stock.<sup>32</sup>

Sri Aurobindo says: “For out of these false relations and by their aid the true have to be found”<sup>33</sup> So, we have to seek out the right relation between them and thus achieve their reconciliation. How to go about it? Let us use the example of water and stone. Can they be mixed? It is not possible, because they are diametrically opposite in nature. But are they really diametrically opposite? One is solid and the other is liquid, but do they not have something in common? Yes! Both have the same subatomic material. So essentially, both are atoms and therefore, both are basically the same. Sri Aurobindo’s argument is that until now we have thought that there is no common ground between this world and the higher universal consciousness. We have segregated them and we have

renounced one for the other. The right understanding is that they are essentially one and that they are convertible just as vapour, water and ice are essentially one and can be converted from one state to the other, i.e., water can become ice, and ice can become water and then turn into vapour. Similarly, what is the animal? What is man? What is superman? They are the same substance of Sachchidananda, only the external characteristics are different. So Sri Aurobindo teaches us to reconcile them, because being the same substance, it is possible to do so and thereby transform the lower forms into the higher. Sri Aurobindo writes:

... since all is one Reality, this inferior negation also, this other contradiction or non-existence of Sachchidananda is none other than Sachchidananda itself.<sup>34</sup>

Man at present is blinded by his narcissism, and he sees only himself in everything. This narcissism, this self-importance, this vanity does not permit him to see anything else. It is this narcissism that is breaking the true relation. If he can dilute it and melt it then this obstruction in the right human relationship with the world can be broken down. This 'I' becomes one with all, and unity is established between man and Matter, between man and the animal, between man and the supracosmic Godheads. So, Sri Aurobindo indicates that the real troublemaker is the ego. But what is the ego? What are its qualities? From where is it born? How is it born? From where did it come? Obviously, we know that everything comes from the supreme Brahman, but where did it all go wrong? That wrong is spoken of in the Bible: Adam and Eve ate the fruit of Knowledge. God had forbidden them to eat the fruit of Knowledge, but had permitted them to eat the fruit of the tree of Life! The fruit of Knowledge, the famous apple where the Knowledge is stored, is not the knowledge of the Divine, but the 'knowledge of separateness', of the 'I', of the ego. This knowledge caused this great fall. Had Adam eaten from the tree of Life, he would have evolved into a Godhead,

but the knowledge he got was the knowledge of a divisive consciousness of the mind: the knowledge of the good and the bad, the evil and the good. It is not the unified knowledge of the Supermind. Due to this separation— the separation from the blissful oneness with God—the ‘fall’ occurred. This separation from God has taken a full cycle now, and ultimately, there is a return to the Garden of Eden. Thanks to the efforts of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who have brought down god’s own transforming power—the Supermind!

They have done their work, but what we have to do in this ‘return’ journey is:

... we must dare to go below the clear surfaces of things on which the mind loves to dwell, to tempt the vast and obscure, to penetrate the unfathomable depths of consciousness and identify ourselves with states of being that are not our own.<sup>35</sup>

We have to go beyond mind to get a glimpse of the next truth, and in the coming chapters we shall see what is there beyond Mind, and what is the next truth that will manifest in evolution.

## References

- 1.SABCL, vol. 18, p. 42 (opening quote).
- 2.Ibid., p. 42 (para 1).
- 3.Ibid., p. 42 (para 1).
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- 5.Ibid., p. 42 (para 2).
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26. Ibid., p. 46 (para 11).
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30. Ibid., p. 48 (para 14).
31. Ibid., p. 48 (para 15).
32. Ibid., p. 48 (para 15).
33. Ibid., p. 48 (para 16).
34. Ibid., p. 49 (para 19).
35. Ibid., p. 49 (para 20).

## **Lecture Notes**

### *I. The universe*

- (a) The meaning and aim of the universe is the progressive revelation of a luminous Reality.
- (b) The universe is not purposeless illusion or a fortuitous accident.
- (c) The universe is self-aware and master of itself.
- (d) Sri Aurobindo's use of the phrase 'luminous Emergence' gives the idea of a Reality that is evolving

from one level to another, revealing itself more and more.

## II. *Role of man*

- (a) This Emergence was slow till man came, as there was no dynamic and conscious aspiration for growth.
- (b) The ascent to the divine life is the human journey, the work of works, the acceptable sacrifice.
- (c) To Sri Aurobindo 'man' is one who tries to fulfil God in life.
- (d) Man's ultimate business, and the justification of his existence, is to manifest this Becoming of Sachchidananda.
- (e) Sachchidananda is the unknown and omnipresent, which the human consciousness is eternally seeking.

## III. *The Eternal play—two processes*

- (a) First is the process of involution or self-concealment or descent.
- (b) The Supreme has put on itself the first veil of Overmind and there is a descent, then it puts on the veil of Mind, then Life and then Matter. In this process of involution, at every step there is densification, self-oblivion and the Divine becomes its own opposite.
- (c) The second process is the process of evolution or self-revelation or ascent.
- (d) In this ascent there is a sublimation and an integration.
- (e) Evolution has now produced the Mind-principle, which is freely and widely expressing itself.
- (f) The primordial foundation, Matter, always remains, and with the emergence of each higher stage of

consciousness, Matter is influenced and moulded accordingly.

- (g) Our world has to climb beyond Mind to Supermind, wherein the universe and man become aware of their essential identity and thus harmonise and become unified.

#### *IV. Quality of Matter*

- (a) Matter contains in itself the balance between a perfect poise of tranquillity and the action of an immeasurable energy.
- (b) But it has not the awakened joy of them.
- (c) The essential feature of life is desire: a desire to grow, enlarge and be happy.
- (d) Mind's basic quality is seeking of knowledge, which later can turn into an aspiration to go beyond the Mind.
- (e) In Supermind there is fulfilment on all levels.
  - (i) Tranquillity in Supermind is completely self-aware and is experienced as Peace.
  - (ii) Immeasurable force in Supermind is a fully awakened consciousness. Life which seeks self-fulfilment of desire and happiness becomes self-existent Bliss in Supermind.
  - (iii) Mind's seeking for knowledge becomes the self-possessed condition of Chit-Tapas.

#### *V. The process of creation and its goal*

There are three steps taken within Sachchidananda for it to become the manifest Reality:

- (a) A single point, which contains the entire universe,

starts expanding into vastness and diffusion. With this diffusion, Time and Space come into being.

- (b) This expansion was interrupted, as it were, by the process of individualisation—the coming in of the Many—atoms at the level of Matter and individual egos at the level of Life.
  - (i) The Many begins to move towards oneness—atoms combine to form a living cell—many living cells come together to form larger bodies, culminating in the complex human body.
  - (ii) At the Life level, all egos merge together and are unified in a universal consciousness.

#### VI. *The universe and man*

Universe—a diffusion of the divine All in infinite Space and Time. Individual—its concentration within limits of Space and Time.

- (a) The Individual should enlarge his consciousness and become Universal. Universalisation in the true sense is identifying one's self with the psychic being.
- (b) Individual must necessarily universalise and impersonalise himself in order to manifest the divine All which is his reality, otherwise he has missed his goal, the divine work for which mankind was created.
- (c) Man is the greatest living being—but he is the most discontented because he feels most intensely the pressure of his limitations. He alone is capable of being seized by “the divine frenzy” for a remote ideal.
- (d) Man (who can be seized by a divine frenzy) is the Manu, the thinker, the mental person. First man should develop his mind, intelligence and discriminatory capacity, then find his Manomaya Purusha.

*VII. Double darkness*

- (a) Man at present is poised between two negations:
  - (i) a darkness below  
(pain, suffering, death, limitations; inconscience below);
  - (ii) a mightier darkness beyond (Asat—'beyond' Sachchidananda).
- (b) To accept one and reject the other is not the solution.

*VIII. The truth of these contraries*

- (a) Man has to find the right relation between the Individual and the Universe.
- (b) The two darknesses appear to be contraries, but they are the same Reality in different forms—none other than Sachchidananda. Because of this they can be reconciled.
- (c) The solution is to go beyond Mind.