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**Deliberations on**

***The Life Divine***

**(Chapterwise Summary Talks)**

# **Volume - Seven**

**Book – II**

**The Knowledge and the Ignorance–**

**the Spiritual Evolution**

**Part – I**

**The Infinite Consciousness and the Ignorance V. Ananda Reddy**

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**Dedicated to**

The Lovers of *The Life Divine* iv

## Acknowledgements

I here present to my readers with the seventh volume of

‘Deliberations on *The Life Divine*’. Like the other volumes this is also a transcribed and edited text of my talks given over a year between 2004 to 2005.

This book would not have seen the light of the day so soon had it not been for Dr. Larry Seidlitz who took up the editing of my talks which was a time taking task and demanded much work as the transcripts were absolutely raw. I extend my thanks to him for this great help and meticulous work. I record my thanks to my wife Deepshikha who took upon herself to get the transcriptions done from some of the well-wishers. I would also like to thank Indrajit Goswami and Ellora Goswami for carrying out this work of transcription years ago which came of use when we planned for this volume. I am grateful to Shruti Bidwaikar who has done the proofing and gave a few positive suggestions which clarified the text further. I cannot forget to express my loving gratitude to Miresh who preserved the manuscript for years and to Vipul who patiently and meticulously paginated the entire text to give it this shape. He also helped me design the cover of this book.

I feel happy to bring out this volume as an offering to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo who have been my inspiration and guiding light during the talks.

V. Ananda Reddy

### **Note on Documentation**

Each chapter contains a series of talks on the text. There could be some repetition of ideas as a summary of the previous class. It has been purposely maintained.

All quotes of *The Life Divine* have been taken from Volume 21 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) from the respective chapters.

Other references have been mentioned with the quote itself.

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## **Chapter –V**

### **The Cosmic Illusion:**

### **Mind, Dream and Hallucination**

This chapter and the next – “Reality and the Cosmic Illusion”, are very important in *The Life Divine*. They present the essential arguments

explaining and countering Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy.

We need to examine closely why Sri Aurobindo finds Adi Shankaracharya's proposition inappropriate and unconvincing on the logical level. In the earlier chapters we have read Sri Aurobindo agreeing that on the experiential level it is difficult to refute Adi Shankaracharya because his experience is absolutely valid. However, he would say that there is an experience beyond what the ancient Acharya had and if he had waited a little longer he could perhaps have gone higher and had a different vision of the world which is also real.

In this chapter Sri Aurobindo puts forth the arguments on a logical level. He leads us from argument to argument and that is why this chapter and the next one become very interesting. He logically explains Adi Shankaracharya's points to make us understand what was the latter's stand on various concepts like the world as illusion, the dream state of common human beings and the hallucination of rope as the snake, and then gives his own explanation for accepting or refuting them.

In the text the first argument Sri Aurobindo takes

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* up is that mental thought constantly moves between affirmation and negation:

All human thought, all mental man's experience moves between a constant affirmation and negation; there is for his mind no truth of idea, no result of experience that cannot be affirmed, none that cannot be negated. It has negated the existence of the individual being, negated the existence of the cosmos, negated the existence of any immanent or underlying Reality, negated any Reality beyond the individual and the cosmos;...

Philosophers and intellectuals can negate anything and everything. Sri Aurobindo tells us that human thinking is such that it can negate everything in the world, including God, world, environment, existence, everything. At the same time another class of intellectuals have affirmed everything. Materialists affirm the world, affirm ourselves, our society and the nation

and we have spiritualists who affirm God, the soul, and supraphysical worlds. Some philosophers say the world does not exist and others say that the world alone exists. This dichotomy is there because of the fundamental problem of our mental consciousness itself. As he would say here, "...it can arrive at no final certainty, no absolute and abiding conviction."

That is because mind is by its very nature ignorant and a dealer in possibilities. It is not sure of any knowledge perfectly. Sri Aurobindo explains that mind only gropes for the ultimate knowledge that it cannot have. It does not know what is true. For some time, mind declares something to be true, and then suddenly, another day, it is refuted with a number of arguments and examples. Mind thus keeps oscillating between negation and acceptance.

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Sri Aurobindo takes up a quick survey of the evolutionary process before continuing with the mind's wavering attitude. He goes back to the emergence of the mind and asks, why is the mind like this? Then he takes up an analysis of the evolutionary process of the mind itself.

First, we have the physical mind, for it all that is physical is real. We are beginning to use terms which we will have to analyse and define later, such as the word 'real'. For now we need to remember that a physical existence visible and sensible to the body is what we call real. Physical science is the greatest supporter of this view. It has convinced our minds amply that sensory knowledge alone is true. Such a belief becomes the index of the level of our consciousness.

If we are grounded in the physical consciousness, then it is natural to consider only physical things to be true.

If we elevate our consciousness, then the definition of reality begins to change. For a poet a rose is much more meaningful and beautiful than its physical beauty because his sense of beauty is on the mental level, in an aesthetic consciousness.

The life-mind or the vital mentality emphasises more on desire, enjoyment, enlargement, self-affirmation and aggrandisement of its power and profit. It desires, enjoys, possesses actualities, but also hunts after unrealised possibilities. The vital mind wants to achieve and attain: it may be a relationship, a possession or a certain target.

For example, if one is promoted to become the head of a company, he feels his ego aggrandised, enlarged and empowered. For the life-mind that which it possesses alone is real. Essentially, the vital mind wants to possess by means of desire, emotions, attachment or relationships.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* It does hankers after physical possession as much as it hungers for a relation. We can observe that the definition of reality is already changing. Further Sri Aurobindo adds:

...it enlarges always desire and craving, creates a dissatisfaction, an unrest, a seeking for something more than what life seems able to give it: it brings about a vast enlargement of the field of physical actuality by the actualisation of our unrealised possibilities, but also a constant demand for more and always more...

This kind of enlargement is good, but obviously one cannot get everything one wants. There comes a point of dissatisfaction. There is a limit, because there are others also who desire and crave for the same thing and then there is a clash. Vital desires bring disillusionment.

The feeling that I cannot possess this person or cannot become the boss of the company, etc. brings in a sense of disenchantment in life.

Next comes the thinking mind:

To add to this cause of unrest and incertitude there comes in a thinking mind that inquires into everything, questions everything, builds up affirmations and unbuilds them, erects systems of certitude but finally accepts none of them as certain, affirms and questions the evidence of the senses, follows out the conclusions of the reason but undoes them again to

arrive at different or quite opposite conclusions, and continues indefinitely if not ad infinitum this process. This is the history of human thought and human endeavour, a constant breaking of bounds only to move always in the same spirals enlarged perhaps but following the same or constantly

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similar curves of direction. The mind of humanity, ever seeking, ever active, never arrives at a firmly settled reality of life's aims and objects or at a settled reality of its own certitudes and convictions, an established foundation or firm formation of its idea of existence.

At the level of the mind we have greater uncertainty because what is true today becomes untrue tomorrow, what is confirmed as reality today becomes illusion tomorrow and we get completely disillusioned.

Sri Aurobindo tells that due to this in life every human being at some time or another reaches a stage of agnosticism, disgust, disappointment and vexation of spirit. It is nothing unnatural. This disappointment may be for a short while, maybe for a week or ten days, or it may be longer, for six months or a year. Psychologists call it depression, but Sri Aurobindo would say it is natural because all our expansion – physical, vital, mental – at a certain point reaches a limit, thus far and no further, and we get a jolt there.

One may feel that due to old age one is not able to exert physically any longer. Sri Aurobindo tells us that this is a natural part of one's growth that we get disgusted, disappointed, disillusioned with life itself. This disappointment gives support to Adi Shankaracharya's view of the world being a *mithya*, an illusion. Out of this disappointment with life, which is a natural stage in the evolution of consciousness, there arose the philosophies of the Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya. From this viewpoint, they are not contradicting life in their philosophy, they are affirming our life experience. This is why they have become so very popular, because they emphasise a certain reality of

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* life as it presently exists. It is quite natural that I get disgusted with the life and say all this world is a Maya.

Coming back to our argument, what the Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya did was to systematise what life itself presents.

This systematisation was given in three famous formulas: Karma, Rebirth and Maya. The essence of Buddha's and Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy boils down to these concepts. Of these three, Sri Aurobindo takes up the issue of Maya because this is where lies the whole argument. Is this world a Maya, an illusion?

Human, social and political endeavour turns always in a circle and leads nowhere; man's life and nature remain always the same, always imperfect, and neither laws nor institutions nor education nor philosophy nor morality nor religious teachings have succeeded in producing the perfect man, still less a perfect humanity, — straighten the tail of the dog as you will, it has been said, it always resumes its natural curve of crookedness. Altruism, philanthropy and service, Christian love or Buddhist compassion have not made the world a whit happier, they only give infinitesimal bits of momentary relief here and there, throw drops on the fire of the world's suffering.

Sri Aurobindo takes trouble to make us understand this view, held by many that no matter how many revolutions on the social, political, educational and spiritual level have taken place but the human nature has remained the same.

In fact this view compares human nature with that of a dog's tail. People who are lost in the pragmatic day-today life with their jobs, family, enjoyments and material progress may not necessarily give a deep thought to the aim of life, but those who think deeply would certainly try

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to find out an answer to what they are doing on this earth.

Are we just turning in a circle or are we progressing? Has humanity changed at all? Avatars, Vibhutis, saints and philosophers have come to elevate us but we seem to be changing only the form and the formula, going from one 'ism' to another. According to this view, they, the saints etc. "have not made the world a whit happier". If we look back 3000 or 5000 years, were people less happy because they did not have an automobile or a computer?

Are we happier because of these things? If there is no purpose and direction of this world and humanity then we might conclude that it is an "aimless cosmic illusion".

But the question is: is this the permanent character of the world? Sri Aurobindo rejects the view that this world was intentionally created to be full of ordeal and suffering simply to teach the souls about its unsatisfying nature and return to the reality from which they have come down. If the world has no meaning why are we born into it at all?

He says, there must be something else to this world for these immortal souls to come down; it cannot be simply this pain and suffering and ordeal.

We need to remember that what the Acharya told was echoing a common human experience but he also emphasised on it with great logical arguments. The dissatisfaction in life on the physical, vital and mental levels was so much emphasized that it was quite convincing for people to accept that the world is an illusion. For, if people were all happy in their lives, the thought of the world as Maya would not have occurred to them. It is only misery, pain and suffering that makes one feel that this world is not worth living in. Adi Shankaracharya's was a powerful mind. He stamped this belief in the minds

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of people that this world is an illusion. His thought and philosophy have almost become a religion for humanity.

Now, Sri Aurobindo has to counter this massive wave which has been prevalent since more than a millennium.

He is logically trying to convince us that this world could not have been a mistake, it perhaps has a purpose and it is for us to find it.

Now we have to look into the original definition of Brahman, *mithya*, real etc from Adi Shankaracharya and then read Sri Aurobindo's explanations of the same. That would give us clarity and only then we would be able to proceed with its analysis.

What is the definition of the 'Real'? We have already discussed that for a physical consciousness what is real is what we call the phenomenal world, what is evident to our physical senses. But Adi Shankaracharya's concept of reality is that whatever is real is unalterable, unchanging.

This is a significant point of emphasis, for his entire proposition of this transitory world being an illusion stands on it.

Let us take a mundane example: if I have a pen in my hand, I would say it is real. If the pen is not there, I would say it is not there. It cannot be simultaneously both existing and not existing. To understand the meaning of the term Real, Satya we have to go to its root. The Sanskrit equivalent to the term 'real' etymologically means something enduring, something which is not nonexistent, or something uncontradicted in the triple time of past, present and future. In its broad sense, the word Sat, from which the term 'Satya' has been derived, is also applicable to good character and good behaviour. 'Real' or

'Satya' is that which is indestructible, eternal or immutable.

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We may say that all this is highly applicable to something which may not be real as the pen. But first we have to establish it on the level of our own example that is this pen indestructible? No, it is destructible. Now in the two definitions of the real the first one of "uncontradicted", that means the pen "is there" or "it is not there." But the second definition of eternal and immutable and indestructible does not seem to apply to the pen. So that means we have two categories of 'Satya' here. The first definition of 'Real'

is that which is uncontradicted that means ‘it is’ or ‘it is not’. This implies that it is indestructible. The moment we give this definition, we would have to fall in line with Adi Shankaracharya and say that the world is not real. Another term we can use for unchanging is ‘immutable’. It means that which does not change; but everything in the world changes – is it not? If it is time-bound, if it is destroyable, it does not have the mark of reality according to this view.

Iron bridges and concrete walls even lofty mountains and deep oceans, the sun, and the moon will one day equally go out of existence. There was a time when they were not there and then there may again come a time when they may not be there. Scientists tells us they are all subject to perpetual change.

Forms change but their ‘is-ness’ is permanent. Existence or Sat, or Brahman, is eternal, the rest is temporal or destructible or mutable. The ‘is-ness’ goes beyond the temporal framework of the three times. We need to remember that the eternal is the ‘is-ness’ of things. Adi Shankaracharya says that the real must be something of an unalterable nature, something about which our judgment should admit of no modification or revision.

This is not peculiar to him, it seems to be the most

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* commonly held view by the authors of the scriptures in India. This view of reality is suggested by the distinction that people in general make between the illusory and the so-called real objects themselves. Our own logic drives us to the conclusion that the is-ness behind this world, behind its forms, is permanent and eternal; the form itself is destroyable and mutable, it is not eternal.

The word Brahman or Brahma is derived from the Sanskrit brh, which means “to grow”, or “let grow”, or

“to be great”. This word is important because we can observe which one of these applies to the “Brahman” of Adi Shankaracharya? According to him, if we follow the derivation “to be great”, the connotation of Brahman’s

eternal purity gets at once conveyed to us. The Absolute, the Infinite, is called Brahman because of its greatness.

Brahman could also be called as such because it is fully grown – that which cannot grow further. The third one,

“to let grow”, this connotation of *brh* is where there could be a trap, because it suggests the possibility that Brahman can undergo some mutation or apparent mutation.

Now, according to the Acharya the definition of Brahman is that which is characterised by immutability, eternity and self-existence, and the world is obviously none of these three. Therefore, he says that it is *mithya*. All becoming or change is held by Adi Shankaracharya to be unreal, for before its origination and after its destruction the characteristics of Brahman are not obtained. He also said that all the objects of our cognition are unreal for the simple reason that they are subject to change. Brahman is immutable and the world is mutable and all that changes cannot be eternal because change itself means a breaking down.

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Adi Shankaracharya argues that the world is like a dream, a hallucination, a mirage. Sri Aurobindo actually takes up these examples now.

The cosmic Illusion is sometimes envisaged, — though that is not the accepted position, — as something that has the character of an unreal subjective experience; it is then, — or may be, — a figure of forms and movements that arises in some eternal sleep of things or in a dream-consciousness and is temporarily imposed on a pure and featureless self-aware Existence...

Adi Shankaracharya says, when we are in a dream we think that the objects that we see in the dream are real and when we wake up we realise that it was a dream because objects are not there, it was all an illusion. Then the world for us is real, and the dream world seems unreal. But Sri Aurobindo says even the dream world has a meaning, it has a reality connected with

our own self. We will have further explanations when we take up this argument in greater detail.

Let us now see if there is a loophole in the argument that Brahman is immutable, which connotes that there cannot be anything separate from it. Therefore, manifestation cannot exist. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, it only means that we have restricted Brahman to one aspect, the immutable aspect, the unchanging the static aspect, whatever we call it, but that is only one incomplete aspect of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo says that the immutable inherently has mutability. For example, if I am now standing here firmly does it inevitably mean that I cannot step forward? That is how Sri Aurobindo challenges the definition of immutability itself. For him the meaning of staticity or immutability or unchangingness is that it is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* only an arrested energy. There is an inherent possibility of dynamism, of change, of force in the immutable.

Brahman is all alone; he is the sole One, he is Existence, he 'Is', he is Sat. But Sat becomes dynamic out of his own will. That is what the Upanishads have said. He was alone and he decided to be Many. That is what the Mother tells us. The Supreme decided to bring out his consciousness and will. Until then he only 'is', the Sat; but he decided to bring out Chit. It is here that the definition of bṛh as

'let grow' comes in. Brahman is not only fully grown. If bṛh also means to let grow it means Brahman can let grow the manifestation out of himself, and we can have all the worlds of multiplicity.

Adi Shankaracharya's argument is that the objects of waking experience are unreal because they are objects of cognition. One of the characteristics of the world he has said is that it is an object that can be known, but according to his definition all objects that can be known are unreal.

As long as we are in this world this knowability only seems real, like a dream seems real while we are in it. At one go he is throwing this entire world into an unreality because it is contradictory to his definition of what

is real, that is, self-existent, immutable, unchangeable, eternal. All of these factors of the real make the world unreal because it does

“not fit” into this definition of Brahman.

As long as we are in this temporal consciousness the objects of the world appear as real. But this is like in a dream, we think the objects and events as real. The moment I come out of my dream, those knowable objects appear unreal, because I have changed my state of consciousness. Therefore, Adi Shankaracharya simply says that the objects of waking experience are unreal

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because they are objects of cognition. In fact, to be known is to be finite. That is a further point we should remember.

According to him they are unreal because they are finite.

Any object that I know has to be finite because the infinite is unknowable, only the finite is knowable. Even the Upanishads and Sri Aurobindo do not say Brahman can be known. The Upanishads also say that which is knowable is finite and subject to change. So from this it is almost like a logical mathematical formula that the unreal is finite and knowable and real is infinite and unknowable.

Remember, Adi Shankaracharya’s whole argument is thorough, quite impenetrable in itself. He cannot be challenged on his own ground unless and until we add a new dimension to his experience. Remember, Adi Shankaracharya is irrefutable on his own ground, both logically and experientially. It is only when we go beyond him in experience that we can add this extra dimension of the Reality. That is why scholars have come and gone but nobody could defeat him. Even Sri Ramanujacharya attempted, Vallabhacharya modified, Madhvacharya tried to refute him, and each one gave his own argument from his experience. Even what Sri Aurobindo argues has been said in part by Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Madhvacharya; some of the arguments we find in Sri Aurobindo are not fully his own. We see them reflected especially in Sri Ramanujacharya's philosophy.

Sri Aurobindo argues against Adi Shankaracharya's metaphor for the unreal nature of the world to be like a dream. He says,

Dream is felt to be unreal, first, because it ceases and has no farther validity when we pass from one status of consciousness to another which is our normal status.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* But this is not by itself a sufficient reason: for it may well be that there are different states of consciousness each with its own realities; if the consciousness of one state of things fades back and its contents are lost or, even when caught in memory, seem to be illusory as soon as we pass into another state, that would be perfectly normal, but it would not prove the reality of the state in which we now are and the unreality of the other which we have left behind us.

Sri Aurobindo argues why do we say that the dream was unreal and illusory, what is the proof that that state was an illusion? In the dream we never ask the question is it illusory or not.

That which we call waking and dream state need not cancel out the other. We can give an independent existence to both. Sometimes we may see several dreams in one dream – disconnected with each other – and all of them seem to be real. We cannot segregate them as right or wrong. Even in the dream there could be different layers which have their own existence. Sri Aurobindo further explains:

The world is real to the consciousness dwelling in it, an unconditioned existence is real to the consciousness absorbed in Nirvana; that is all that is established.

This is Sri Aurobindo's first argument against the view that the world, like dreams, is illusory. He says that just because we wake up and find a different reality, that does not mean that the dream world was illusory, it only means that the waking state that we presently experience seems real now and the dream states experienced earlier do not seem real. Similarly,

when we go into the state of oneness with Brahman, the state in which we experienced the

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world seems unreal, though when we were in that state the world seemed real and the Brahman seemed unreal.

In other words, the state that we are in determines what seems real to us, but it does not necessarily render the other states unreal.

Then he presents another argument: But the second reason for refusing credit to our sleep experience is that a dream is something evanescent without antecedents and without a sequel; ordinarily, too, it is without any sufficient coherence or any significance intelligible to our waking being.

This argument that a dream seems illusory does not have any coherence or antecedent or consequence. If I dreamt of something yesterday, I may not dream the continuation of the it today. Dreams are little anecdotes that come and seem to have no meaning. That is very important. When I am awake, I have a continuity – suppose yesterday I left my explanation on page 1 of this book that I am now explaining and today I pick up from the next page. In a dream there is no logic between yesterday's and today's dream. There might sometimes be correspondences but those are exceptions.

Adi Shankaracharya would tell us that just like a dream the world is unreal, and Sri Aurobindo wants to prove that the world, even if we say is like a dream, is real.

There is therefore no analogy between a dream and waking life; these are experiences quite different in their character, validity, order. Our life is accused of evanescence and often it is accused too, as a whole, of a lack of inner coherence and significance; but its lack of complete significance may be due to our

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* lack or limitation of understanding: actually, when we go within and begin to see it from within, it assumes a complete connected significance; at the same time whatever lack of inner coherence was felt before disappears and we see that it was due to the incoherence of our own inner seeing and knowledge and was not at all a character of life. There is no surface incoherence in life, it rather appears to our minds as a chain of firm sequences, and, if that is a mental delusion, as is sometimes alleged, if the sequence is created by our minds and does not actually exist in life, that does not remove the difference of the two states of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo argues that like dreams, our waking life may seem to lack coherence or meaning, but actually it does have coherence and meaning, even though our limited surface mind may not understand it. Therefore, to argue that the world is similar to dreams in this respect is not correct. When we go into a deeper consciousness, or even examine more carefully our life and events of the world, we find that our waking life does have a connected inner significance. For example, we may not understand why some young person in our family suddenly passes away and we may feel confused by the apparent senselessness of the event, but in a deeper consciousness we can see the necessity and the reason for it. Further, he would say:

We see too that the dream-consciousness seems to be wholly devoid of that control which the waking consciousness exercises to a certain extent over life-circumstances; it has the Nature-automatism of a subconscious construction and nothing of the

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conscious will and organising force of the evolved mind of the human being. Again the evanescence of a dream is radical and one dream has no connection with another; but the evanescence of the waking life is of details, —there is no evidence of evanescence in the connected totality of world-experience.

Whereas dreams seem to be haphazard and uncontrolled, the events of our waking life are to some extent at least under the control of our conscious will.

This again is another reason not to equate our waking consciousness and its sense of reality with that of dreams.

Dreams are haphazard because they are often constructed by the subconscious mind, which is not as ordered and organised as our conscious mind and will. They are constructed by different levels of consciousness. But even this difference between dreams and our waking reality does not necessarily mean that dreams are totally unreal, just like the difference between the Brahman consciousness and our sense of reality does not mean that our world is unreal:

But it may be questioned whether our dreams are indeed totally unreal and without significance, whether they are not a figure, an image-record or a symbolic transcript or representation of things that are real.

What happens in sleep is that our consciousness withdraws from the field of its waking experience. We see images wherein I am a participant: I have gone to this place, I have enjoyed that place, I have eaten that, I have seen this garden etc. Adi Shankaracharya would say these are all just images which are not true at all. But the question is: are these images non-existent in the world?

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Even if I see myself flying and going to America, the idea of flying is true even if I don't have wings or can't fly. If I see a lotus in the sky, it may not be true, it may not be a reality, but the lotus and the sky are both real independently. What my subconscious mind has done is misplaced or creatively combined together different images. But if we take them separately both the lotus and sky have a reality and are true. Sri Aurobindo argues that they are symbolic transcripts or representations in our subconscious mind that in themselves are real. He writes: What happens in sleep is that our consciousness withdraws from the field of its waking experiences; it is supposed to be resting, suspended or in abeyance, but that is a superficial view of the matter. What is in abeyance is the waking activities, what is at rest is the surface mind and the normal conscious action of the bodily part of us; but the inner consciousness is not suspended,

it enters into new inner activities, only a part of which, a part happening or recorded in something of us that is near to the surface, we remember.

We are going to enter into the psychological field, because we shall now study the nature of dreams. Till now we have seen that dreams are also real. But in order to strengthen his argument, Sri Aurobindo takes us to the nature of the dreams. The very first thing that we need to understand is that when we rest, the surface mind and the normal consciousness is at rest, but the inner consciousness is not suspended. During sleep our inner consciousness opens and the surface consciousness is suspended.

Normally it is a subconscious part in us, intermediate between consciousness and pure inconstance, that

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sends up through this surface layer its formations in the shape of dreams, constructions marked by an apparent inconsequence and incoherence. Many of these are fugitive structures built upon circumstances of our present life selected apparently at random and surrounded with a phantasy of variation;...

The surface consciousness means especially the mental, vital and physical consciousness; these three are suspended. Then the subconscious becomes active, because in our waking state the mental consciousness puts a pressure on the subconscious and does not allow it to come up freely as it would want to. When this mental consciousness is suspended then the subconscious arises.

That is one of the reasons why as long as we are in the mental consciousness we cannot sleep. The physical is tired, it is on the bed motionless, quiet. But the vital and even more the mental consciousness may take some time to become quiet and fall asleep. It is only when the mental consciousness goes to sleep that we have rest. If we have a habit of taking a nap in the afternoon, sometimes even two minutes of sleep refreshes us. This dozing-off is nothing but suspending the mental consciousness. The moment the mind is disconnected we have rest. However, coming to the subconscious, Sri Aurobindo tells us: Normally it is

a subconscious part in us, intermediate between consciousness and pure incoherence, that sends up through this surface layer its formations in the shape of dreams, constructions marked by an apparent inconsequence and incoherence.

It is this subconscious which shapes dream constructions that are marked by an apparent inconsequence and incoherence. From the subconscious things just come

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* up like the bubbles in a soda bottle. When these formations come to the surface in this suspended mental consciousness we become aware of them. These constructions of the subconscious seem to have no apparent logical relation with each other. In a dream one may be suddenly in America, then back in a garden, then talking to a friend. There is no logical sequence, but why? It is because when we are awake all that the mental, vital and physical consciousness observe, feel, think sinks down into the subconscious. I may be sitting in this class but I may be thinking of going to America, or going back home, or think of somebody who is waiting for me.

These things may be coming into our consciousness but we are not expressing them because we are in a class. It is all suppressed and pushed into the subconscious. When the mind is not there to control these they start coming up at random because they went down randomly. These formations come up as dreams but they have their origin in our own consciousness.

...others call back the past, or rather selected circumstances and persons of the past, as a starting-point for similar fleeting edifices.

Before we go to sleep, if we think of somebody or some event, it is kind of a starter and when the mind dozes off what we started to think continues. That is why I think the Mother tells us that we should think of the Divine, because then there is a good chance that from the subconscious these thoughts of the Divine may come back in our dreams.

There are other dreams of the subconscious which seem to be pure phantasy without any such initiation or basis; but the new method of psycho-analysis, trying to look for the first time into our dreams with

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some kind of scientific understanding, has established in them a system of meanings, a key to things in us which need to be known and handled by the waking consciousness; this of itself changes the whole character and value of our dream-experience.

I will not get into psychoanalysis but their method of using dreams to go into our past has a meaning. In psychotherapy the psychoanalyst uses dreams to help us go back into our childhood experiences, because it is based on the same idea that things that were experienced got buried in the subconscious and later re-surface in dreams.

Or from another viewpoint this nether part of us may be described as the antechamber of the Inconscient through which its formations rise into our waking or our subliminal being.

This word 'antechamber' is wonderful here. An antechamber is a passage, and our subconscious is like an antechamber of the inconscient from where things come up into our waking or subliminal consciousness.

When we sleep and the surface physical part of us, which is in its first origin here an output from the Inconscient, relapses towards the originating inconscience, it enters into this subconscious element, antechamber or substratum, and there it finds the impressions of its past or persistent habits of mind and experiences,— for all have left their mark on our subconscious part and have there a power of recurrence.

In its effect on our waking self this recurrence often takes the form of a reassertion of old habits, impulses dormant or suppressed, rejected elements of the nature, or it comes up as some other not so easily recognisable, some peculiar disguised or subtle

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* result of these suppressed or rejected but not erased impulses or elements. In the dream-consciousness the phenomenon is an apparently fanciful construction, a composite of figures and movements built upon or around the buried impressions with a sense in them that escapes the waking intelligence because it has no clue to the subconscious's system of significances ...”

Please mark the word “recurring”; these subconscious things keep recurring. It is like a habit that does not leave, it keeps coming back. It may be a small habit or a good or bad habit, but it keeps recurring. These things which are lying in the subconscious keep coming up in dreams.

Sometimes we have repeated dreams, similar dreams, night after night.

... in what we call dreamless sleep, we have gone into a profounder and denser layer of the subconscious, ...

This is a new point which has been referred to in the Upanishad also. When some people sleep they don't have dreams at all, or at least they don't remember any. They may feel that they had a sound sleep with no dreams. If one has no dreams it may simply mean that he/she has sunk very deep into the subconscious and the formations or the constructions have not come to the surface.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that we have different layers of consciousness: the Inconscient, the Subconscious, the Subliminal, the surface mind, and then the Superconscious levels above the mind. The Mother says that the real rest we get comes only when we contact the Sachchidananda.

It is not the number of hours of sleep we get but the quality of sleep. If for half an hour I make my mind quiet, there is a possibility that my consciousness may rise quickly and contact Sachchidananda. To have even one glimpse or a

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contact with it energises the entire surface being. We will discuss about this later; now let us discuss the question of dreamless sleep. So, we have:

... a profounder and denser layer of the subconscious, a state too involved, too immersed or too obscure, dull and heavy to bring to the surface its structures, and we are dreaming there but unable to grasp or retain in the recording layer of subconsciousness these more obscure dream-figures. Or else, it may be, the part of our mind which still remains active in the sleep of the body has entered into the inner domains of our being, the subliminal mental, the subliminal vital, the subtle-physical, and is there lost to all active connection with the surface parts of us. If we are still in the nearer depths of these regions, the surface subconscious which is our sleep-wakefulness records something of what we experience in these depths; but it records it in its own transcription, often marred by characteristic incoherences and always, even when most coherent, deformed or cast into figures drawn from the world of waking experience. But if we have gone deeper inward, the record fails or cannot be recovered and we have the illusion of dreamlessness; but the activity of the inner dream consciousness continues behind the veil of the now mute and inactive subconscious surface. This continued dream activity is revealed to us when we become more inwardly conscious, for then we get into connection with the heavier and deeper subconscious stratum and can be aware, —

at the time or by a retracing or recovering through memory, —of what happened when we sank into these torpid depths.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* We see that many of our dreams start in the subconscious.

How does this relate to yoga? Western psychology if I may venture to say, cannot really give a proper treatment or solution to the problems of life until and unless they take to yoga. There is no other cure. Giving sedatives is not the solution. I have met with some psychotherapists who deal with cases of depression. When I asked what do you do for depression, they said we give sedatives which produce a dullness of the mind. That is not a treatment. After taking sedatives the patient may not complain of depression, but they also don't experience pleasure. The medicine kills the sense of pleasure and pain, depression and joy.

The habits of the subconscious keep coming to us even in the waking state. The subconscious is a kind of dark storehouse of all that is wrong and dark. Our angers, passions, desires are all stored there. How is it filled up?

It is by the same mental thoughts, vital emotions and physical desires that we have in the surface consciousness, they all sink into the subconscious. The substance of the subconscious is made up of what we are doing in the awakened state. If in the awakened state we don't do yoga, if we don't control our thoughts, if we have no dedicated offering, if we are not trying to be conscious of what happens, all of our thoughts and desires sink into the subconscious. Then we treat all this dark stuff in the subconscious by taking sedatives! Instead we must treat the conscious part with yoga. The Mother tells us to be conscious. At least, to begin with, we must become conscious when we are awake; at a later stage we can also become conscious when we are asleep. But at least in the conscious hours if we can control our thoughts and feelings, then we will know what sinks into

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our subconscious. If in my waking consciousness I only think of the Mother, I only offer to the Mother, I look at the beauty around me, that is what will sink into the subconscious and that is what will come up in my dreams and in my waking hours.

With the constant violence in the movies and on TV

and in the video games in which the main theme is killing, we can imagine what happens to children's subconscious!

Obviously, all that sinks into it. Then, when they get angry with somebody, these impressions come up. We have seen and heard news in America of the children who have been shooting down their teachers and classmates with a gun for that is what they have seen in the video games and TV. What one put into the subconscious comes out and then it is too late to go to psychotherapist. That is why it is important to spend the day consciously in good, positive and higher things. Unless psychology becomes yoga psychology, the former alone will never deliver the goods. Just psychology per se does not have the solution.

Yoga and psychology must be put together, then only can it truly be effective.

Next Sri Aurobindo writes about another source of dreams: the subliminal.

If the subliminal thus comes to the front in our dream-consciousness, there is sometimes an activity of our subliminal intelligence,—dream becomes a series of thoughts, often strangely or vividly figured, problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve, warnings, premonitions, indications of the future, veridical dreams replace the normal subconscious incoherence.

The dreams that come from the subconscious and those

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that come from the subliminal have a vast difference.

Subliminal dreams often have tremendous clarity about them, and they may also have symbolic images. Sometimes we get warnings or premonitions in subliminal dreams.

We can analyse where our dreams come from by seeing if they are really clear or if there is a meaning in them, some symbolism, a kind of warning, a kind of message.

Subconscious dreams are usually incoherent, there is no connectivity, but subliminal dreams are pretty clear and the message is usually distinct. All the images, the colours, the symbols that we see are clear in it.

The Mother also says that in subliminal dreams sometimes problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve. She asked the students to practice this when they could not solve a problem, even a mathematical problem: think of the problem and then go to sleep. Then the subliminal consciousness with its greater capacity – it has what we call an inner mind which is vast and more intelligent than the outer mind – it can

solve the problem and when we wake up, we will have the answer. Sri Aurobindo mentions exactly the same here:

There can come also a structure of symbol-images, some of a mental character, some of a vital nature: the former are precise in their figures, clear in their significance; the latter are often complex and baffling to our waking consciousness, but, if we can seize the clue, they reveal their own sense and peculiar system of coherence.

That is one possibility of subliminal dreams. Another possibility is also very interesting: Finally, there can come to us the records of happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes of our own

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being or of universal being into which we enter: these have sometimes, like the symbolic dreams, a strong bearing on our own inner and outer life or the life of others, reveal elements of our or their mental being and life-being or disclose influences on them of which our waking self is totally ignorant; but sometimes they have no such bearing and are purely records of other organised systems of consciousness independent of our physical existence. The subconscious dreams constitute the bulk of our most ordinary sleep-experience and they are those which we usually remember; but sometimes the subliminal builder is able to impress our sleep consciousness sufficiently to stamp his activities on our waking memory. If we develop our inner being, live more inwardly than most men do, then the balance is changed and a larger dream-consciousness opens before us; ...

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Subliminal dreams can also bring experiences from the cosmic worlds. The inner mind, the inner vital and the inner physical are open to their corresponding worlds which are described in *Savitri* in "The Book of the Traveller of the Worlds." The subliminal is open to these worlds at any point of time during day and night. This is different from the subconscious which is a lower, darker region. Sometimes we travel in our dreams to these

inner, higher or more brighter worlds. When we are established in a higher or the subliminal consciousness then in our dreams we travel in these realms and bring back experiences from them. Sometimes we read in the letters of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother that disciples have written about such dream experiences. For example, they might

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* ask, “I dreamt I was going on a beautiful golden path and it reached a mountain peak – what does it symbolise?”

These are symbols of the higher consciousness. A golden path is obviously some spiritual path. We have already seen that these dreams are much more vivid and clear, but I would add the word ‘luminous’ too. There is a feeling of joy and a kind of uplifting atmosphere about them, whereas dreams coming from the subconscious make us feel heavy and sluggish even after long hours of sleep.

This really shows that in fact it is a reflection – if I can say – of our conscious state of mind. That is how dreams can tell us about our conscious state. If we are getting a lot of subliminal dreams, we can be sure that even in our waking hours we have been spending more time in that higher level of consciousness. If our dreams are subconscious we can be sure that our conscious hours unfortunately have been spent living more in that level of consciousness.

Dreams can be watched and interpreted every day. The Mother sometimes suggested to write them down and follow our dreams and see in that way we can convert them into yoga. They can be used in the analysis of our consciousness. We don’t have to go to a guru and ask whether our present state of consciousness is spiritual or mundane. If the guru knows the principles of integral yoga he may say, for the next fifteen days write down your dreams and bring them to me, they will be a very good indicator of your consciousness.

It is even possible to become wholly conscious in sleep and follow throughout from beginning to end or over large stretches the stages of our dream-experience; it is found that then we are aware of ourselves passing

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from state after state of consciousness to a brief period of luminous and peaceful dreamless rest, which is the true restorer of the energies of the waking nature, and then returning by the same way to the waking consciousness. It is normal, as we thus pass from state to state, to let the previous experiences slip away from us; in the return only the more vivid or those nearest to the waking surface are remembered: but this can be remedied,—a greater retention is possible or the power can be developed of going back in memory from dream to dream, from state to state, till the whole is once more before us.

The Mother has also explained in her talks that we can make our dreams a part of our yoga. I would like to emphasise this phrase in the quote above: “... then returning by the same way to the waking consciousness.”

This means that during the course of the night we ascend to higher states of consciousness but do not remember because we keep going from one world to the other, and then after we reach the summit we return in the same way back to our normal waking consciousness.

In the first part of the night we keep ascending in consciousness and in the second part we descend.

Most of the dreams we remember tend to be from the second part, but sometimes we may wake in the middle of the night. If we wake up then we may remember an interesting dream because we have not yet started the descent, but in the morning, we are likely to forget. Once or twice, I saw beautiful poetic lines and said to myself that I will write them down in the morning, but in the morning the lines were lost. But if we put a paper and pencil beside us and make a conscious effort to wake up and remember our dreams during the night and write

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* them down, we are likely to be successful. The most important phase is at the level of Sachchidananda or the higher consciousness for there we have a complete rest.

Then from Sachchidananda as we descend back to our waking consciousness some of these dreams may stick on the surface consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo ends the paragraph by saying that a greater retention is possible, the power can be developed of going back in memory from dream to dream. The Mother tells us that when we wake up we should not wake up with a jerk but come back to our body slowly.

Normally, for some reason or the other we are in a big rush and just get up and get going. She says, we should spend some time to wake up in a slow manner. It is because of the jolt in our waking that the dreams are cut off. That abrupt movement disconnects us from these inner states.

We may first remember our last dream, but remembering that can lead us to the previous dream. We cannot do this all in a day, it is through a long sadhana that we can –

develop it over time. That is how they say we can have conscious nights also.

Sri Aurobindo, as he did earlier with the subconscious, now tells us what exactly is the subliminal. It is a lovely description:

... it is a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution.

That is one of the best descriptions I have ever seen.

This tells us wonderfully that the subliminal is a meeting place between involution and evolution. That brings in a lot of clarity. Otherwise, we may question how is it that

the subliminal is formed and why is it formed? How do the individual and the universal meet? The bridge is the subliminal, it is the meeting point between involution and evolution. What do we understand by that? I will read a few more sentences before taking it up again. About the subliminal, Sri Aurobindo says,

There is in it an inner mind, an inner vital being of ourselves, an inner or subtle-physical being larger than our outer being and nature. This inner existence is the concealed origin of almost all in our surface self that is not a construction of the first inconscient World-Energy or a natural developed functioning of our surface consciousness or a reaction of it to impacts from the outside universal Nature,—and even in this construction, these functionings, these reactions the subliminal takes part and exercises on them a considerable influence. There is here a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal unlike the mostly indirect contacts which our surface being maintains with the universe through the sense-mind and the senses.

Why does Sri Aurobindo call it a meeting point? I was looking for some other word to describe it. There is here an assemblage of things. This solves many mysteries, especially about death. When we say our karma follows us, have we ever wondered at carrier who is the carrier of our karma? In Indian philosophy, we say there is karma and we come back with our karma, both good and bad. But where is this karma preserved? We know that after death the physical, the vital, and the mental sheaths get dissolved. Then what remains that carries our karma? What remains is our soul, the psychic being!

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* But is the psychic being the carrier of our karma? That would mean that the psychic being is really taking all the small incidents of life – if we harm somebody, if we help somebody – every little incident would be stored in our psychic memory! However, it is not so. Let me give you the Mother's answer to this question: *Sri Aurobindo says that sometime after death the vital and mental sheaths dissolve, leaving the soul*

*free to retire to the psychic world before it takes up new sheaths. What becomes of the Karma and of the impressions – Samskaras*

*– on the old sheaths? Do they also dissolve without producing any result, good or bad, which they should according to the theory of Karma? Also, what becomes of the vital and mental beings after the dissolution of the vital and mental sheaths?*

The outer form only dissolves, unless that too is made conscious and is organised round the divine centre.

But the true mental, the true vital and even the true subtle physical persist: it is that which keeps all the impressions received in earthly life and builds the chain of Karma. (CWM 15: 134)

When the psychic being returns, it picks up the “elements of mind and life and body out of the universal store- house of earth's atmosphere as it needs them, in the same way as it returns them there on the journey back after death. But as I have already said, there are beings who have developed well-formed personalities of mind and life and even of the physical consciousness”. (NKG 3: 205) Sri Aurobindo further explains about the subliminal: There is here a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal unlike the mostly

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indirect contacts which our surface being maintains with the universe through the sense-mind and the senses.

Our limited mind cannot connect itself with the universal, it is only the subliminal which connects us with them.

There are here inner senses, a subliminal sight, touch, hearing; but these subtle senses are rather channels of the inner being's direct consciousness of things than its informants: the subliminal is not dependent on its senses for its knowledge, they only give a form to its direct experience of objects; they do not, so much as in waking mind, convey forms of objects for the mind's

documentation or as the starting-point or basis for an indirect constructive experience.

He is describing the greater, more direct consciousness that the subliminal has in its knowledge of things. Then he goes back to its connection with dreams: Sleep like trance opens the gate of the subliminal to us; for in sleep, as in trance, we retire behind the veil of the limited waking personality and it is behind this veil that the subliminal has its existence.

The best way to enter the subliminal is through sleep.

One could do it by going into trance, but sleep is easier. If we have a good sleep, we enter into the subliminal, and it means entering into the universal worlds, and from there we can go to the realm of Sachchidananda. The main difficulty is to become conscious of this movement, but this can be done through a regular discipline of recalling our dreams.

The subliminal, with the subconscious as an annexe of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* itself,—for the subconscious is also part of the behind-the-veil entity,—is the seer of inner things and of supraphysical experiences; the surface subconscious is only a transcriber. It is for this reason that the Upanishad describes the subliminal being as the Dream Self because it is normally in dreams, visions, absorbed states of inner experience that we enter into and are part of its experiences...

The question of what is the Dream Self now becomes clear, it is this subliminal consciousness. We have three basic states of consciousness: the sleep state, the dream state and the waking state. The waking state is our normal mental consciousness, the dream state is the subliminal consciousness and the sleep state is the superconscient.

The superconscient is called the sleep state because, he says, “normally all mental or sensory experiences cease when we enter this superconscience”, and we can bring back no consciousness or memory of being in that state; to do so requires an extraordinary spiritual development.

But, in spite of these figurative names of dream-state and sleep-state, the field of both these states of consciousness was clearly regarded as a field of reality no less than that of the waking state in which our movements of perceptive consciousness are a record or transcript of physical things and of our contacts with the physical universe. No doubt, all the three states can be classed as parts of an illusion...

The difference between Adi Shankaracharya and Sri Aurobindo hinges on this main idea: the Acharya would say there is only one existence and there cannot be any other and Sri Aurobindo would say that there are different levels of the One existence. It is like saying I

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may be a teacher of this class but I may go to a different room and become a student, but that student and this teacher are both the same person, only the mode of existence differs. That is where the whole difference and controversy lies:

If this is a true account of dream-experience, dreams can no longer be classed as a mere unreal figure of unreal things temporarily imposed upon our half-unconsciousness as a reality; the analogy therefore fails even as an illustrative support for the theory of the cosmic Illusion.

This is the conclusion that Sri Aurobindo draws: Adi Shankara's analogy of the illusory nature of the dream to the illusory nature of our existence does not hold true: It may be said, however, that our dreams are not themselves realities but only a transcript of reality, a system of symbol-images, and our waking experience of the universe is similarly not a reality but only a transcript of reality, a series of collection of symbol-images. It is quite true that primarily we see the physical universe only through a system of images impressed or imposed on our senses and so far the contention is justified; it may also be admitted that in a certain sense and from one viewpoint our experiences and activities can be considered as symbols of a truth which our lives are trying to express but at present only with a partial success and an imperfect coherence. If that were all, life might be described as a dream-experience of self and things in the consciousness of the Infinite.

He says that while Adi Shankaracharya's analogy of dreams to the illusion of the world is not valid, he allows

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that dreams may be considered more as symbols of a reality than reality itself, that the reality may not be reflected by dreams in its truth, in its clarity, in its concreteness, in its fullness. This dream world, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, expresses the reality at present with only a partial success.

The world too at present is only partially representing the truth; it does not fully and transparently reflect the Divine. Then he says:

Therefore we may conclude that we experience a real universe through our imaged sense-transcript by the aid of the intuition and the reason,—an intuition which gives us the touch of things and a reason which investigates their truth by its conceptive knowledge.

But we must note also that even if our image view of the universe, our sense-transcript, is a system of symbol-images and not an exact reproduction or transcription, a literal translation, still a symbol is a notation of something that is, a transcript of realities.

Here is an important sentence that we have to note. A symbol always stands for something which really exists.

Sri Aurobindo is knocking at this idea that a dream represents or transcribes a reality. However much this world is a distortion of that reality – Adi Shankaracharya perhaps could not agree that the world was real because of its distortion, because it is vastly different from Brahman in every way – Sri Aurobindo says it is still a representation of the Divine consciousness. Just because it is distorted, do not reject it, realise the consciousness behind it, and then it can be transfigured into a true representation. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother tell us that the world is in its essence the Divine consciousness, but it is still in the making, it is an evolutionary world.

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But in the theory of Illusion the only reality is an indeterminable featureless pure Existence, Brahman, and there is no possibility of its being translated or mistranslated into a system of symbol-figures, for that could only be if this Existence had some determinate contents or some unmanifested truths of its being which could be transcribed into the forms or names given to them by our consciousness: a pure Indeterminable cannot be rendered by a transcript, a multitude of representative differentiae, a crowd of symbols or images; for there is in it only a pure Identity, there is nothing to transcribe, nothing to symbolise, nothing to image.

That is Adi Shankaracharya, he says Brahman is indeterminable, he cannot manifest himself because there is nothing to manifest in the Brahman. He cannot reflect himself in anything because he is indeterminable, he cannot be determined, he cannot be limited, he cannot be named, he cannot be given a form.

Therefore, the dream-analogy fails us altogether and is better put out of the way; it can always be used as a vivid metaphor of a certain attitude our mind can take towards its experiences, but it has no value for a metaphysical inquiry into the reality and fundamental significances or the origin of existence.

Sri Aurobindo has refuted Adi Shankaracharya's dream metaphor by arguing that dreams are not completely unreal, they are distorted transcripts or representations of realities. Similarly, he would say, the world is a distorted reflection of the reality of Brahman and so it is not completely unreal. But here he adds that Adi Shankaracharya would still insist that the world cannot

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* be a reflection of Brahman, because there is nothing in Brahman that can be reflected in an image. Therefore, Sri Aurobindo says, it is better to avoid this dream analogy altogether; it is invalid as an argument either for or against the reality of the world. It may be used to illustrate a certain attitude that our mind can take towards our experience of the world, but nothing more; it cannot be used to decide the origin of the world's existence.

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Next, Sri Aurobindo discusses hallucinations, and of these he says we have two kinds: mental and visual. We have as an example of a visual hallucination a mirage that we see in the desert. As an example of mental hallucination we have the famous illusion of seeing a rope and thinking it to be a snake. He analyses these two in a simple argument:

Dreams, visions, the imagination of the artist or poet can present such an organised diversity which is not real; but it is an imitation, a mimesis of a real and already existent organized diversity, or it starts from such a mimesis and even in the richest variation or wildest invention some mimetic element is observable.

Sri Aurobindo's argument is that there could be this illusion of seeing a snake instead of a rope, but a snake and a rope both are a reality. Similarly, in the visual hallucination, when I see water and green trees in the desert, they may not be there, but the spot and water that we see each have an independent existence. When we see the rope, the memory of a snake is being superimposed upon it. Sri Aurobindo tells us that poets and artists also bring back images that they recollect and give them form

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in their artistic creations. One cannot think of anything in the world which one has not experienced or that which does not exist. Hallucinations, whether they are mental or visual, are not something non-existent; that is the important point. Sri Aurobindo gives this argument because, in the next line, he says: There is here no such thing as the operation attributed to Maya in which there is no mimesis but a pure and radically original creation of unreal forms and movements that are non-existent anywhere and neither imitate nor reflect nor alter and develop anything discoverable in the Reality.

This is the main argument. What is the thesis of the theory of illusion or Maya? Adi Shankaracharya says that the world is "superimposed upon Brahman" with all its multiplicity of forms just as the image of a snake is superimposed upon a rope. Imagine a rope hanging vertically, but instead I

see a snake. But the problem with this analogy is that both the snake and the rope are pre-existent, they exist prior to my seeing them here. How can Maya superimpose a tree or a man or anything else which does not already exist? If it already exists, where is it existing? It would mean that it is existing in Brahman.

However, if we say that Brahman is Nirguna, immutable, unchanging, without any multiplicity, there can be no trees or other forms in Brahman. That is different from the analogy that he uses; Adi Shankaracharya says that Maya is creating an illusion of something which does not exist. Therefore, this analogy of the rope and snake cannot be applied here. This argument is fallacious, it doesn't hold ground.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo refutes other analogies presented by Adi Shankaracharya in the same way.

The familiar instance of mother-of-pearl and silver turns also, like the rope and snake analogy, upon an error due to a resemblance between a present real and another and absent real; it can have no application to the imposition of a multiple and mutable unreality upon a sole and unique immutable Real. In the example of an optical illusion duplicating or multiplying a single object, as when we see two moons instead of one, there are two or more identical forms of the one object, one real, one—or the rest—

an illusion: this does not illustrate the juxtaposition of world and Brahman...

Having said that it is not possible for this Maya to create something non-existent, Sri Aurobindo says that this manifestation could come out of a Consciousness and Energy of the Reality, but Adi Shankaracharya does not admit those elements in the Brahman. The Acharya says that Maya is anirvachaniya, it is indescribable.

Now Sri Aurobindo says that these analogies raise the question of what is the nature of mind and its relation to the Reality, because it is the mind that creates these illusions:

Our own mind, at any rate, is not an original and primary creative power of Consciousness; it is, and all mind of the same character must be, derivative, an instrumental demiurge, an intermediary creator. It is likely then that analogies from the errors of mind, which are the outcome of an intermediate Ignorance, may not truly illustrate the nature or action of an

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original creative Illusion, an all-inventing and all-constructing Maya.

Thus, the mind, with its innate capacities is only an intermediary creator and it cannot be given the same status that Adi Shankaracharya gives to the “all-inventing and all-constructing Maya.” In spite of its capacity to receive inspirations and intuitions from above, the mind is only “a diviner and recipient of truths not yet known or actualised.” Hence it does not have the power, as per Shankara, of imposing any illusory or unreal truths on Brahman. The best it can do is to supplement its incapacities by using its own “boundless imagination.”

Here we have one more very important element coming in: the mind’s capacity of imagination.

Imagination is a very interesting power of the mind, and it works as a substitute for the original supramental consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo says,

... it is limited in knowledge and has to supplement its restricted knowledge by imagination and discovery.

Mind cannot know the truth, but it applies its imagination to see the possibilities of truth. Supermind can see directly but the mind gives half a dozen possibilities out of which only one may be true. Still, imagination is very powerful instrument of the mind.

It has not the omnipotence of an infinite conscious Energy; it can only realise or actualise what the cosmic Energy will accept from it or what it has the strength to impose or introduce into the sum of things because the

secret Divinity, superconscient or subliminal, which uses it intends that that should be expressed in Nature.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo points out the limitations of mind and imagination, and then argues that these characteristics show that it does not have the ability that Adi Shankaracharya is arguing that Maya has, that of creating illusions out of nothing.

Its limitation of Knowledge constitutes by incompleteness, but also by openness to error, an Ignorance. In dealing with actualities it may misobserve, misuse, miscreate; in dealing with possibilities it may miscompose, miscombine, misapply, misplace; in its dealings with truths revealed to it it may deform, misrepresent, disharmonise. It may also make constructions of its own which have no correspondence with the things of actual existence, no potentiality of realisation, no support from the truth behind them; but still these constructions start from an illegitimate extension of actualities, catch at unpermitted possibilities, or turn truths to an application which is not applicable. Mind creates, but it is not an original creator, not omniscient or omnipotent, not even an always efficient demiurge.

Maya, the Illusive Power, on the contrary, must be an original creator, for it creates all things out of nothing unless we suppose that it creates out of the substance of the Reality...

Sri Aurobindo has considered what is the nature of mind because it is the mind which seems to be the main instrument for creating hallucination or illusion.

He says that because of its limitation of knowledge, it tends to 'miscompose', 'miscombine', misapply, misplace and misrepresent. But he adds that Adi Shankaracharya argues that Maya creates out of nothing, and mind does not seem to have that power. Its creations must already

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be pre-existent. We can accept that the mind errs, but it does not err in the way that Maya is said to err.

Maya, on the contrary, if it creates on the basis of the Reality, yet erects a superstructure which has nothing to do with the Reality, is not true or potential in it; if it creates out of the substance of the Reality, it makes out of it things that are not possible to it or in accordance with it,—for it creates forms and the Reality is supposed to be a Formless incapable of form, it creates determinations and the Reality is supposed to be absolutely indeterminable.

Now Sri Aurobindo considers more closely the faculty of imagination, and asks whether it may not be similar to Maya.

But our mind has the faculty of imagination; it can create and take as true and real its own mental structures: here, it might be thought, is something analogous to the action of Maya. Our mental imagination is an instrument of Ignorance; it is the resort or device or refuge of a limited capacity of knowledge, a limited capacity of effective action.

I will skip a few lines and come to the crux of the description:

But it is to be noted that through the imagination it does receive a figure of truth, does summon possibilities which are afterwards realised, does often by its imagination exercise an effective pressure on the world's actualities.

He says that imagining things is not a waste of time because behind our imagination, if we put our will, there is a possibility that we can manifest our imagination. It

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* catches some kind of truth, it is a faculty, a kind of a bridge between the ordinary mind and the higher consciousness.

Imaginations that persist in the human mind, like the idea of air travel, can actualise themselves if there is sufficient strength in the formation or in the mind that forms it. If we plan, strive and persevere in trying to realise it, we

can create our own future by imagining what we want ourselves to be and then putting will behind it with sufficient strength.

Imaginations can create their own potentiality.

Especially if they are supported in the collective mind, they may in the long run draw to themselves the sanction of the cosmic will. If the collectivity wants a certain thing that someone has imagined, it could draw the sanction of the Supreme. That is why sometimes we see that if somebody endeavours to make something new and puts his will, suddenly things turn so positive that one begins to feel the Mother's will behind it. If we put our will behind it, our complete dedication, at a certain point we may feel that the Mother has taken it over.

In fact all imaginations represent possibilities: some are able one day to actualise in some form, perhaps a very different form of actuality; more are condemned to sterility because they do not enter into the figure or scheme of the present creation, do not come within the permitted potentiality of the individual or do not accord with the collective or the generic principle or are alien to the nature or destiny of the containing world-existence.

Thus the mind's imaginations are not purely and radically illusory: they proceed on the basis of its experience of actualities or at least set out from that,

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are variations upon actuality, or they figure the "maybe"s or "might-be"s of the Infinite, what could be if other truths had manifested, if existing potentials had been otherwise arranged or other possibilities than those already admitted became potential.

Sri Aurobindo is giving a high position to the mind's imaginations by saying that they are not purely and radically illusory, because that means there is the possibility that the Divine may be working through our imaginations. Therefore, let's not be afraid of imagining or day-dreaming. Imagination can give us a flight into the future, and as he puts it beautifully

here, they can figure the may-be's or might-be's of the Infinite. Even the Infinite consciousness can manifest itself through imaginations.

There must be some people to imagine things. It is not that everybody must be practical and be able to construct a building. There must be architects who can imagine buildings and then only can they put into brick and mortar their imaginings. Imaginations are the possibilities of the Infinite itself; that is a very high position that Sri Aurobindo gives to imagination: Moreover, through this faculty forms and powers of other domains than that of the physical actuality communicate with our mental being.

Imagination can be a bridge between this world and the other worlds.

Even when the imaginations are extravagant or take the form of hallucinations or illusions, they proceed with actuals or possibles for their basis.

Imagination is important because behind it there is the basis for it to become an actuality. When the Wright

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Brothers thought of flying, they had imagined a possibility which became a reality. Centuries ago Leonardo Da Vinci had made a drawing showing the possibility of a man flying. There has to be someone to spearhead an imagination that catches higher possibilities and truths.

The mind creates the figure of a mermaid, but the phantasy is composed of two actualities put together in a way that is outside the earth's normal potentiality; angels, griffins, chimeras are constructed on the same principle...

With regard to imagination, here is a passage from the Mother in which she helps us to better understand its nature:

*But it is only an imagination, isn't it, Mother?*

An imagination? But what is an imagination?... You cannot imagine anything which doesn't exist in the universe! It is impossible to imagine something that does not exist somewhere. The only possibility is that one may not put one's image in its place: either one gives it virtues and qualities it doesn't have, or explains it with some other than the right explanation.

But whatever one imagines exists somewhere; the main thing is to know where and to put it in its proper place. (CWM 9: 379-380)

The real power of imagination comes from putting the will into realising it. For instance, if we have a pain somewhere, and we imagine that we are making the pain disappear or removing it or destroying it, we may succeed.

When a doctor tells you that the pain will go away, it has a deep powerful action.

Further the Mother continues:

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You cannot think powerfully of something without your thought taking a form. But if you were to believe that this form was physical, that would obviously be an error, yet it really does exist in the mental world.

Imagination is a power of formation. In fact, people who have no imagination are not formative from the mental point of view, they cannot give a concrete power to their thought. Imagination is a very powerful means of action. For instance, if you have a pain somewhere and if you imagine that you are making the pain disappear or are removing it or destroying it—all kinds of images like that—well, you succeed perfectly.

There's a story of a person who was losing her hair at a fantastic rate, enough to become bald within a few weeks, and then someone told her, "When you brush your hair, imagine that it is growing and will grow very fast." And always, while brushing her hair, she said, "Oh, my hair is growing! Oh, it will grow very fast!..."—And it happened! But what people usually do is to tell themselves, "Ah, all my hair is falling again and I shall become bald, that's certain, it's going to happen!"

And of course it happens! (Ibid)

There is also another passage in which the Mother describes the power of imagination: *Sweet Mother, the other day you told me that it was necessary to learn how to discipline the imagination.*

Yes.

*How is it done?*

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Imagination is something very complex and manifold—what is vaguely called “imagination”.

It can be the capacity for seeing and recording, noting the forms in some mental or other domain.

There are artistic, literary, poetic domains, domains of action, scientific domains, all belonging to the mind—

not a very high and abstract mind, a mind above the physical mind which, without our knowing it, pours out constantly through the individual and collective mind to manifest in action.

Some people, through a special faculty, are in contact with these domains, take up one formation or other that is there, draw them to themselves and give them an expression. This power of expression is different in different people, but those who can open themselves to these domains, to see things there, to draw these forms towards themselves and express them—either in literature or in painting or music or in action or science—are, according to the degree of their power of expression either very highly talented beings or else geniuses.

There are higher geniuses still. They are people who can open to a higher region, a higher force which, passing through the mental layers, comes and takes a form in a human mind and reveals itself in the world as new truths, new philosophical systems, new spiritual teachings, which are the works

and at the same time the actions of the great beings who come to take birth on earth. That is an imagination which can be called “Truth-imagination”. These higher forces, when they come down into the earth-atmosphere,

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take living, active, powerful forms, spread throughout the world and prepare a new age.

These two kinds of imagination are what could be called higher imaginations. (Ibid: 385-386) The Mother uses exactly the same words that Sri Aurobindo used in *The Life Divine*: “Truth- imagination:”

...as the mind ascends towards the Truth-Consciousness, this mental power becomes a truth-imagination which brings the colour and light of the higher truth into the limited adequacy or inadequacy of the knowledge already achieved and formulated and, finally, in the transforming light above it gives place wholly to higher truth-powers or itself turns into intuition and inspiration; the Mind in that uplifting ceases to be a creator of delusions and an architect of error.

What a majestic thing it is! In that uplifting consciousness ascending towards the Supermind imagination becomes truth-imagination, which means a truth-seeing or it becomes a truth-word, pashyanti vak. Therefore, imagination is not a dull, fanciful thing. We should not become fanciful, but if a child is encouraged, he can develop this link between the higher ranges of truth and the ordinary mind. That is why the artist, poet and musician often have a greater contact with the higher consciousness than other people who are always looking down at the earth.

This then is the dual possibility that arises before us.

There is, we may suppose, an original consciousness and power creative of illusions and unrealities with mind as its instrument or medium in the human and animal consciousness, so that the differentiated

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* universe we see is unreal, a fiction of Maya, and only some indeterminate and undifferentiated Absolute is real. Or there is, we may equally suppose, an original, a supreme or cosmic Truth-Consciousness creative of a true universe, but with mind acting in that universe as an imperfect consciousness, ignorant, partly knowing, partly not knowing,—a consciousness which is by its ignorance or limitation of knowledge capable of error...

We end up in two possibilities: (1) there is an original consciousness that is Maya which creates illusions with the mind as its instrument, or (2) there is a Supreme Consciousness which creates this world in which mind is an imperfect consciousness but an increasingly truer consciousness. The first possibility suggests that Maya will be eternally there, and mind will be an eternal creator of falsehood. The second possibility suggests that there is supreme Truth-Consciousness called Supermind of which mind is an imperfect instrument. However, in its evolution mind could progressively become open to the higher truths of the Supermind. These are the two possibilities that open up before us. The first is Adi Shankaracharya's view and the second is Sri Aurobindo's view. These two possibilities are examined further in the next chapter.

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My reading of this chapter is that Sri Aurobindo had to bring into his argument against Adi Shankaracharya's view two things: one, the logic of the Infinite, and two, a complete spiritual experience. Adi Shankaracharya's spiritual experience is incomplete, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's experience of Supermind Sri Aurobindo takes recourse to an integral spiritual experience which

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includes both the Saguna and Nirguna aspects, otherwise we cannot counter the arguments of the Acharya. Secondly, Adi Shankaracharya's logic of the finite has to be overcome by the logic of the Infinite, then only can Sri Aurobindo refute him. Sri Aurobindo has to cross into the logic of the Infinite, which is the logic of the supramental consciousness.

He cannot refute Adi Shankaracharya by simply arguing on the same intellectual, rational level. All these examples that Sri Aurobindo has given about dreams and hallucinations are more or less psychological explanations, they are not metaphysical. Sri Aurobindo isn't following a strict rational logic here, he goes into psychology, into the logic of the Infinite, into spiritual experience. He goes around Adi Shankaracharya, he doesn't argue against him directly.

That is perhaps because it is not Sri Aurobindo's intention to refute him; it is more to complete his arguments that he explains them.

Sri Aurobindo has an embracing attitude and therefore he would show the weak points and at the same time he would not reject the viewpoint entirely. The logic of the Infinite does not reject the logic of the finite, it only supplements, supersedes and completes it. Unless the infinite supports the finite, the meaning of the finite itself cannot be known.

To understand the finite, one must understand the Infinite.

That is what is the difference between the materialist and the spiritualist. The materialist looks at Matter per se, whereas the spiritualist looks at it from the dimension of the spirit, in which alone the meaning of Matter comes out fully. We find the same policy everywhere: Sri Aurobindo completes but does not negate. We have to study and show how Sri Aurobindo does it. He uses three keys: the logic of the Infinite, the synthesis of matter and spirit, and the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* integral experience of the Brahman. We must apply these three keys to face Adi Shankaracharya's arguments, that I suppose would be the proper Aurobindonian attitude.

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## **Lecture Notes**

### **I. The Process of Evolution - Paras 1 to 3**

a) All human thought moves between a constant affirmation and negation because living in a world of relativities and possibilities, it can arrive at no final certainty.

b) On the outer level of the process of evolution, the first stress is on the physical mind which regards things as real only those which are physical facts. Physical science is a perfect example of this approach to reality.

c) The life - mind or the vital mentality is an instrument of desire. It seeks not only to satisfy its desire but also hunts after unrealized possibilities. At the same time, this seeking beyond what life can give creates a dissatisfaction and unrest.

d) The thinking mind erects systems of certitude but finally accepts none of them as certain. This process it continues indefinitely.

## **II. Para-4**

a) At a certain stage of life, the physical mind loses its conviction of objective certitude and enters into agnosticism. The vital mind gets frustrated and is ready to reject life. The thinking - mind finds no reality in its mental constructions and believes all to be an illusion.

b) Thence arises the great world - negating religions and philosophies like those of the Buddha and Shankara

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which have left behind the lasting impressions upon the Indian psyche of the chain of karma, escape from rebirth and Maya.

## **III. Physical, vital and mental basis for Illusion - Para - 5**

a) The sense of Illusion could very well find a certain validity if we look at life as such which is nothing but a bundle of failures and frustrations and disappointments and knowledge, happiness, success, and perfection are constantly found to be deceptive and inconclusive and ever elusive.

b) If this were the permanent character of the world -

order, then it only leads to a vast and aimless cosmic Illusion.

#### **IV. Para-6**

a) It is difficult to accept this theory that the world is a total failure and that at best it is only a field for acquiring some experience by the immortal souls.

This is too trivial a justification for the creation of this world.

b) If we accept that this world has behind it a greater creative motive and that Ignorance is only a necessary factor, then there is no validity in considering the world as a failure leading to the sense of frustration.

#### **V. Mental and spiritual basis for Illusion - Para - 7**

a) Brahman is the only Reality and the world is an inferior order of reality which comes to an end once the soul recognizes that Brahman alone is true.

( *Discussion from "Shankara's Brahmvada"* by Dr. R.L.

Naulakha) - Published by Kitabghar, Kanpur, 1964)

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#### **Deliberations on *The Life Divine* VI. The World as a Dream - Para-8**

a) The Cosmic Illusion is compared to dream analogy.

Just as a dream is felt as unreal only after the dreamer wakes up, so too the world is real to the person as long as his consciousness is dwelling in it. But on realizing Brahman the reality of the world is broken.

#### **VII. Para-9**

a) The counter argument to this view is that dreams are passing experiences between one level of experience to another. This kind of going from one state to another state does not prove the unreality of the previous state.

b) Dreams do not have sufficient coherence or continuity whereas our life is full of continuity and meaning.

c) Dreams appear at random during sleep, whereas, our thoughts and emotions have a common anchor on our ego or the deeper self.

### **VIII. The Nature of dreams - Para-10**

a) Dream is felt unreal because it ceases and has no farther validity when we wake up. But Sri Aurobindo says that this does not prove the unreality of the dreams for each status of consciousness may have its own reality.

b) Dreams are unreal because they are a passing experience and there is no coherence. But according to Sri Aurobindo often our waking life also lacks coherence and significance - it is only imposed by a mental delusion.

Are dreams totally devoid of any significance?

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Are they not in reality transcripts of things that are real?

### **IX. Source of our Dreams - Paras-11 to 17**

a) What happens in our sleep is that our surface mind and normal consciousness is suspended but not the inner consciousness. The subconscious and the subliminal are active which send up into the surface layer their formations in the shape of dreams.

b) The subconscious is our dream-builder, it is the place where the Inconscient struggles into half-consciousness.

The subconscious is the antechamber of our Inconscient In dreamless sleep we enter this region.

c) In the subliminal, dreams appear more vividly as series of thoughts, warnings, indications of the future etc. There could also be record of happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes.

d) One could by the process of sadhana become conscious in one's sleep.

e) Our subliminal is a meeting place of Involution and Evolution. It has a direct contact with the universal.

In sleep, the gates of the subliminal are open to us and we get dreams (which are not like the trance), all with supernormal clarities of vision. In the Upanishad it is described as the Dream self because normally it is through dreams one enters the subliminal. Similarly, that state reached in trance is called the Sleep - self.

f) Looked at from this angle, dreams are no longer unreal and the analogy fails as an illustration of the theory of illusion. Our working experiences are symbols of a truth which our lives are trying to express though present only with a partial success.

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#### Deliberations on *The Life Divine* X. **Paras-24 & 25**

a) In Adi Shankaracharya's philosophy there is a conflict between an intuition and Vigorous rationalism.

That is why there is no reconciliation between the world and the Brahman.

b) This reconciliation is brought about by introducing the concept of Ishwara, who, by his Maya, constructs this world as a temporal phenomenon.

c) The concept of Ishwara does not, however, seem to resolve the contradiction in Shankara. For if Maya were to cease, then the world and Ishwara would also cease.

But, Ishwara is a manifestation of Brahman in regard to the phenomenal world, and, being so how can he cease to exist when Maya ceases to be?

#### XI. **Para-26**

a) This suprarational mystery can be solved only by going beyond the intellectual Reason which in fact perpetuates an apparent contradiction. If Brahman alone exists, then all these must be Brahman and viewing it thus all these self - contradictory concepts get reconciled.

b) To know the real truth of the world, it must be seen

"from the view of the superconscience" and not from the mental consciousness.

## **XII. Para-27**

a) The universe is not excluded from the Reality and it is real. If it does not reveal the Reality now it is because it is a progressive self - expression, an evolving self -

development of Brahman.

b) It may be argued that Reality has no need of creation;

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but so can we argue that Brahman has no need of any self

- illusion or illusion of any kind. The Absolute can have no need of anything but still there can be an imperative of a supreme self- effectuating force.

## **XIII. Para-28**

a) The only unreal reality is our individual sense of separateness from the infinite. The concept has a pragmatic necessity but if one can go beyond, then one sees that the individual is a power and manifestation of the infinite the knowledge and awareness of the inner person drives away ego which is the seat of separateness.

## **XIV. Paras-29, 30, 31**

a)

The theory of illusion contains in it a devastating simplicity of nullification depriving everything of any reality - including the impersonal Brahman, taken at its extreme. The experience of 'I am that' would be unreal.

This theory cuts the knot of world problems it does not disentangle It; is an escape, not a solution. That knowledge is likely to be the highest knowledge which illumines, integralises the significance of all knowledge

- but, illusionism unifies by elimination.

### **XV. Paras-32 & 33**

a) The spiritual basis of the theory of illusion is no doubt very solid. But, all spiritual experience of the Infinite can take a multitude of directions. All these experiences are only penultimate experiences to the ultimate one that holds a greater Divine Unity and Unity which holds both these realizations in its vast integral Reality.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* b) When the soul stands on the border between overmind and Supermind, it gets this unitary vision of the total Reality.

c) This problem of the cosmic illusion is to be discussed at length because it is one of the most powerful experiences of the mental spiral. But once we know that it is not the obligatory and, then this cosmic illusion theory could be left aside.

### **XVI. Para-35**

a) The essential question that needs to be solved is that of

“what is Reality?” We could distinguish, depending on our way of contact with existence, i) the essential Reality ii) the phenomenal Reality iii) the Sense Reality b) All that our senses accept as true and work upon it –

such as the earth is flat, or the stars are just shining specs of light etc – is the sense Reality.

c) Science, by going beyond the senses, points out that the earth is round and that the stars and huge planets, even bigger than the sun – this is called phenomenal Reality.

Reason is the principal instrument in the discovery of this phenomenal reality.

### **XVII. Para-36**

a)

Because of its habit of cutting the whole into parts and to consider the part as the whole, even the spiritual experiences of man carries this exclusive consciousness.

The one and many are always considered as opposites by this consciousness.

b) But a consciousness beyond mind would have a different integral view in which Reality would be something more comprehensive and subtler – the finite

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would reveal itself as a power, a movement a process of the infinite.”

### **XVIII. Paras-37 to 39**

a) Supposing that there is the Reality behind appearances, what about the Absolute. It is illimitable and as the universe and the individual limit and divide it, they must be unreal.

b) But this is a false sense which belongs to the mind only. The Absolute is illimitable and indivisible, neither by absolute negation or affirmation. The Absolute is the ineffable overtopping and underlying and immanent and essential in all that we can call existence or non-existence.

### **XIX. Paras-40 & 41**

a) A distinction is made between being and existence

- it is said that being is real but existence is unreal. But, this need not be true if existence is a form of Being and substance of Being. Moreover, nothing can be in Time, which does not pre-exist in the timeless Reality.

b) To conclude, both the timeless eternity and time eternity are two aspects of the Eternal and both are real.

## **XX. Paras-42 to 44**

a) The real question that needs to be resolved is where from is this element of unreality in the Real. Where does this element of unreality begin and where does it stop?

We could say, it is Ignorance which brings in this element of unreality.

b) If we consider ignorance as permanent and unalterable, then an escape of the individual from the world and a cessation of the world - being would be the only solution.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* But, if we admit an evolutionary principle, then a greater manifestation here becomes possible.

c) Lastly, what how do we analyse our conception of unreality. To us reality is what exists on the material and physical level. But, it need not be so. An analysis of the world movement shows that there are different orders of reality which manifest themselves one after another in the evolutionary march. What is not yet unrealised need not be unreal.

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## Chapter – VI

**Reality and the Cosmic Illusion** In the previous chapter we discussed about the two options for the origin of the Manifestation: (1) an original Consciousness or Power of Maya creative of illusions and unreality of which the mind is a party; and (2) an original cosmic Truth-Consciousness of which the mind is an imperfect instrument – imperfect now, but in the course of evolution it could become perfect.

Sri Aurobindo continues this chapter, “Reality and the Cosmic Illusion”, from almost the same thought where he had ended the previous chapter.

What is this original consciousness that has created this world of illusions? Let us start with the first sentence to link up the idea:

But so far we have only cleared a part of the foreground of the field of inquiry; in the background the problem remains unsolved and entire. It is the problem of the original Consciousness or Power that has created or conceptively constructed or manifested the universe, and the relation to it of our world-cognition, —in sum, whether the universe is a figment of consciousness imposed on our mind by a supreme force of Illusion or a true formation of being experienced by us with a still ignorant but an increasing knowledge.

The question here is: what is the nature of Reality? Is it the Nirguna aspect or does it have multiple aspects?

Sri Aurobindo explains what the illusionist would answer:

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* On behalf of illusionism it can be answered to the position put forward by us with regard to the truth of existence that all this might be valid within the bounds of the cosmic Illusion; it is the system, the pragmatic machinery by which Maya works and maintains herself in the Ignorance: but the truths, possibilities, actualities of the cosmic system are true and actual only within the Illusion, outside that magic circle they have no validity; they are not abiding and

eternal realities; all are temporary figures, the works of Knowledge no less than the works of Ignorance.

Adi Shankaracharya was very clear: for him Reality is the Absolute, and all that we ask, think or question about Reality is part of our ignorance and illusion. It is because we are in the Illusion, we even ask what Reality is. Because our mind is a part of that Illusion, it even dares to ask the question, “What is the nature of Reality?”

It can be conceded that knowledge is a useful instrument of the Illusion of Maya, for escaping from herself, for destroying herself in the Mind; spiritual knowledge is indispensable: but the one true truth, the only abiding reality beyond all duality of knowledge and ignorance is the eternal relationless Absolute or the Self, the eternal pure Existence.

Spiritual knowledge may be useful for getting out of the Illusion, and once we come out, all questions will vanish, there would then be absolute clarity as to what is Reality.

Sri Aurobindo now takes up a new question. He says that even before we try to find out what Reality is, let us get into the process of this questioning of “what is Reality?” There are two things in the question, “what is Reality?” ‘Reality’ is one thing and when I ask the question

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‘what’ then there is a mental attitude in it. When we pose a question there is an attitude of inquiry into the nature of Reality. Sri Aurobindo first takes up the inquiry part.

He proceeds rationally and scientifically to prove his point. “All mental cognition depends on three elements, the percipient, the perception and the thing perceived or percept.” We have come across this also in other contexts.

We may wonder why does Sri Aurobindo suddenly change the line of argument! It is because the stance that one takes would alter the definition of Reality.

In the next paragraph he says,

In the theory of the sole reality of Matter consciousness is only an operation of Matter-energy in Matter, a secretion or vibration of the brain cells, a physical reception of images and a brain response, a reflex action or a reaction of Matter to the contacts of Matter. Even if the rigidity of this affirmation is relaxed and consciousness otherwise accounted for, still it is no more than a temporary and derivative phenomenon, not the enduring Reality.

For the materialists, Matter is the ultimate reality.

From their viewpoint, consciousness is only a kind of emergent reality of matter. They will not recognise the Supreme Divine or Sachchidananda or consciousness distinct from matter. As he puts it here very clearly, for them “consciousness is only a secretion or vibration of the brain-cells, a physical reception of images and a brain response, a reflex action or a reaction of Matter to the contacts of Matter.” They will not concede any importance to consciousness. Here the definition of Reality is quite different. Who is asking the question? For the materialist the question is different than for a spiritualist.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* But if Matter turns out to be itself unreal or derivative and simply a phenomenon of Energy, as seems now to be the probability, then Energy remains as the sole Reality; the percipient, his perception, the perceived object are only phenomena of Energy.

For the materialist, Matter is the Reality and consciousness is a by-product of Matter. But what is Matter? Science confirms, it as Energy. Now Energy is the absolute Reality, even for the materialist. The next question is “Energy of what?” Then comes the possibility that it is Energy of a Consciousness. This ‘Consciousness’

may be called Brahman or Sachchidananda or anything else. He says,

But an Energy without a Being or Existence possessing it or a Consciousness supplying it, an Energy working originally in the void,—for the material field in which we see it at work is itself a creation,—looks itself very much like a mental construction, an unreality...

He says that even if you say that Energy is a Reality, you have to concede a Consciousness, otherwise it is an Energy working in a void.

The Buddhist theory of the percipient and the perception and the percept as a construction of Karma, the process of some cosmic fact of Action, gave room to such a conclusion; for it led logically to the affirmation of the Non-Being, Void or Nihil.

This is interesting. The Buddhists say that they do not take this Energy as Energy of a Being; they say it is not necessary that Energy should belong to a Being, it can exist by itself. There is no Atman and no Brahman. He cuts off this link completely. The Buddha stops his analysis

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right there. Why must Energy belong to something else?

There is the energy of the sun, it doesn't mean there is Sun-God, Surya.

Now the question is how does this Energy work? Is it aimless? Is it a blind Energy or a conscious Energy?

There are two possibilities. One is that it knows what it is doing, the other is that it does not know. Depending on the answer, we will be taken on a different track. For the Buddha, Energy is unconscious, because if it were conscious, then it will suggest that it belongs to a Being.

If Energy is conscious, then it is the consciousness of a Being or Brahman and this negates what the Buddha had been advocating. However, we may ask can unconscious Energy have this kind of order, rhythm, which seems to have some kind of logic? Behind this unconscious Energy, the Buddha says there is the rhythm of a law, which is that of Karma. How wonderfully he shifts the topic! In fact, if one wants to be a materialist- philosopher

there is nobody better than the Buddha I feel! He says you don't have to have a Being behind Energy, it is the Karmic law. It is like there is a wire and the current has to pass through it. There is no other escape. He says that perennially, eternally, the whole thing is Karma – individual Karma, universal Karma, cosmic Karma – that is the basic law, it guides Energy.

Whereas, Sri Aurobindo says, that it is the Consciousness behind Energy, the consciousness-force or *chit-tapas* of Sachchidananda which guides. However, from the metaphysical point of view, the Buddha cannot be proved wrong. It is a question of experience and belief.

He says, I didn't find anything. Of course, Sri Aurobindo says that the Buddha did not want to give it a name, but

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* what he experienced comes from the same source of the Divine Consciousness.

It is possible indeed that what is at work is not an Energy, but a Consciousness; as Matter reduces itself to Energy seizable by us not in itself but in its results and workings, so Energy could be reduced to action of a Consciousness is seizable by us not in itself but in its results and workings.

Consciousness may be perceptible only in its results and workings. There is a lot of talk about consciousness, but can we see consciousness without its results and workings? Anyway, consciousness implies manifestation.

Consciousness without manifestation cannot exist, does not exist. It is only through its results and workings that it is known.

To return to our main argument, mental cognition consists basically of three things: the person who sees or experiences (the knower or percipient); act of knowing or perceiving; and the percept, the object of our knowing or perception. If the world that is the object to be known is unreal, then the act of perception which is a part of this world is also unreal, does not exist. The argument is very simple: "For the Reality is one without a second, it is

immutable in eternity, it is the sole Existence; there is nothing else, there are no true becomings of this Being...”

That is Adi Shankaracharya’s argument. Now the question that arises out of this is: if the world is illusory, who is looking at this world? On one side we say Brahman is the sole Reality, and on the other side we say the world does not exist. So is the sole Reality of Brahman looking at an unreal world? Can Brahman see an unreal world?

That would imply many things. If we say there is no

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world and we say that Brahman is the onlooker, what is he looking at? Is he looking at himself? But looking at himself means what? Is there a kind of objectivity that comes in? If I say I am looking at myself, it means I am looking at some parts of myself. But if Brahman is looking at himself, and he is looking at some parts of himself, it cannot be because he is indivisible and changeless. This question is very much complex indeed!

According to Adi Shankaracharya’s view: As only Brahman is real, only a consciousness or a power of Brahman could be a real creator and a creator of realities. But since there can be no other reality than Brahman pure and absolute, there can be no true creative power of Brahman. A Brahman-consciousness aware of real beings, forms and happenings would signify a truth of the Becoming, a spiritual and material reality of the universe, which the experience of the supreme Truth negates and nullifies and with which its sole existence is logically incompatible. Maya’s creation is a presentation of beings, names, forms, happenings, things, impossible to accept as true, contradictory of the indeterminable purity of the One Existence.

Here Sri Aurobindo gives an explanation of Maya itself.

He asks who is the percipient of the world, it could be either Brahman or Maya. We suggested before that Brahman is looking at the world, but if you argue that Brahman cannot look at the world, Adi Shankaracharya could say it is Maya who is looking at the world. Then what is this Maya? Is Maya

truly existent or non-existent? Here is Sri Aurobindo's description: "Maya's creation is a presentation of beings, names, forms, happenings,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* things, impossible to accept as true, contradictory of the indeterminable purity of the One Existence." The argument that follows from this is that 'Maya then is not real, it is non-existent.' It has created all these things, these names and forms, but they cannot be accepted as true. Why is it so? Because there is only One Existence, only the formless Brahman is true, therefore all forms are unreal, illusory. This indicates that Maya is itself something untrue because there cannot be two realities, Brahman and Maya. Therefore, from this viewpoint Maya is not real, it is non-existent. "Maya is itself an illusion, the parent of numberless illusions..."

If Adi Shankaracharya's view of the Brahman is correct, we have to accept that Maya is non-existent.

But Sri Aurobindo then adds,

...moreover, the universe does not exist in a Void but stands because it is imposed on Brahman, it is based in a way on the one Reality; we ourselves in the Illusion attribute its forms, names, relations, happenings to the Brahman, become aware of all things as the Brahman, see the Reality through these unrealities. There is then a reality in Maya; it is at the same time real and unreal, existent and non-existent; or, let us say, it is neither real nor unreal: it is a paradox, a suprarational enigma.

Adi Shankaracharya tells us that as long as we are in the dream, the dream is real. It may be an ephemeral, temporary reality. As long as we are in this Maya, it is real. If I say "I am speaking," what is the meaning of "I am"? It connotes that I exist. The whole question here is of existence. It means that Maya, however short it is, is also existent. We can look at Maya both ways, as real and

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unreal, that is why we have always called it indescribable.

It is existent temporarily, but on the eternal level, we have to say it is nonexistent, because the moment we come out of this Maya due to our meditation and realise the Brahman, the 'I' becomes non-existent. To summarise, we can say that as long as we are in ignorance, we are in Maya, and the moment we have knowledge, we come out of Maya, we are in Brahman.

Now from here, we need to connect Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. According to him Ignorance is the consciousness of separation from the Origin. The moment I feel that I am separated from the Divine, that means I am in ignorance. The moment I realise that I am one with the Divine, I am in Knowledge.

Ignorance and Knowledge look apparently simple but it takes thousands of lives to realise that "I am That".

We can bridge Adi Shankaracharya and Sri Aurobindo thus – Adi Shankaracharya says that as long as we are in ignorance we are in Maya, whereas Sri Aurobindo says that as long as we have the sense of separation from the supreme Sachchidananda, we are in ignorance and illusion. Maya is such a "suprarational enigma": nobody can say "it is" and nobody can say "it is not."

In the next paragraph Sri Aurobindo says, At first sight one is compelled to suppose that Brahman must be in some way the percipient of Maya,—for Brahman is the sole Reality, and if he is not the percipient, who then perceives the Illusion? Any other percipient is not in existence; the individual who is in us the apparent witness is himself phenomenal and unreal, a creation of Maya.

If we have established that Maya is fundamentally

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* non-existent and is only temporarily existent, then who is looking at this illusory world? Logically, it must be

Brahman who is the percipient. Now the question is, can Brahman watch something illusory? We can see an illusion of a snake instead of a real rope, but can Brahman see an illusory world? It is not possible! I can see a snake instead of a rope because of my ignorance and limitation and incapacity, but Brahman cannot do that because he is all-consciousness, the supreme Light. If Brahman is the percipient, the world has got to be real. Why are we saying that when Brahman looks at the thing, it has to be real?

It is because Brahman is All-consciousness, the supreme Light, so he cannot see something false. These are purely rational arguments.

If Maya is in some way real, the conclusion imposes itself that Brahman the Reality is in that way the percipient of Maya. Maya may be his power of differentiating perception, for the power of Maya consciousness which distinguishes it from the true consciousness of sole spiritual Self is its creative perception of difference. Or Maya must be at least, if this creation of difference is considered to be only a result and not the essence of Maya—force, some power of Brahman's consciousness,—for it is only a consciousness that can see or create an illusion and there cannot be another original or originating consciousness than that of Brahman. But since Brahman is also self-aware for ever, there must be a double status of Brahman-Consciousness, one conscious of the sole Reality, the other conscious of the unrealities to which by its creative perception of them it gives some kind of apparent existence.

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Here the argument is that Brahman is perceiving the world of Maya and at the same time he is perceiving himself. In the traditional view Brahman is perceiving himself, is self-aware, but Sri Aurobindo is suggesting that he must also be perceiving the world of Maya, and so it must have some kind of double-consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo continues the argument: These unrealities cannot be made of the substance of the Reality, for then they also must be real. In this view one cannot accept the assertion of the Upanishads that the world is made out of the supreme Existence, is a becoming, an outcome or product of the eternal Being. Brahman is not the material cause of the universe: our nature—as

opposed to our self—is not made of its spiritual substance; it is constructed out of the unreal reality of Maya. But, on the contrary, our spiritual being is of that substance, is indeed the Brahman; Brahman is above Maya, but he is also the percipient of his creations both from above and from within Maya. This dual consciousness offers itself as the sole plausible explanation of the riddle of a real eternal Percipient, an unreal Percept, and a Perception that is a half-real creator of unreal percepts.

Sri Aurobindo says this enigma of Brahman looking at an unreal world can be solved by the solution of a dual consciousness or double status of Brahman. On one level Brahman is aware of himself and, as Adi Shankaracharya says, immutable, changeless and the sole One. But our own spiritual being is also the Brahman and it is that is the percipient of the creations of Maya “both from above and from within Maya.” Brahman is above Maya, but he is also our true spiritual being which is viewing this Maya from

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* within it, and it is into Him that we can withdraw from Maya and its unreal creations.

If there is not this dual consciousness, if Maya is the sole conscious power of Brahman, then one of two things must be true: either the reality of Maya as a power is that it is a subjective action of Brahman-consciousness emerging out of its silence and superconscious immobility and passing through experiences that are real because they are part of the consciousness of Brahman but unreal because they are not part of Its being, or else Maya is Brahman’s power of cosmic Imagination inherent in his eternal being creating out of nothing names, forms and happenings that are not in any way real. In that case Maya would be real, but her works entirely fictitious, pure imaginations...

Here Sri Aurobindo says that if we reject this dual status of Brahman – one status in which it sees only undifferentiated Being and another status in which it witnesses the illusions of Maya – then there are two other possible explanations we can consider. The first is that Maya is an action of Brahman’s consciousness going through experiences that are not part of its

true being, and the second is that Maya is Brahman's power of Imagination that is creating fictions. These two explanations are very similar in that they both suggest that Maya is a working of Brahman's consciousness, but that the products or activities of this consciousness are different from the being of Brahman and not fundamentally true.

He first rejects the second possibility:

...but can we affirm Imagination as the sole dynamic or creative power of the Eternal? Imagination is a necessity

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for a partial being with an ignorant consciousness; for it has to supplement its ignorance by imaginations and conjectures: there can be no place for such a movement in the sole consciousness of a sole Reality which has no reason to construct unrealities, for it is ever pure and self-complete. It is difficult to see what in its own being could impel or induce such a Sole Existence complete in its very essence, blissful in its eternity, containing nothing to be manifested, timelessly perfect, to create an unreal Time and Space and people it to all eternity with an interminable cosmic show of false images and happenings. This solution is logically untenable.

He indicates that Brahman does not require imagination because it is already complete. It is untenable to believe that Brahman's only power of consciousness is to create fictions.

Sri Aurobindo then takes up the first possibility and also rejects it:

The other solution, the idea of a purely subjective unreal reality, starts from the distinction made by the mind in physical Nature between its subjective and objective experiences; for it is the objective alone of which it is sure as entirely and solidly real.

But such a distinction could hardly exist in Brahman consciousness since here there is either no subject and no object or Brahman itself is the sole possible subject of its consciousness and the sole possible object; there

could be nothing externally objective to Brahman, since there is nothing else than Brahman.

He says that there cannot be this distinction between subjective and objective in the sole undifferentiated reality of Brahman, or if it would exist, it is Brahman who

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* would be both the subject and the object because It alone exists. This is particularly problematic if we say that the subject of the consciousness is real but the object of the consciousness is unreal. We also cannot make a cleavage between the being of Brahman and the consciousness of Brahman, especially when we say that the consciousness of Brahman is not reflecting the being of Brahman but fabricating unrealities:

On the other hand, the distinction between the consciousness and the being of Brahman could not be valid, unless Brahman being and Brahman consciousness are two distinct entities, — the consciousness imposing its experiences on the pure existence of the being but unable to touch or affect or penetrate it.

In other words, this argument would suggest that Brahman's being and Brahman's consciousness are two distinct entities, because the consciousness of Brahman would not in any way affect its being. It is like dividing Brahman in two, but according to this viewpoint, Brahman is only one, it is not many. It is therefore contradictory.

Now Sri Aurobindo goes back to the possible solution that there is a dual consciousness of Brahman, one above the world centred in its oneness, and another within the world viewing the illusion of the universe and capable of escaping out of it. He says that this explanation of Maya has its own problems. First, it cannot be that Brahman is subject to the Illusion in the same way that we are subject to it, for "that would mean a principle of Ignorance clouding the Eternal's self-awareness."

Sri Aurobindo suggests a possible answer to this dilemma, but this would require a change in the definition

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of Maya away from Adi Shankaracharya's idea of a meaningless illusion:

An Ignorance which occurs or intervenes in the course of manifestation as a result of a subordinate action of Consciousness and as part of a divine cosmic plan and its evolutionary meaning, is one thing and is logically conceivable; a meaningless ignorance or illusion eternal in the original consciousness of the Reality is another thing and not easily conceivable...

For Adi Shankaracharya's explanation, we can ask why would Brahman need this artificial drama of names, forms and happenings of an unreal world? If it is simply an illusion, why should Brahman entertain it? When we watch a drama on the stage, the audience may be laughing and crying and enjoying but why would Brahman require all this artificially? Even granting that he might enjoy such a drama, how could Brahman even for a moment be deluded by this drama and believe that it was real and with difficulty have to find a way out of it? Could Brahman get overpowered by ignorance and illusion and become trapped in it?

On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo suggests, if this world was a manifestation of Brahman in time and space, and because it is in time, a gradual unfolding of Brahman's consciousness, an evolutionary development that is a subordinate movement within Brahman's consciousness, then it might be logically conceivable. Ignorance then would be a stage in this unfolding of consciousness and would be a part of a divine plan conceived by the Divine.

It would not be meaningless and not built of illusions but would be a partial and incomplete manifestation of Brahman's consciousness, a subordinate movement of its

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* consciousness and itself real. But this possibility is quite different from Adi Shankaracharya's conception of Maya.

Sri Aurobindo, however, continues to examine further possibilities that could explain Adi Shankaracharya's view.

...it may be that we err in attributing any kind of reality, however illusory at bottom, to Maya or her works: the true solution lies in facing courageously the mystery of its and their utter unreality... There is indeed a line of reasoning which gets rid of the problem by excluding it; it affirms that the question how the Illusion generated, how the universe manages to be there in the pure existence of Brahman, is illegitimate: the problem does not exist, because the universe is non-existent, Maya is unreal, Brahman is the sole truth, alone and self-existent for ever. Brahman is not affected by any illusory consciousness, no universe has come into existence within its timeless reality. But this evasion of the difficulty is either a sophism which means nothing, an acrobacy of verbal logic, the logical reason hiding its head in the play of words and ideas and refusing to see or to solve a real and baffling difficulty, or else it means too much, since in effect it gets rid of all relation of Maya to Brahman by affirming her as an independent absolute nonreality along with the universe created by her.

This argument says that we need not worry ourselves over how this illusion has come into being. The problem does not exist because the universe does not exist. Only Brahman exists, and Brahman doesn't have a problem or worry. Sri Aurobindo says that this argument evades the problem, because for us, for human beings, who seem to

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be living in this world, it *is* a problem. On the other hand, this point of view suggests that this illusion in which we are living has no importance because it has no relation to Brahman, the Reality, and if it has no relation, then it has a kind of separate existence – there is Brahman and there is this illusion of Maya which we are somehow experiencing. But according to the argument Brahman is one and indivisible, there is nothing separate.

Sri Aurobindo says it is not Brahman who is viewing the illusion, but the individual being. The problem here, however, is that the individual being is a part of the Illusion, such that the percipient, the perception, and the act of perceiving would all be illusory, and nothing would have significance or importance. Our immersion in the Illusion and our release from this immersion would both be unreal and insignificant. Again, this view suggests that there is nothing here to consider or concern ourselves with, because it is all unreal, an illusion. Again, it seems like an evasion of the persisting problem of our apparent existence and its apparent difficulties.

Sri Aurobindo presents another alternative: It is possible to take a less rigid standpoint and hold that Brahman as Brahman has nothing to do with Maya, is eternally free from all illusion or any commerce with illusion, but Brahman as the individual percipient or as the Self of all being here has entered into Maya and can in the individual withdraw from it, and this withdrawal is for the individual an act of supreme importance.

He interjects here a modification to the view more in line with his own vision, in which he posits that the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* indivisible Brahman exists free of relation with the Illusion of the world, but that an aspect of Brahman, “Brahman as the individual percipient or as the Self of all being”, has entered into Maya and is experiencing this illusion, but can also withdraw from it into its indivisible status.

Sri Aurobindo explains that this modification is problematic for Adi Shankaracharya’s view and incompatible with it:

But here a dual being is imposed on Brahman and a reality attributed to something that belongs to the cosmic Illusion,— to the individual being of Brahman in Maya, for Brahman as the Self of all is not even phenomenally bound and does not need to escape from her: moreover, salvation cannot be of importance if bondage is unreal and bondage cannot be real unless Maya and her world are real.

The absolute unreality of Maya disappears and gives place to a very comprehensive even if perhaps only a practical and temporal reality.

In other words, this view introduces a distinction into the indivisible Brahman, a dual status in which part of Brahman is above and unrelated to the Illusion, and another part has entered into the Illusion and seeks to escape from it. It also gives at least a partial or temporary reality to Maya, because it suggests that bondage and liberation from Maya are relevant and important issues for the individual being.

This is perhaps the most important argument against Adi Shankaracharya. There seems to be a self-contradiction in his argument. Why did this entire philosophy of Illusionism begin? It was because this

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world was seen as full of ignorance, suffering and sorrow.

It was proposed that the way out of this suffering was to escape from it and leave it behind because it is an illusion.

On one side he says that the world is an illusion and on the other side he admits that we are suffering. Somehow suffering and illusion do not go together. How can we be suffering if it is an illusion? To put it more simply, on one side he says 'I am suffering' and on the other he says 'I do not exist.' He says 'I am' and 'I am not' in the same breath.

This whole philosophy boils down to the question: "who is bound and who is released?" If we answer that question, Adi Shankaracharya can be revived; if we cannot answer we can perhaps go on arguing philosophically about dreams and hallucinations, but practically it would not stand the test of my real life experiences. What happens is that at some point I reject all these philosophies and if I have any pain I go to doctor to get some medicine!

Therefore, the Buddha comes in with a pragmatic solution and says, don't talk about Self and Atman and Brahman; your stomach is paining and here is the medicine: follow these steps and you will be free from your pain. The

Buddha was a very pragmatic person, but somehow Adi Shankaracharya turns out to be a controversial philosopher.

We began the whole argument of Adi Shankaracharya with the fact that in our life we get dejected, frustrated, and disappointed. All of us become Shankaras in our own way and say this world is maddening, it has no meaning and that, it really is Maya. We started with this experience, but today we end by saying that explanation of Maya, that it is all an illusion, cannot be true if my suffering, my dejection and my frustration is true. For

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Adi Shankaracharya, there should be no suffering because you do not exist, you are yourself an illusion. We start by supporting Adi Shankaracharya, but when we travel through the philosophy we do not find support in his explanation. Sri Aurobindo's important rebuttal to Adi Shankaracharya is: "salvation cannot be of importance if bondage is unreal and bondage cannot be real unless Maya and her world are real".

Sri Aurobindo still does not give up on Adi Shankaracharya's argument, he examines every possible argument that might support it and then refutes it. He continues: "To avoid this conclusion it may be said that our individuality is unreal, it is Brahman who withdraws from a reflection of itself in the figment of individuality and its extinction is our release, our salvation..." He says, we can argue saying that it is not Brahman that enters into the Illusion and escapes, it is a reflection of Brahman in the illusory figment of individuality that suffers the Illusion and can escape from it. But Sri Aurobindo counters this argument:

... a reflection, a figment of individuality is not a thing that can need salvation. A reflection, a figment, a mere image in the deceptive mirror of Maya cannot suffer a real bondage or profit by a real salvation. If it be said that it is a conscious reflection or figment and therefore can really suffer and enter into the bliss of release, the question arises whose is the consciousness that so suffers in this fictitious existence, —for there can be no real consciousness except that of the One Existence...

The possible argument to support Adi Shankaracharya

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does not hold ground here. A figment or image of Brahman in the distorting mirror of Maya is still a part of Illusion and cannot suffer. We are maintaining that this image is not something real, does not exist as such, and if it does not exist, how can it suffer? If we add that it is not merely an empty image, but a conscious image, then whose consciousness is suffering? But we have said that there is only one conscious Existence, Brahman!

Sri Aurobindo tries one more angle by which to support Adi Shankaracharya:

It may finally be put forward as a solution that the percipient individual and the percept universe are unreal, but Maya by imposing itself on Brahman acquires a certain reality, and that reality lends itself to the individual and to its experience in the cosmic Illusion which endures so long as it is subject to the illusion.

He says, perhaps this power of creating illusions imposes itself on Brahman and by imposing itself, acquires a certain reality from its imposition on the Reality of Brahman, and extends that sense of reality to the illusory individual and its illusory experience in the illusory world. But Sri Aurobindo refutes this also on similar grounds:

But, again, for whom is the experience valid, the reality acquired while it endures, and for whom does it cease by liberation, extinction or withdrawal? For an illusory unreal being cannot put on reality and suffer from a real bondage or escape from it by a real act of evasion or self-extinction...

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* He says we are playing the same trick. We are saying that an illusory individual is taking on a reality while living in the illusory world, and then discarding that sense of reality by withdrawing

from the illusory world with all its suffering, but how can an illusory being take on this apparent reality of suffering from which it must escape?

If the percipient of this illusion is the individual, but the individual does not exist, how can a nonexistence obtain a temporary reality and give it back again when it withdraws from the world? We are driven back to the explanations of a dual being of Brahman or to a suprarational mystery that is inexplicable, *anirvacaniya*.

The crux of Adi Shankaracharya's problem is that he is not able to bridge this world and Brahman, therefore he calls the world Maya, an illusion. There is such a tremendous gap between the falsehood and suffering of this world and his experience of the Brahman, that he cannot accept this world. It has its logical contradictions as we have seen, but he can always retreat to the position that it is a suprarational mystery that is inexplicable.

This is one solution but there are other Advaitin philosophers who have tried to build a bridge between Brahman and world. They take the help of the Upanishads which speak of different states of the Brahman consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says, There are, however, two possible replies to the difficulty, if we get rid of the idea of absolute unreality and admit a qualification or compromise. A basis can be created for a subjective illusion-consciousness which is yet part of Being, if we accept in the sense of an illusory subjective world-awareness the account

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of sleep and dream creation given to us in the Upanishads. For the affirmation there is that Brahman as Self is fourfold; the Self is Brahman and all that is the Brahman, but all that is the Self seen by the Self in four states of its being.

These four levels are: (1) *Turiya*, "a state of superconscience absorbed in its self-existence, in a self-silence or a self-ecstasy, or else it is the status of a free Superconscient containing or basing everything but involved in nothing"; (2) *Susupti* or *Virat*, the sleep self,

“a massed consciousness which is the origin of cosmic existence; this state of deep sleep in which yet there is the presence of an omnipotent Intelligence is the seed state or causal condition from which emerges the cosmos”; (3) *Swapna*, “the dream-self which is the continent of all subtle, subjective or supraphysical experience”; and (4) *Jagrat*, the waking state, which is “the support of all physical experience”. He says we can view these latter three as the whole field of Maya.

As a man in deep sleep passes into dreams in which he experiences self-constructed unstable structures of name, form, relation, happenings, and in the waking state externalises himself in the more apparently stable but yet transient structures of the physical consciousness, so the Self develops out of a state of massed consciousness its subjective and its objective cosmic experience. But the waking state is not a true waking from this original and causal sleep; it is only a full emergence into a gross external and objective sense of the positive reality of objects of consciousness as opposed to the subtle subjective dream awareness

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of those objects: the true waking is a withdrawal from both objective and subjective consciousness and from the massed causal Intelligence into the superconscience superior to all consciousness; for all consciousness and all unconsciousness is Maya.

Just as a human being passes into different states of dream, this theory tells us that Brahman which is pure Being on the level of *Turiya* passes into these different states of the sleep self, the dream self, and the waking self. Similarly, from our waking state we can move back through these different states to *Turiya*. The three lower states belong to Maya and *Turiya* is the true state of the Being. But then Sri Aurobindo writes, “It may be noted, however, that nowhere in the Upanishads is it actually laid down that the threefold status is a condition of illusion or the creation of an unreality...”. He says that this may be a good idea but the Upanishads don’t say that these three levels are unreal. On the contrary, they say that the sleep state is as real as the dream self or the waking self.

What the Upanishads tell us is that from the waking state of the *Jagrat* we pass into the dream self or subliminal consciousness. We forget about the *Jagrat* but when we come back from sleep who is it that says “I have been dreaming?” It is a fine question! When we go into the dream, we forget that we are sleeping but, in the morning, when we come back to our waking state we may say that last night I had a dream and I went to a place and I met this person and had a conversation. There has to be some link, otherwise how can we say that we had a dream? What is that link? This is the main question of the Upanishads: who is it that is saying “I had a dream”. Obviously, there is some link continuously from *Jagrat* to *Swapna* to *Sushupti*

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to *Turiya*. There must be some underlying link. Similarly, when great yogis come back from a deep trance in their meditations, who is it that was in trance? When they are in trance they don't know anything about this world, their mind and emotions are completely withdrawn and their body is still. When they come back, they say I was in trance. The Upanishads tell us that this link between one world and the other is the Self itself, the Atman. When we are asleep the mind, body, vital may be asleep but the Self is awake. It is the Self that moves from one level to the other gathering experience. The Mother says that in our sleep our psychic being goes up to Sachchidananda, gathers energy and returns. It is the psychic being that is travelling through all these experiences.

Continuing the quote above, Sri Aurobindo says,

... it is constantly affirmed that all this that is,—

this universe we are now supposing to have been constructed by Maya,—is the Brahman, the Reality.

The Brahman becomes all these beings; all beings must be seen in the Self, the Reality, and the Reality must be seen in them, the Reality must be seen as being actually all these beings; for not only the Self is Brahman, but all is the Self, all this that is the Brahman, the Reality. That emphatic asseveration leaves no room for an illusory Maya...

Sri Aurobindo argues that the Upanishads emphasise the reality of all these different states, but the fact that they use these words like sleep-self and dream-self creates the possibility of disconnecting them and gives room to Adi Shankaracharya to support his theory of illusion.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* The Upanishads suggest that one state is a covering over the other. The Mayavadins suggest that if I can take this covering off I can also throw it out. Sri Aurobindo says that the scriptures have given some kind of support to Adi Shankaracharya and therefore we cannot fully blame him, for adjusting the meaning of the Upanishads in his favour.

It will be easier to understand this in Sri Aurobindo's terminology. We can go from the outer consciousness into the subliminal consciousness and through the subliminal into Sachchidananda. The outer consciousness has the outer mind, vital and physical. The subliminal consciousness has an inner mind, vital and physical consciousness. Further within we have the purushas, the Manomaya Purusha, the Pranamaya Purusha, and the Annamaya Purusha, and then still deeper within we have the Chaitya Purusha, the psychic being. We can also go into Sachchidananda through a different route. We can go above the normal mind into the Higher mind, from there into the Illumined mind, from there to the Intuitive mind, from there to Overmind and then into Supermind and culminating in Sachchidananda.

In *Savitri* we read about this upward journey of Aswapati which was actually taken by Sri Aurobindo himself. He climbed each step of "the ladder" whereas Adi Shankaracharya, by-passed it. We can take an analogy to understand this difference. In order to go from Chennai to Delhi, one may travel by road. It does take time but then on the way one is able to enjoy the beautiful landscape, the countryside and different cuisines. However, if one were to take a flight from Chennai to Delhi, he would miss the experience of the places coming in between and

could remain in awe of the new place one has reached.

The destination then remains a semi-reality.

Adi Shankaracharya went abruptly into the Superconscient overleaping the stages in between. He was in a hurry as if. He left his body at the age of 32, whereas Sri Aurobindo lived for 78 years, so he could travel from junction to junction. But Adi Shankaracharya leapt over and by doing so he bypassed all these subjective experiences in between. When Adi Shankaracharya reached Brahman, this physical world was so insignificant and so unreal that it lost its value and appeared to be an illusion.

Sri Aurobindo explains this here:

In this transition it is possible to be awake to all the states of being together in a harmonised and unified experience and to see the Reality everywhere. But if we plunge by a trance of exclusive concentration into a mystic sleep state or pass abruptly in waking Mind into a state belonging to the Superconscient, then the mind can be seized in the passage by a sense of the unreality of the cosmic Force and its creations; it passes by a subjective abolition of them into the supreme superconscience. This sense of unreality and this sublimating passage are the spiritual justification for the idea of a world created by Maya; but this consequence is not conclusive, since a larger and more complete conclusion superseding it is possible to spiritual experience.

We have seen that Sri Aurobindo does acknowledge this sense of unreality and that the abrupt passage bypassing the intervening levels of the subliminal consciousness are

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the spiritual justification for the idea of a world created by Maya. We can see Sri Aurobindo slowly closing down on Adi Shankaracharya and taking out the best from him and showing the weak points and possible answers to his irreconcilable problems.

The theory of the cosmic Illusion gets rid of an original contradiction, a problem and mystery which may be otherwise soluble, by erecting another contradiction, a new problem and mystery which is irreconcilable in its terms and insoluble. For we start with the conception or experience of an absolute Reality which is in its nature eternally one, supracosmic, static, immobile, immutable, self-aware of its pure existence, and a phenomenon of cosmos, dynamism, motion, mutability, modifications of the original pure existence, differentiation, infinite multiplicity. This phenomenon is got rid of by declaring it to be a perpetual Illusion, Maya. But this brings in, in effect, a self-contradictory dual status of consciousness of the One to annul a self-contradictory dual status of being of the One. A phenomenal truth of multiplicity of the One is annulled by setting up a conceptual falsehood in the One creating an unreal multiplicity. The One for ever self-aware of its pure existence entertains a perpetual imagination or illusory construction of itself as an infinite multiplicity of ignorant and suffering beings unaware of self who have to wake one by one to awareness of self and cease individually to be.

In brief, Adi Shankaracharya could not explain the apparent contradiction between the static immobile, immutable Brahman and the world. Therefore, he

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suggests not to try to explain because there is something called Maya which has created all that. A similar question is about the dichotomy between the One and the many, and Shankara says that this is a conceptual falsehood in the One creating an unreal multiplicity. But Sri Aurobindo says this answer is not satisfying and is as perplexing as the original problem:

In face of this solution of a perplexity by a new perplexity we begin to suspect that our original premiss must have been somewhere incomplete,—not an error, but only a first statement and indispensable foundation.

We begin to envisage the Reality as an eternal oneness, status, immutable essence of pure existence supporting an eternal dynamism, motion, infinite multiplicity and diversity of itself. The immutable status of oneness brings out of itself the dynamism, motion and multiplicity,—the dynamism, motion

and multiplicity not abrogating but bringing into relief the eternal and infinite oneness. If the consciousness of Brahman can be dual in status or action or even manifold, there seems to be no reason why Brahman should be incapable of a dual status or a manifold real self-experience of its being. The cosmic consciousness would then be, not a creative Illusion, but an experience of some truth of the Absolute.

This is the answer. The solution is based on a double status or dual consciousness of Brahman. Brahman is one and fully self-aware but at the same supports an eternal multiplicity and diversity of himself, what we have called this world of Maya. The Upanishadic explanation that the Brahman has a simultaneous parallel existence on different

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* levels is useful here. If Brahman can be on four different states of consciousness simultaneously, he could also be in the finite forms.

If there are different levels of Brahman, as seen earlier, then it can be One and many at the same time. There is a simultaneous existence of that Transcendent Reality and the cosmic existence here. Sri Aurobindo continues: In a second possible answer on the illusionist basis to the problem, in the philosophy of Shankara which may be described as a qualified Illusionism, an answer which is presented with a force and comprehensiveness that are extraordinarily impressive, we make a first step towards this solution. For this philosophy affirms a qualified reality for Maya; it characterises it indeed as an ineffable and unaccountable mystery, but at the same time it does present us with a rational solution, at first sight thoroughly satisfactory, of the opposition which afflicts our mind; it accounts for our sense of the persistent and pressing reality of the universe and our sense of the inconclusiveness, insufficiency, vanity, evanescence, a certain unreality of life and phenomena. For we find a distinction made between two orders of reality, transcendental and pragmatic, absolute and phenomenal, eternal and temporal,—

the former the reality of the pure being of Brahman, absolute and supracosmic and eternal, the latter the reality of Brahman in Maya, cosmic, temporal and relative.

Ultimately, Adi Shankaracharya admits that there are two levels of Brahman's consciousness: one side of Brahman is the eternal, the Absolute, the pure being, the

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immutable and there is something else, the Brahman in Maya the Ishwara, which is this cosmic universe in time and space. That is also true, but to what extent is it true?

That is the next question.

Here we get a reality for ourselves and the universe: for the individual self is really Brahman; it is Brahman who within the field of Maya seems phenomenally to be subjected to her as the individual and in the end releases the relative and phenomenal individual into his eternal and true being. In the temporal field of relativities our experience of the Brahman who has become all beings, the Eternal who has become universal and individual, is also valid; it is indeed a middle step of the movement in Maya towards liberation from Maya.

This Brahman in Maya is Ishwara. But how can Brahman, who is eternally free, bind himself up in this world, this Maya? Adi Shankaracharya grants a temporary reality to us and the world. As long as we are living it is real for us. We can live as we want, but if we do so we will keep coming back to this ignorant world, into this Maya. If we live, as Adi Shankaracharya would advise us to live, then we will reach Brahman. As a compromise he says let us call this Brahman in Maya, and will it find release and fulfillment? There is a spiritual truth in this also. What is interesting is that there is one Truth that has been spoken about right from the Vedic times through Adi Shankaracharya, the Buddha, Sri Ramanujacharya and Sri Aurobindo. It is one and the same Truth, only its expression changes and becomes wider and deeper.

Sri Aurobindo uses a beautiful phrase here to describe Adi Shankaracharya point of view: “it is Brahman who within

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the field of Maya seems phenomenally to be subjected to her as the individual and in the end releases the relative and phenomenal individual into his eternal and true being.” Brahman “releases the relative and phenomenal”.

That means that he releases himself as individual into himself as his eternal and true being.

This is a truth of liberation that the Mother herself speaks about. Liberation into Brahman does not necessarily come after meditation or reading scriptures or spiritual books. One can read all the scriptural volumes in the

world and nothing may happen. What I mean is that it is a very strange phenomenon that Brahman or Atman, releases itself. When the Supreme wants to release only then we will be released – that is truth of the matter. It is not a question of releasing ourselves. One can sit under a tree for 45 years or stand on one leg in meditation but nothing will happen unless the Supreme wants to reveal himself. That means that if the Supreme wants to release himself he can give liberation to even a sinner. When he chooses to release himself there is no sinner and no saint, within no time he can get Mukti. This is what happens when the supreme grace comes.

I never get tired of quoting that instance when there was the inauguration of the Hindocha Sugar Mill (New Horizon). The Mother was invited on the inauguration of the Sugar Mill. There was a distribution of prasad for all the workers who were there. Then in the evening or the next day Lalji bhai, the owner of the mill went and met the Mother. The Mother said, “you know what I did yesterday to all those who came for my blessings: I gave them liberation”. I hope you understand the meaning. I

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gave them liberation not from Horizon Mills, they will be working for you, but I have given them the true Mukti. I forget now the exact reference of this narration. But I was thrilled to read it. It is not the question of being a labourer or an Ashramite or a Sannyasi in Himalayas. When the Supreme wants to release itself from the bond then only it happens.

That is what I was amazed to see in Sri Aurobindo and it is the same thing that Adi Shankaracharya also said. That is why I said there is one Truth which Adi Shankaracharya caught but in his own way. He was not an ordinary acharya; he was a Vibhuti of Shiva himself. He cannot be telling an untruth; he may be telling a partial truth.

The eternal and the temporal are both real. The temporal ceases when the eternal chooses to go beyond.

But how much is this temporal reality real? Sri Aurobindo says,

But the question of the nature and extent of this reality at once arises: for the universe and ourselves may be a true reality though of a lesser order, or they may be partly real, partly unreal, or they may be an unreal reality.

This is in regard to the temporary reality of the universe and ourselves, not the reality of the Absolute.

Sri Aurobindo says, "If they are at all a true Reality there is no place for any theory of Maya". But would Adi Shankaracharya accept this? No, he will not give it a true reality, it is too dangerous for his theory. The second alternative is that it is partly real, partly unreal. If that is the case, he says "the fault must lie in something wrong either in the cosmic self-awareness or in our own

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* seeing of ourselves and the universe which produces an error of being, an error of knowledge, an error in the dynamis of existence". The confusion comes because our instrumentation of knowledge is defective. If our mind is prejudiced, we will see the thing we want to see and in the way we want to see it. There is something wrong either in the cosmic self-awareness or in our own seeing of ourselves and the universe which produces the error of being. The third possibility is that it is an unreal reality. For this possibility Sri Aurobindo says, "if to a transcendental consciousness all this has no truth of existence and its apparent reality ceases once we step out of the field proper to Maya, then the concession accorded with one hand is taken away by the other; for what was conceded as a truth turns out to have been all the time an illusion". In other words, we are back to where we started, it is all an illusion.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

It is difficult to see why, once any reality is conceded to ourselves and to the universe, it should not be a true reality within its limits. It may be admitted that the manifestation must be on its surface a more restricted reality than the Manifested; our universe is, we may say, one of the rhythms of Brahman and not, except in its essential being, the whole reality: but that is not a sufficient reason for it to be set aside as unreal.

If this temporal world is unreal, why is it so? What is the logic of this unreality? Adi Shankaracharya says it is unreal because its very fact of temporality brings an unreality. Why? Remember our original definition of Satya? It is that which exists eternally. Are we eternal? No, we exist but not eternally, therefore this temporal reality

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is an unreality. Adi Shankaracharya concedes existence to the universe and the individual but then he withdraws this concession, because he says it is not eternal. Now, Sri Aurobindo argues, that a thing must be unreal due to temporality does not really stand. Strict logic suggests that a thing can exist temporarily. If it lasts only three seconds it is real for three seconds, that is all. We need not say that it is real for eternity. We can call Brahman the Absolute eternal reality and the world a temporal reality. Where is the problem? Why should reality be absolutely eternal or nothing?

In a higher status of consciousness the difficulty disappears, the connection is established; the sense of unreality recedes and a theory of illusion becomes superfluous and inapplicable. It cannot be the final truth that the Supreme Consciousness has no regard upon the universe or that it regards it as a fiction which its self in Time upholds as real. The cosmic can only exist by dependence on the supracosmic, Brahman in Time must have some significance for Brahman in timeless eternity; otherwise there could be no self and spirit in things and therefore no basis for the temporal existence.

Sri Aurobindo then gives an example which illustrates this relation. He says,

But the universe is condemned as ultimately unreal because it is temporary and not eternal, a perishable form of being imposed on the Formless and Imperishable. This relation can be illustrated by the analogy of earth and the pot made out of earth: the pot and other forms so created perish and go back

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* to the reality, earth, they are only evanescent forms; when they disappear there is left the formless and

essential, nothing else. But this analogy can tell more convincingly the other way; for the pot is real by right of its being made out of the substance of earth which is real; it is not an illusion and, even when it is dissolved into the original earth, its past existence cannot be thought to have been unreal or an illusion.

The relation is not that of an original reality and a phenomenal unreality, but of an original, —or, if we go back from earth to the invisible substratum and constituent ether, an eternal and non-manifest,—to a resultant and dependent, a temporal and manifested reality.

The pot is there for a while and when it is destroyed it goes back to earth, but just because it returns to earth can we say the pot was unreal? The pot is real but it is a temporary reality. It is not an illusion of the earth, it is a formation made of the earth itself. One could ask, which is better, the lump of clay or the pot? Even the Avatar comes and takes a form. The earth attracts the superconscient into its beautiful forms. Form has a magic of charm, beauty and bliss. Sri Aurobindo says that if a thing is made out of the real, the thing that is made is also real, however temporary it may be. That is the conclusion.

He says, “The cosmic is a different order of the Real from the supracosmic Transcendence, but there is no need to take it as in any way non-existent or unreal to that Transcendence”.

The only difference in the reality of the transcendence and the cosmos is manifestation or non-manifestation –

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that is the only difference. When the cosmos is manifested out of the non-manifest we see it as a universe and a world, and perhaps the cosmos will be withdrawn into the unmanifest as is supposed to happen during Pralayas, but even if the form is withdrawn we cannot say it was an illusion. It was a reality for 50 billion years and afterwards it has become unmanifest but not unreal. The words

‘unmanifest’ and ‘unreal’ have different connotations.

Sri Aurobindo says that Time is not cancelled out of existence by the timeless Eternity, their relation is only verbally a relation of contradiction, but in fact, it is more likely to be a relation of dependence.

Next, Sri Aurobindo brings in a new element, the dynamic and pragmatic character of the cosmos in relation to the immutable Brahman.

Similarly, the reasoning which cancels the dynamics of the Absolute, the imposition of the stigma of unreal reality on the pragmatic truth of things because it is pragmatic, is difficult to accept; for the pragmatic truth is after all not something quite other, quite separate and unconnected with spiritual truth, it is a result of the energy or a motion of the dynamic activity of the Spirit. A distinction must, no doubt, be made between the two, but the idea of an entire opposition can rest only on the postulate that a silent and quiescent status is the Eternal's true and whole being; but in that case we must conclude that there is nothing dynamic in the Absolute and all dynamism is a contradiction of the supreme nature of the Divine and Eternal. But if a temporal or cosmic reality of any kind exists, there must be a power, an inherent dynamic force of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Absolute which brought it into being, and there is no reason to suppose that the power of the Absolute can do nothing but create illusions. On the contrary, the Power that creates must be the force of an omnipotent and omniscient Consciousness; the creations of the absolutely Real should be real and not illusions...

He describes the character of the world as pragmatic and dynamic. When we tell a person to be pragmatic and not idealistic, we mean to be more practical, focus on what can be done and not just think about it in mind.

Sometimes, though, we say that behind a pragmatic action there should be some conceptual ideal. In fact, only action that has been preceded by a concept is meaningful.

Otherwise, an action without the precedent of a concept has not much meaning or capacity of survival. It is then a kind of firecracker which has

burst out of emotion and does not last. Sri Aurobindo brings out the relation between dynamism and silence which he takes up in the next paragraph.

It is perfectly rational to suppose that the eternal status of being of the Reality contains in it an eternal force of being, and this dynamism must necessarily carry in itself a power of action and movement, a kinesis; both status of being and movement of being can be real. There is no reason either why they should not be simultaneous; on the contrary, simultaneity is demanded,— for all energy, all kinetic action has to support itself on status or by status if it is to be effective or creative; otherwise there will be no solidity of anything created, only a constant whirl without any

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formation: status of being, form of being are necessary to kinesis of being.

This is an argument about the relation between the dynamic and the static aspects. Brahman is supposed to be immutable and basically static, whereas the world is supposed to be mutable and dynamic. Adi Shankaracharya thought of these two as incompatible, but Sri Aurobindo tells us “both status of being and movement of being can be real”. He also says they can be simultaneous, and even that they *must* be simultaneous. Status of being has an inherent force. This becomes clear when we talk about Sat, Chit-Tapas, and Ananda. Where there is existence there is automatically consciousness and force and Ananda.

When this force is not applied we call it status of being, but when it is applied we call it the movement of being.

Anything that is in stasis or in a state does not necessarily mean that it cannot move, it only means that its force is static. At present its capacity to move has been suspended or withheld. For example, at the start of a horse race the jockey controls, withholds the horse, and the moment it is released we see that the horses leap with a tremendous dynamism with all its energy and movement. In status, there is tremendous dynamism but it is just waiting for the word ‘go’. It doesn’t mean that it is not there or it can never come out. This is like the double status of Brahman.

Tapas, the dynamism of the world, is already something that is existent as part and parcel of Sat and Chit.

Sri Aurobindo also says that static and dynamic states are simultaneous. If I am moving, my movement and staticity are together. For example, if I am moving, I am not static, but something else is static. The floor on which

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* I am moving is static. If there is dynamism there must be a background of the static. If the world is a dynamic operation of Force there must be a static Brahman in the background. Therefore, staticity and dynamism are not opposite or incompatible, they are simultaneous realities.

This is a principle of manifestation. Sri Aurobindo says that we have to see that the manifestation and the unmanifest are simultaneously real, and both movement and staticity are real.

But we need not therefore conclude that the temporary forms are unreal; for the energy of the being is real and the forms made by it are forms of the being. In any case the status of the being and the eternal dynamism of the being are both real, and they are simultaneous; the status admits of action of dynamism and the action does not abrogate the status. We must therefore conclude that eternal status and eternal dynamism are both true of the Reality which itself surpasses both status and dynamism; the immobile and the mobile Brahman are both the same Reality.

Sri Aurobindo says the dynamic and the static may be the same Brahman, the same Reality, but still in our normal day to day life we make a distinction. We say that to go into meditation and stop all actions is the best way, for action pulls us into ignorance and into involvement with other ignorant forces. Non-action is preferable if we want to reach the Brahman. Action leads to Bhoga and meditation leads to yoga, that is what is a common belief.

But Sri Aurobindo would never advocate it.

But this reasoning is not wholly valid because it is looking at perception and action only as they are in

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our mental cognition of the world and its movement; but that is the experience of our surface being regarding things from its shifting motion in Time, a regard itself superficial, fragmentary and delimited, not total, not plunging into the inner sense of things. In fact we find that action need not bind or limit, if we get out of this moment-cognition into a status of cognition of the eternal proper to the true consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo completely disagrees with this negative view of action, this division between action and non-action, karma and mukti. He says it is a superficial understanding and is not true on a deeper level. According to him,

Action does not bind or limit the liberated man; action does not bind or limit the Eternal: but we can go farther and say that action does not bind or limit our own true being at all. Action has no such effect on the spiritual Person or Purusha or on the psychic entity within us, it binds or limits only the surface constructed personality.

What makes the difference between whether an action is binding or not binding? It all depends upon the source of our action. Is the causal source of our action our ego?

Then it is binding and we call it Karma. In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo explains that ego-based action is Karma. Divine-based action is not binding. When we let the Mother do the work in us it turns into yoga and is not binding. When one's whole attitude becomes "May you the Divine, be the source of my action, may all my action begin and end in you," then it becomes not binding and is called yoga. Then it becomes what we normally call Karma

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Yoga. With ego-based work we reap the consequences of our actions.

Action can be a source of union with the Divine if it is done in the proper way, that is, by letting the Divine be the source and the cause of our action. In that case it need not bind us to this world of ignorance. It could be something that delivers us from this world of ignorance.

Therefore, action has its proper reality. Dynamism is also real. It is not just through meditation that one can reach Brahman; it can be reached through proper action also.

It is not necessary to reject the world and action to reach Brahman, we can be in the world and base our action on the Divine.

The whole effort of yoga is to transfer from Karma to “Kar-Ma”. It is a very simple formula. As the Mother always told us, “Let me do the yoga for you.” That is the whole simple secret. Otherwise, as long as I am the doer then it all becomes erroneous, full of uncertainty, full of dangers, because “I” is the ego, the passion, the desire, the ignorance. The moment I let the Mother do it, it does not mean that I am completely transparent and she becomes the full vehicle, but through my deficiencies and defects at least a ray of light starts transmitting itself.

This is what I have ultimately found to be the simple secret of this yoga. We have to concentrate on Karma yoga. We all think that we are doing our little work. We may be doing our work from morning till evening, but that is doing our duty, but doing our duty is not Karma yoga. Duty is done for the sake of somebody who is giving us a salary on the first of every month; we want to please and obey him. If we do our duty well our income may

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increase every year. But yoga is where from the simplest to the highest things we ask the Mother to do through us. What happens then is that the responsibility of our actions, the worry about our actions, the tension of our actions all become less. Otherwise, we always have these endless questions: What will happen if I do this? What will happen if I don't go there? The

central secret is to bring in the Mother and let her be the doer and then we can be the enjoyer.

We have seen that action can be a bondage and how if it is done in a different manner it could become a means as much as Jnana Yoga or Bhakti Yoga for releasing oneself from ego and uniting with Brahman. In the next paragraph Sri Aurobindo gives us a new argument and an explanation of Adi Shankaracharya's view.

In the philosophy of Shankara one feels the presence of a conflict, an opposition which this powerful intellect has stated with full force and masterfully arranged rather than solved with any finality,—the conflict of an intuition intensely aware of an absolute transcendent and inmost Reality and a strong intellectual reason regarding the world with a keen and vigorous rational intelligence. The intellect of the thinker regards the phenomenal world from the standpoint of the reason; reason is there the judge and the authority and no suprarational authority can prevail against it: but behind the phenomenal world is a transcendent Reality which the intuition alone can see; there reason—at least a finite dividing limited reason—cannot prevail against the intuitive

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* experience, it cannot even relate the two, it cannot therefore solve the mystery of the universe.

It is more or less something that we have been seeing, but here Sri Aurobindo has brought in a different analysis that considers Adi Shankaracharya's use of intuition and reason.

Reason sees the phenomenal world and intuition sees the eternal or the Brahman. This is the main problem with him.

By his intuition, or we can say, by his spiritual experience, he grasps the experience of Brahman, but at the same time his reason somehow says this world is also real but it is incompatible with Brahman. So what does he do? Instead of facing the situation and solving it he uses his intellect and masterfully arranges it to somehow get over this conflict.

His arrangement is that this phenomenal world is real as long as you are in it. He says your experience of the world is a temporal phenomenon of that eternal existence, but the moment you come out of it and see the Reality, this world does not exist. Sri Aurobindo says that Adi Shankaracharya has not solved the problem with any finality; he has just opposed the two different realities, the eternal reality of Brahman and the other unreal real world which is only real as long as we are in it.

Shankara takes up this contradiction, this opposition which is normal to our mental consciousness when it becomes aware of both sides of existence and stands between them; he resolves it by obliging the reason to recognize its limits, in which its unimpaired sovereignty is left to it within its own cosmic province, and to acquiesce in the soul's intuition of the transcendent Reality and to support, by a dialectic which ends by dissolving the whole cosmic

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phenomenal and rational-practical edifice of things, its escape from the limitations constructed and imposed on the mind by Maya.

This has been his genius: he says that within this phenomenal world what our reason says is acceptable, but however great our reason, do not argue against what intuition says. Intuition is a greater power than reason, and what intuition says is that Brahman is the Satya, Truth, the Reality, and it is that which we must ultimately find. As long as we are not in Brahman we can do what we want because we are still in ignorance, but the most important thing is to acquire the soul's intuition of the transcendent Reality.

Next, Sri Aurobindo lays out the argument for how the world has come to be and its relation with Brahman from Adi Shankaracharya's perspective:

The eternal Reality manifests itself in regard to the phenomenal world as Self and Ishwara. The Ishwara by his Maya, his power of phenomenal creation, constructs this world as a temporal phenomenon, and this phenomenon of things which do not exist in the utterly Real is imposed by Maya through our conceptive and perceptive consciousness on the superconscient or purely self-conscient Reality.

Brahman the Reality appears in the phenomenal existence as the Self of the living individual; but when the individuality of the individual is dissolved by intuitive knowledge, the phenomenal being is released into self-being: it is no longer subject to Maya and by its release from the appearance of individuality it is extinguished in the Reality; but the world continues to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* exist without beginning or end as the Mayic creation of the Ishwara.

“...there is a Transcendence which is for ever self-existent and immutable and a world which is only phenomenal and temporal” – this is the reconciliation. To bridge these two realities Adi Shankaracharya brings in the concept of Ishwara. He says, “The Ishwara by his Maya, his power of phenomenal creation, constructs this world”. It is the Ishwara who created the world, not Brahman, because Brahman is immutable, unchangeable and cannot be the creator of the world. Until now we have said that it is Maya, but now it is the Maya of the Ishwara which has created the illusion of the world. The concept seems to get more and more complicated. Had he left it with Maya it would have been easier, but now the question is what is the source of Ishwara? Is it Brahman? He says No. Brahman is not the origin of Ishwara, because Brahman cannot create anything, and if he cannot become anything, he cannot become Ishwara also. He says Ishwara is Brahman’s reflection to us in Maya. He says Ishwara is the source of Maya and reflection of Brahman in Maya. Reason is trying its best to accommodate the Eternal with the finite world and marry them, so it has brought in the priest of the marriage called Ishwara!

Sri Aurobindo elaborates on this perspective: Thus the Ishwara, though he is undeluded by Maya and the creator of Maya, seems himself to be a phenomenon of Brahman and not the ultimate Reality, he is real only with regard to the Time-world he creates; the individual self has the same ambiguous character.

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Maya is like a mirror in which Brahman is seeing himself as Ishwara, but if the mirror is broken the Ishwara is gone because no reflection is possible. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

If Maya were to cease altogether from its operations, Ishwara, the world and the individual would no longer be there; but Maya is eternal, Ishwara and the world are eternal in Time, the individual endures so long as he does not annul himself by knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo says that this reasoning ends up being so convoluted that Adi Shankaracharya has in the end to say that it is a suprarational mystery that cannot be explained.

Sri Aurobindo then suggests that perhaps it cannot be explained in this way because there is something missing, and then provides a possible solution: Ishwara is not himself a phenomenon of Maya, he is real; he must then be the manifestation of a truth of the Transcendence, or he must be the Transcendent itself dealing with a cosmos manifested in his own being. If the world is at all real, it also must be the manifestation of a truth of the Transcendence; for only that can have any reality.

Sri Aurobindo is now coming out with his own answer that this Ishwara is not a phenomenon of Maya, he is the creator of Maya. If we ask from where does Ishwara come, obviously Ishwara has to have his roots in the Brahman, the Transcendent. Sri Aurobindo uses the word Transcendent instead of Brahman – why?

He says “Ishwara is a manifestation of a truth of the Transcendence”. Sri Aurobindo is clearing the confusion created by Adi Shankaracharya. It makes more sense if we

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* say that the Ishwara is a manifestation of a truth of the Transcendence in the cosmos. Sri Aurobindo rectifies the basic Truth of Brahman the Transcendent, the Universal or cosmic, and the Individual. Adi Shankaracharya has not been able to link them because of his basic stand of the immutable Brahman being the only reality. For Sri

Aurobindo Transcendence is both immutable and mutable and because of this change he is able to solve the entire riddle. Without saying that Adi Shankaracharya is wrong or right he has given a kind of logical structure to Adi Shankaracharya's own realisation. Adi Shankaracharya had all the elements, but Sri Aurobindo has corrected the links.

Therefore, whatever I do gains meaning because I am real. For Shankara, bondage and liberation have no meaning because I am not real and the world is not real. All this becomes a fiasco. For example, when we are watching a movie we may be emotionally disturbed but we know ultimately this is only going to last two hours and then it will be over. This is the kind of meaninglessness that comes in Adi Shankaracharya's view. Sri Aurobindo says that if we consider that the individual and the world are real then liberation through Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Karma Yoga all have meaning, and human beings can live with hope and purpose. Otherwise life becomes such a dreary experience. If on top of sorrows and suffering we add hopelessness and meaninglessness, then all our efforts to survive, end up in depression.

It becomes evident that as the Transcendence is suprarational and seizable only by an intuitive experience and realisation, so also the mystery of

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the universe is suprarational... But if so, we have to pass beyond the intellect in order to bridge the gulf and penetrate the mystery; to leave an unsolved contradiction cannot be the final solution. It is the intellectual reason that crystallises and perpetuates an apparent contradiction by creating its opposite or dividing concepts of the Brahman, the Self, the Ishwara, the individual being, the supreme consciousness or superconscience and the Mayic world-consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo argues that it is because Adi Shankaracharya is looking at this problem from a rational point of view that he arrives at these permanent divisions of Brahman, Ishwara, the universe and the individual. The logic of the finite is a divisive logic and creates opposite and dividing concepts of the Brahman, whereas the logic of the infinite is a uniting logic and unites the Brahman, Ishwara, the world and the individual. Sri Aurobindo takes

recourse to the logic of the infinite, to his own supramental vision. He says that in the Brahman consciousness these divergences are seen as a manifold Oneness. He continues: The Buddha applied his penetrating rational intellect supported by an intuitive vision to the world as our mind and sense see it and discovered the principle of its construction and the way of release from all constructions, but he refused to go farther. Shankara took the farther step and regarded the suprarational Truth, which Buddha kept behind the veil as realisable by cancellation of the constructions of consciousness but beyond the scope of the reason's discovery. Shankara, standing between the world and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the eternal Reality, saw that the mystery of the world must be ultimately suprarational, not conceivable or expressible by our reason, *anirvacaniya*; but he maintained the world as seen by the reason and sense as valid and had therefore to posit an unreal reality, because he did not take one step still farther. For to know the real truth of the world, its reality, it must be seen from the suprarational awareness, from the view of the Superconscience that maintains and surpasses and by surpassing knows it in its truth...

This is something that we must take cognizance of that until the coming of Sri Aurobindo no other Acharya could have given us a unitive explanation of this world and the Brahman because the uniting consciousness, that of the Supermind, was itself absent. It is because Sri Aurobindo brought down the supramental consciousness he could go further than the Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya and give a new vision of Reality. One of the fundamental ideas in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy is that if you want to truly understand the finite you must enter into the consciousness of the infinite. It is only the infinite that fulfills the finite.

Adi Shankaracharya and the Buddha and the rest of the Acharyas saw the world from a point that was in the world and looking upwards beyond it. Sri Aurobindo changes this stance: he saw the world from a viewpoint that was above the world, from a supramental stand point, and looked down at it.

The mystery of the universe must have a divine sense to the Divine; it must have a significance or a truth of cosmic being that is luminous to the Reality that

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upholds it with its transcending and yet immanent superconscience.

If Reality alone exists and all is the Reality, the world also cannot be excluded from that Reality; the universe is real.

These are Sri Aurobindo's own solutions. He says that the world cannot be excluded from the Reality of Brahman. Adi Shankaracharya's own stand is that Brahman is the only Reality. Sri Aurobindo says I accept that Brahman is the only Reality, but then we could reach two opposite conclusions. One is that the world is an illusion and the other is that the world is also a Reality. Adi Shankaracharya argues, how can this world be a Reality when it is in such a state of affair? Sri Aurobindo answers: If it does not reveal to us in its forms and powers the Reality that it is, if it seems only a persistent and yet changing movement in Space and Time, this must be not because it is unreal or because it is not at all That, but because it is a progressive self-expression, a manifestation, an evolving self-development of That in Time which our consciousness cannot yet see in its total or its essential significance.

This world is real but it is not like the Reality from which it comes. It is a progressive self-expression of the Reality. The Mother has said that one of the most important principles of the world is that it is progressive.

Because it is progressive we cannot say that this ignorance is eternal. Today ignorance is there but the Divine is gradually removing veil after veil until he can be seen in his total and integral truth.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* It is because of this self-progressive nature of the world that humanity also likes to progress. Imagine if we really knew what is going to happen to us over the next 10 or 20 years we would not be

able to put in the same effort into our action. Long ago the Mother had given me a message: “Keep your resolution firm and your future will be revealed to you as you go along.” I did not understand it in those days but now I understand its meaning. It is a practical and pragmatic guidance. When I was building SACAR I did not think of anything else except the next step of SACAR. It was like veil after veil was being removed from my eyes. After building SACAR then the next thing came into view and now I realise I have to work another project sanctioned by the Mother. The beauty of this is that if I live in the present then my entire consciousness and efforts are focused. If I know that something will happen after 20 years then my energy, my focus and my full attention would not be there; they would be diluted.

In the process of unveiling the future what is supposed to reveal itself or happen may not happen. It is like a beautiful story in the famous book *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. A young boy is watching the birth of a butterfly. He sees on the tip of the cocoon a little hole that gradually becomes a little bigger hole and finally when the caterpillar gets transformed into a butterfly inside the cocoon it comes out through the hole. The young boy who was watching this process saw the butterfly struggling to come out, so he tore the hole open a little wider. Thanks to that the butterfly came out faster and sooner, but unfortunately, because of that help the butterfly could not fly! It did not have strong wings. Nature has made the hole so small that in the

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process of struggling through the hole its wings become stronger. There is a circulation of fluid that so acts that it gets more strength in its wings, and finally it is able to come out and can fly off. It was a very touching story, because our life also requires that kind of concentrated effort. If we are prevented from facing any danger or difficulty then also our intended future may not manifest. It is all a process.

This comes back to seeing the world as real and a self-progressive manifestation of the Divine. This progressive aspect of the world is one of the greatest arguments of Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy, that it will reveal the Divine as we go along.

Sri Aurobindo addresses a possible counter argument to this line of thinking. “It is contended indeed that the universe cannot be a manifestation because the Reality has no need of manifestation, since it is for ever manifest to itself”. This is a classical metaphysical argument that we would come across in any book of philosophy. Time and again people have questioned the need for the self-manifestation of Brahman. Sri Aurobindo says it is a progressive self-manifestation, but what is the need of this self-manifestation at all, leave aside the question of progression? Does Brahman need something to fulfill? I act because I have a need to fulfill; I have a desire, but can Brahman have a need or desire which gets fulfilled through manifestation? Is he complete or incomplete? Is there a sense of incompleteness in him that he has to manifest and then complete himself through manifestation? These are very pertinent questions and Sri Aurobindo has to take into account all of them. It is not sufficient to say that the world is a progressive self-manifestation of the Brahman.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo answers:

...equally it can be said that the Reality has no need of self-illusion or illusion of any kind, no need to create a Mayic universe. The Absolute can have no need of anything; but still there can be—not coercive of its freedom, not binding on it, but an expression of its self-force, the result of its Will to become,—

an imperative of a supreme self-effectuating Force, a necessity of self-creation born of the power of the Absolute to see itself in Time. This imperative represents itself to us as a Will to create, a Will of self-expression; but it may be better represented as a force of being of the Absolute which displays itself as a power of itself in action. If the Absolute is self-evident to itself in eternal Timelessness, it can also be self-manifest to itself in eternal motion of Time.

There are marvelous ideas here. He says it is “a necessity of self-creation born of the power of the Absolute to see itself in Time.” This is Sri Aurobindo’s answer. He also directly addresses Adi Shankaracharya, “equally it can be said the Reality has no need of self-illusion or illusion of

any kind.” The question is why should the Brahman manifest itself, then Adi Shankaracharya may have to also answer why Brahman should create an illusion? Then Sri Aurobindo says, we accept that Brahman has no need, but still, He is free to manifest or not to manifest. “If the Absolute is self-evident to itself in eternal Timelessness, it can also be self-manifest to itself in eternal motion of Time.” This means Brahman can manifest if it wills. Why might Brahman will to manifest? Sri Aurobindo says that it may be “an imperative of a supreme self-effectuating

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Force, a necessity of self-creation born of the power of the Absolute to see itself in Time. This imperative represents itself to us as a Will to create, a Will of self-expression...”

This imperative to manifest derives from the meaning or definition of Brahman. If we say that Brahman is Sat, Chit-Tapas and Ananda, Force or Tapas is there inherently in him. We can translate Force into “will to manifest”, because what is the point of an unmanifest Force? If Brahman is Force, then that Force may seek manifestation, self-expression.

In our ordinary life, when we feel sick or tired, when we do not have energy, we want to be non-active, but when we are full of energy, we want to do something. Force means a will to act. This will to act in Brahman means the will to manifest. Sri Aurobindo says that because the supreme Sachchidananda has this inherent force there is an imperative need to manifest.

Further, the Supreme wants to manifest in time, and not be confined to timeless Eternity. In Eternity, He is self-absorbed and cannot see himself objectively. It is only in Time Eternity that he can objectively see himself. It is like I put out my hand in front of me and see that I have five fingers. My experience of it is different than when it is simply a part of my body lying at my side. Each individual being in the world is that objective image of Brahman

– in a way he is lost in himself and wants to see himself in infinite number of mirrors to see how “beautiful” he is, to experience his potential. We are

all little pocket mirrors of Brahman and he is seeing himself as X, Y and Z who are each evolving through innumerable forms and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* experiences to express a particular aspect of himself. That is self-objectification in time.

Sri Aurobindo contends that it is unnecessary to say that the manifestation is an unreality, it is enough to say that Brahman can be unmanifested and manifested, can exist in timelessness and in time. No other distinction is necessary. Surely there is a difference, but why must one be real and the other unreal? He says, The one thing that can be described as an unreal reality is our individual sense of separateness and the conception of the finite as a self-existent object in the Infinite. This conception, this sense are pragmatically necessary for the operations of the surface individuality and are effective and justified by their effects; they are therefore real to its finite reason and finite self-experience: but once we step back from the finite consciousness into the consciousness of the essential and infinite, from the apparent to the true Person, the finite or the individual still exists but as being and power and manifestation of the Infinite; it has no independent or separate reality.

The sense of the unreal reality of the world also persists in Sri Aurobindo, but here it is due to the sense of ego; the ego is the unreal reality. The unreal reality that Adi Shankaracharya gave to the world, that it is real as long as you are in it but the moment you come out of it, it is unreal, Sri Aurobindo says is true of the ego. "Ego is the helper, ego is the bar". So as long as we are ego, it seems real: we are independent, the possessor, the enjoyer, the doer, we achieve success and greatness. But once we have a conscious connection with our psychic being, then we

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see that ego has no reality, there is no more I and mine and you and yours, it is all oneness. This is the same principle of unreal reality. To be in the ego is to be in ignorance, and the faster we come out of this ego, the faster we come out of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo takes Adi Shankaracharya's

terminology and applies it to his own concept of the sense of separateness, and the seat of separateness is ego.

In the beginning the ego is necessary, but a time comes when it can be left behind. As the Mother explains in one of her talks, just as when you put a new plant you protect it with a little barrier around it, so that animals do not eat the plant, when the plant grows up it doesn't need the barrier or protection any longer. Similarly, ego is a kind of protection for the growth of our individual personality.

In the beginning we need to be egoistic, it is a practical necessity to become individualised beings. Otherwise we would be amorphous, constantly shaped and reshaped by our environment. Our parents tell us one thing, our teachers tell us something else, and our friends tell us something else again. We would become like unclaimed land on which everyone could trespass. We would not have our individual personality. It is a practical necessity to have ego even though it is a false sense of separateness and ultimately unreal. It is a necessity of evolution, a facet and a phase.

When we say the sun rises from the east, it is not really true. It may be real for me but it is not true. Still, on that untruth I base my life, the entire physical organization of my time management is based on that untruth. If I go into space I would see there is no rising and setting of the sun,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* it is the earth which is turning. But when I come back to earth and wake up in the morning I see the sun rising as I get out of the bed.

Sri Aurobindo wants us to realise that the world is real and my individuality is real, but my sense of separateness that my ego gives is not real. He says that once we step back from the ego we see that the individual still exists but as the being and power of the infinite. We have this double facet: in front we have the ego which is unreal, and behind this ego there is true individual.

He then takes up another aspect of the problem: On the other hand, the disappearance of these finite forms of the manifestation is evidently a factor in the problem, but does not by itself convict them of unreality; the disappearance may be only a withdrawal from manifestation. The cosmic manifestation of the Timeless takes place in the successions of Time: its forms must therefore be temporary in their appearance on the surface, but they are eternal in their essential power of manifestation; for they are held always implicit and potential in the essence of things and in the essential consciousness from which they emerge: timeless consciousness can always turn their abiding potentiality into terms of time actuality.

If forms are withdrawn or disappear it does not necessarily mean that they are unreal. If I have a clay pot and it breaks and goes back to the earth from which it came, the form has been withdrawn but not the substance.

Sri Aurobindo says that forms must be temporary but

“they are eternal in their essential power of manifestation”.

On one side we see that forms disappear but it may be

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that they are only withdrawn into non-manifestation and may later manifest again. This is a new argument in Sri Aurobindo, that the world is an eternal reality because form itself has an essential and eternal reality. The pot may be broken but the potter can always create a new pot because the pot continues to exist as a concept in his mind.

Similarly, in Brahman too form is there eternally as part of its consciousness. There may be ten pralayas but form will keep coming back because it is eternal. This is where Sri Aurobindo differs not only with Adi Shankaracharya but with many other philosophers. This explanation is a beautiful one. The finite and the infinite are both eternal.

Like in a seed a whole tamarind tree with all its leaves and its eighty years of life exists as a potential, so are all forms hidden as potentials in the formless Infinite. Like the tree, the self-manifestation of forms takes place

progressively over time. The tree does not grow into its fullness within a day, it takes its own time. The whole world is in the womb of the Brahman but it is growing like a tree. How can you say this is something bad? Yes, sometimes the tree may get damaged from insects or the weather, and one or two of its branches have to be cut off, that is what is called destruction or evil, but it doesn't mean that one chops down the whole tree.

Sri Aurobindo next makes a conclusive argument against Adi Shankaracharya

A theory of Maya in the sense of illusion or the unreality of cosmic existence creates more difficulties than it solves; it does not really solve the problem of existence, but rather renders it for ever insoluble. For, whether Maya be an unreality or a nonreal reality,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the ultimate effects of the theory carry in them a devastating simplicity of nullification. Ourselves and the universe fade away into nothingness or else keep for a time only a truth which is little better than a fiction.

His main criticism of Adi Shankaracharya is that it creates a devastating simplicity of nullification. At one stroke he dismisses the world and calls it a *mithya*, an illusion. Sri Aurobindo says that this oversimplifies and nullifies the problem, and that it creates more difficulties than it solves. He then explains why: In the thesis of the pure unreality of Maya, all experience, all knowledge as well as all ignorance, the knowledge that frees us no less than the ignorance that binds us, world-acceptance and world-refusal, are two sides of an illusion; for there is nothing to accept or refuse, nobody to accept or refuse it. All the time it was only the immutable superconscient Reality that at all existed; the bondage and release were only appearances, not a reality. All attachment to world-existence is an illusion, but the call for liberation is also a circumstance of the illusion; it is something that was created in Maya which by its liberation is extinguished in Maya. But this nullification cannot be compelled to stop short in its devastating advance at the boundary fixed for it by a spiritual Illusionism. For if all other experiences of the individual consciousness in the universe

are illusions, then what guarantee is there that its spiritual experiences are not illusions, including even its absorbed self-experience of the supreme Self which is conceded to us as utterly real?

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That is Sri Aurobindo's last shot at Adi Shankaracharya's arguments. Adi Shankaracharya says that Brahman alone is true and the world and the individual are *mithya*. Who is telling all this? The individual who is himself a *mithya*!

He may be the great Shankaracharya or Ramanujacharya, but he is an individual who is a *mithya* himself. If Adi Shankaracharya himself is part of this *mithya* and he says only Brahman is real and the world is an illusion, why should I believe him? Adi Shankaracharya may say this conclusion is based on his great spiritual experience of the Brahman, but Sri Aurobindo can reply, how do you know that your spiritual experience is true, since you yourself are an illusion? We all end up in this magnificent illusion where even our speaking itself is a lie, a falsehood.

Sri Aurobindo extends Adi Shankaracharya's logic to his own arguments and his own conclusions: For if cosmos is untrue, our experience of the cosmic consciousness, of the universal Self, of Brahman as all these beings or as the self of all these beings, the One in all, all in the One has no secure foundation, since it reposes in one of its terms on an illusion, on a construction of Maya. That term, the cosmic term, has to crumble, for all these beings which we saw as the Brahman were illusions; then what is our assurance of our experience of the other term, the pure Self, the silent, static or absolute Reality, since that too comes to us in a mind moulded of delusion and formed in a body created by an Illusion?

It is like seeing through yellow glasses. I see everything yellow and say it is an illusion, but then I see something which looks blue and I say that is the reality. But the

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* doctor says you still have on yellow glasses, so that blue cannot truly be blue, your visual experience of it cannot be correct. You have nullified everything else as an illusion because it looked yellow, but this blue too must be nullified because you are wearing the same glasses. It is a logical extremism perhaps but that is unfortunately where Adi Shankaracharya has led us, where all faith even in his spiritual experience falls through. That is why it is a dangerous argument.

It is open to the intellect which has once arrived at the conviction of the unreality of all other things, to take a farther step and deny the reality of Self and of all existence. The Buddhists took this last step and refused reality to the Self on the ground that it was as much as the rest a construction of the mind; they cut not only God but the eternal Self and impersonal Brahman out of the picture.

Sri Aurobindo comes to the rescue of Adi Shankaracharya and says to avoid this conclusion there is one possibility:

There is a less drastic nullification if a certain reality is admitted for the being even within the illusion, a certain validity for the experience and knowledge by which we grow into the spirit: but this is only if the temporal has a valid reality and the experience in it has a real validity, and in that case what we are in front of is not an illusion taking the unreal for real but an ignorance misapprehending the real.

If the Acharya gives one concession, his theory could hold some ground and that is the reality of our experience.

It may be a temporal reality but has to be a valid reality.

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Through this concession the whole argument changes. It is no longer that the world is unreal but it is an ignorance misapprehending the real. What is the saving grace? I am no longer in an illusory world and part of the illusion, but I am in ignorance of the truth of the world.

The solution is not that my existence is unreal but that my experience of existence is ignorant. If I am in ignorance, then there is a possibility of understanding. I have a growing partial understanding of this world and of Brahman. The more we come out of ignorance we come to know about Brahman. If we hold to Adi Shankaracharya, then that famous sentence of the Upanishad, “That thou art”, has no validity. If we follow him strictly, how can we say “I am that”? how can we say “He am I”? It is impossible, because for Adi Shankaracharya what is illusory is “I am”. He says “I am” is part of the illusion, therefore my experience is also an illusion.

...the experience “I am That” is vitiated by an ignorant conception, for there is no I, only That; the experience

“I am He” is doubly ignorant, for it assumes a conscious Eternal, a Lord of the universe, a Cosmic Being, but there can be no such thing if there is no reality in the universe.

Adi Shankaracharya does not accept the famous intuitions of the Upanishads: “I am That”, “He am I”, and

“All that is here is verily Brahman”. Those are the three eternal Upanishadic formulae, and he, with one sweep gets rid of all of them. This becomes very difficult to accept. In India we cannot nullify these three fundamental intuitions. If the Upanishads stand on a ground of Truth and experience, it is on these three formulas, and Adi

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Shankaracharya demolishes all of these. Sri Aurobindo says that Shankaracharya’s arguments are unfounded if we really stick to these sacred formulas.

A real solution of existence can only stand upon a truth that accounts for our existence and world-existence, reconciles their truth, their right relation and the truth of the relation to whatever transcendent Reality is the source of everything. But this implies some reality of individual and cosmos, some true relation of the One Existence and all existences, of relative experience and of the Absolute.

Sri Aurobindo says that ultimately the solution must be one that would comprehend God, the world and the individual. If we get rid of any one them then the whole structure of our logic becomes unstable. He says, “The theory of illusion cuts the knot of the world problem, it does not disentangle it, it is an escape, not a solution...”

When we are stitching and the threads become entangled, and we cannot disentangle them, we cut the thread. Why is it that we have not been able to solve the problem?

Because of the impatience to disentangle it, we take a short cut. Cutting the knot is a short cut, and that is what Adi Shankaracharya did. Sri Aurobindo had all the patience of the world to experience the complete Reality and write it as *The Life Divine*. Here he disentangles, all the knots of the philosophic world:

...a flight of the spirit is not a sufficient victory for the being embodied in this world of the becoming; it effects a separation from Nature, not a liberation and fulfilment of our nature. This eventual outcome satisfies only one element, sublimates only one

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impulse of our being; it leaves the rest out in the cold to perish in the twilight of the unreal reality of Maya. As in Science, so in metaphysical thought, that general and ultimate solution is likely to be the best which includes and accounts for all so that each truth of experience takes its place in the whole: that knowledge is likely to be the highest knowledge which illumines, integralises, harmonises the significance of all knowledge and accounts for, finds the basic and, one might almost say, the justifying reason of our ignorance and illusion while it cures them; this is the supreme experience which gathers together all experience in the truth of a supreme and all-reconciling oneness.

This is precisely what Sri Aurobindo does: He

“illumines, integralises, harmonises the significance of all knowledge” of both East and West and finds the one basic, justifying reason of our poor

existence and ignorance. He rejects none, refutes none. All philosophies find their harmony and completion in his consciousness. Such a wholesome knowledge alone can throw light on all the problems of human existence. It is not enough to say that it is difficult to solve this problem and so it is better to leave it. This is the comprehending outlook which takes each truth of experience and gives it its place. *The Life Divine* is a like a divine jig-saw puzzle. The universal experiences brought in by Adi Shankaracharya and the Western philosophers such as Plato and Socrates have been brought in to solve the puzzle and show us the divine plan. That is why he has taken so much pain and labour to put each piece into it and dovetail each with every other piece so beautifully.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo does not denounce any philosophy but shows their limitations and how they can be reconciled with other complementary truths.

But this debate belongs to the domain of the pure reason and the final test of truths of this order is not reason but spiritual illumination verified by abiding fact of spirit; a single decisive spiritual experience may undo a whole edifice of reasonings and conclusions erected by the logical intelligence.

Here the theory of Illusion is in occupation of a very solid ground; for, although it is in itself no more than a mental formulation, the experience it formulates into a philosophy accompanies a most powerful and apparently final spiritual realisation.

Sri Aurobindo has always supported the validity of spiritual experience. He says that even though logically we may get into all kinds of paradoxes and problems, a single spiritual experience that contradicts our reason can still be valid. Sri Aurobindo does not question the experience of Adi Shankaracharya, because he says that is in fact one of the ultimate spiritual experiences. He is perhaps the right person to tell us about this because he has himself gone through this experience and therefore knows the nature of Adi Shankaracharya's experience.

Yet still he would say that there is something beyond this experience, which, as he puts it almost poetically, It comes upon us with a great force of awakening to reality when the thought is stilled, when the mind withdraws from its constructions, when we pass into a pure selfhood void of all sense of individuality, empty of all cosmic contents: if the spiritualised mind then

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looks at individual and cosmos, they may well seem to it to be an illusion, a scheme of names and figures and movements falsely imposed on the sole reality of the Self-Existent.

You can imagine that if our mind were to leap from the mental consciousness directly into the superconscious, it could seem extraordinarily silent because thought ceases and the mind cannot function. It is in that condition that the world and individuality seem to be nullified.

Sri Aurobindo supports Adi Shankaracharya's experience, and he further says,

There can certainly be no doubt of the validity—

complete within itself—of this experience; there can be no denial of the overwhelming decisive convincingness — *ekātma-pratyaya-sāram*—with which this realisation seizes the consciousness of the spiritual seeker.

I remember that the Mother explained that what happens to these people like the Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya is that when they get into this experience of the Nirguna it is so overwhelming that they cannot even think that there could be something beyond it. That is the whole problem.

Sri Aurobindo did not rest content with this experience, but most others do. It is like if we go to France and see the palaces of Louis XIV, each palace is so complete in its beauty, comfort, luxury, aesthetics that once we go there we think that it is the end of the world and there is nothing more that needs to be seen. This is how Sri Aurobindo describes Adi Shankaracharya's experience and it is quite possible to become arrested at that level.

But still all spiritual experience is experience of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Infinite and it takes a multitude of directions; some of them—and not this alone—are so close to the Divine and the Absolute, so penetrated with the reality of Its presence or with the ineffable peace and power of the liberation from all that is less than It, that they carry with them this overwhelming sense of finality complete and decisive.

This is not the only case of Adi Shankaracharya. When Sri Ramana Maharishi had his experience of Brahman he also thought that it was the end and he didn't look for other aspects of Brahman. All spiritual experiences have this sense of finality, and I would say that it is the heroic soul which alone can say that there is still a beyond.

Sri Aurobindo always believed “still there is a beyond”.

It is not that he did not get into Nirvana, it is not that he did not experience the immutable Brahman, but still he believed that there must be something beyond this.

And that's how, in his consciousness of the Supermind he could reconcile all the truths of Adi Shankaracharya or Sri Ramanujacharya or Sri Vallabhacharya and present an integral theory of the existence of God and world and man.

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## **Lecture Notes**

### **I. Para-1**

The problem that needs to be clarified is whether the universe is really an illusion or a true formation of being experienced by us, though partially. That is, what is the nature of Reality and is it at all capable of manifesting any of its infinite truths or inherent possibilities?

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To know the validity of Shankara's argument that this world is a cosmic illusion and that by spiritual knowledge one realises the One eternal relationless Absolute, we must analyse all mental cognition on the basis of three elements: a) The percipient (or the knower) b) The perception (act of knowing) c) The percept (the known).

### II. Para-2

a) The materialists have affirmed only the percept, that is, the universe, the Energy. For them matter alone is real and consciousness is only an operation of Energy or matter. It is only an emergent condition of matter in its process of evolution.

b) But can Energy, which seems to be at the basis of the 3 Ps, be without a Being or Existence? Energy is an action of a Consciousness seizable by us in itself but in its results and workings. And behind the Consciousness is the original Existence. And the creation of such a Consciousness would be real and not an illusion.

### III. Para-3

a) According to the Illusionists, only the supreme Spiritual Existence is accepted as the sole Reality unlike the Materialists who contend that only the percept is true, But it is indeterminate and featureless and thereby it cannot become the universe.

b) Then who is the percipient of the illusory world? Is it Maya? But, there is no such reality as Maya, for Brahman alone is Real. And yet the universe has some reality and Maya being the parent has a kind of

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* reality. Hence Maya is both real and unreal, existent and nonexistent.

#### **IV. Paras-4 & 5**

a) Logically, what it comes to is that Brahman, being the sole Reality, has to be the percipient of this illusory world. In such a case the illusion cannot exist in the light of the Truth - consciousness. But, let us accept provisionally that the universe is a fact and Maya does exist.

b) If Maya is real, then Brahman becomes the percipient.

He is aware of the unrealities of Maya and at the same time self-aware; hence there is a double status of consciousness in Brahman. He is both above Maya and within Maya — this alone seems to be the sole plausible explanation of the riddle of a real eternal percipient, an unreal percept and a perception that is a half-real creator of unreal percepts.

#### **V. Paras-6 to 8**

a) From the conclusion of a dual consciousness, what we gather is that either one of the two things must be true: either a) Maya is a subjective action of Brahman consciousness or else b) Maya is Brahman's power of imagination inherent in his eternal being, creating out of nothing, names and forms.

b) But imagination is a faculty that helps human mind to supplement its limited knowledge. But Brahman has no incapacities and limitations for which he needs the supplement of imagination.

c) The solution that Maya is the subjective action of Brahman - consciousness is also untenable because unlike man, Brahman has no subjective and objective

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experiences, for such a thing is an impossibility: Brahman being the sole existent there can be none other outside of him. This duality is applicable to

ignorant man but not to the pure awareness of Brahman.

d) With regard to the dual-consciousness of Brahman, the question arises as to the need of Brahman to create and that too just a drama of names and happenings which have neither meaning nor denouement.

#### **VI. Para-10**

a) So, if Brahman is not the Percipient, then the individual being must be the Percipient. But such a possibility is not there with the illusionists because the Percipient, and the Percept are an illusion. If all is unreal, then there is no bondage or salvation.

b) It is argued that Brahman as the individual percipient has entered into Maya and can in the individual withdraw from it. But such a bondage of Brahman is not possible for he is ever free and does not need salvation.

#### **VII. Para-11**

It may then be said that the individual percipient and the percept, the universe are real, but, Maya by imposing itself on Brahman, gets some reality which is imparted to the individual and his experiences in the unreal world.

But again this raises the question of only one Truth, that of Brahman, and that there cannot be any other consciousness.

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#### **Deliberations on *The Life Divine* VIII. Paras-12 to 15**

As a compromise to these contradictions, the Upanishadic idea of the Fourfold self has been compared with Maya and Brahman. The highest state of Superconscience (Turiya) is the status of the pure Brahman. The other three states of Sleep Self (Shushupta), Dream self (Swapna) and Waking Self (Jagrat) belong to Maya. Thus the subjective experience of the self are real but the objective experience of the self are not real. This analogy once again falls into the trap of dream and reality.

But the Upanishad do not support this view that the three lower states are those of an illusion. All the four states are the Brahman himself.

The three lower states of Self are nothing but the Superconscious and the Subliminal which are behind and beyond our waking status. It is through this inner states that we could pass into the supreme Superconscience. But in this passage, if the experience is abrupt, then the mind could be seized in the passage by the unreality of the cosmic Force and its creations.

### **IX. Paras-16 & 17**

The theory of cosmic Illusion does not seem to reconcile the evident contradiction between the Nature of the Eternal Reality and that of the cosmic illusion. The One indeterminable and the Many are irreconcilable in this theory.

But if we admit that the consciousness of Brahman can be dual in status or action or even manifold, then, the cosmic determinations are nothing but the manifestations of some truth of the supreme Reality.

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### **X. Para-18**

In reality Adi Shankaracharya's qualified Illusionism admits a qualified reality to Maya and a partial reality to her creations, that is, the universe and the individuals. He brings in this solution by positing two orders of reality - transcendental and pragmatic.

There are three alternatives to indicate the nature of the reality of the universe and the individual: a) a true reality b) partly real, partly unreal, c) unreal reality.

### **XI. Para-19**

The reality of this world and ourselves is only as long we are in ignorance but unreal to true knowledge.

But according to Sri Aurobindo this need not be so.

When the higher status of consciousness is achieved, the sense of unreality may recede and the mind could find a connecting link between Brahman and the world. The transcendental truth of Brahman is found to be the basis of the pragmatic truth.

## **XII. Paras-20, 21, 22**

The universe is held to be unreal basically because of its non-eternality. The example of pot and earth is given to illustrate this point. But Sri Aurobindo asks as to how can anything made out of something real, be unreal? A form may disappear but it only passes out of manifestation into non-manifestation, but it does not mean that manifestation was unreal.

We cannot limit Brahman only to static Brahman, for all creation, pragmatic or otherwise only point at the dynamic aspect of Brahman. Both, the status of being and movement of being are real and can be

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* simultaneous for the kinetic needs the support of the static.

## **XIII. Para-23**

It is experienced that in silence only we can experience the highest Reality and all dynamism seems to lose its reality. But this is not wholly real; it is only the way of looking at it from our mental cognition. Action does not bind or limit the liberated man - it limits only the surface constructed personality.

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## **Chapter – VII**

**The Knowledge and the Ignorance** This is comparatively a shorter chapter but it gives us the fundamental definition of Knowledge and Ignorance from Sri Aurobindo's perspective. Both Sri Aurobindo as well as the Vedas describe existence as being made up of seven principles. In one of the previous chapters called "The Seven-fold Cord of Being," existence is described as being made up of upper hemisphere and lower hemisphere. The upper hemisphere consists of Sat, Chit-Tapas and Ananda plus Supermind. And the lower hemisphere consists of Matter, Life and Mind. Seven seems to be the number of the principles of existence. But Sri Aurobindo also speaks of an eighth principle, that of the psychic. Each principle in the higher hemisphere corresponds to the one in the lower: Sat corresponds to Matter, Chit-Tapas corresponds to Life, Ananda corresponds to the Psychic, and Supermind corresponds to Mind. This is the basic structure of this universe according to Sri Aurobindo.

We must remember that all these principles are powers of one Being, and, as Sri Aurobindo says, they are the one Being only changed in apparent substance and in dynamism of action. They are not modified in their real essence. This also suggests that when Sat becomes matter, Chit-Tapas becomes life, Ananda becomes the psychic, and Supermind becomes mind, there is a change in the apparent substance and in the dynamism but not in their essence.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* It is like the case of ice and water. Ice is a static solid substance and changes its state to water when it melts. Its change to fluidity means there has been a modification of the substance and it becomes more dynamic. Ice is static whereas water moves, but essentially they are the same.

As he says, it is not modified in real essence. Similarly, this whole universe is nothing but Sat-Chit-Ananda but there is a difference in apparent substance and dynamism. What exists eternally as Nirguna, which is static, unmoving, at rest, changes its poise and becomes Saguna, becomes movement, becomes the many. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy these are the two sides of the same Brahman.

Sachchidananda has “melted” and become this manifold universe. What we should remember is that there is no essential difference, except in its apparent substance and state.

But here there is a world based upon an original Inconscience; here consciousness has formulated itself in the figure of an ignorance labouring towards knowledge. We have seen that there is no essential reason either in the nature of Being itself or in the original character and fundamental relations of its seven principles for this intrusion of Ignorance, of discord into the harmony, of darkness into the light, of division and limitation into the self-conscious infinity of the divine creation.

This is the issue. If this manifestation is made of these seven substances, where is this substance called Ignorance?

How has ignorance found a place? From where has this intrusion of ignorance come in? That is mystery we have to solve.

The Vedic seers were conscious of such a divine

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self-manifestation and looked on it as the greater world beyond this lesser, a freer and wider plane of consciousness and being, the truth-creation of the Creator which they described as the seat or own home of the Truth, as the vast Truth, or the Truth, the Right, the Vast, or again as a Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun of Knowledge finishes his journey and unyokes his horses, where the thousand rays of consciousness stand together so that there is That One, the supreme form of the Divine Being.

On one side we have the fine philosophy of the seven Rishis and the seven rays of light, but when we look at our world it is such a dramatic change that it becomes almost a complete paradox. Did the Vedic Rishis understand this paradox?

But this world in which we live seemed to them to be a mingled weft in which truth is disfigured by an abundant falsehood, *antasya bhureh*; here the one light has to be born by its own vast force out of an initial darkness

or sea of Inconscience; immortality and godhead have to be built up out of an existence which is under the yoke of death, ignorance, weakness, suffering and limitation.

The Vedic Rishis knew that on one side there is the Supermind and on the other is this “abundant falsehood”.

What is important to note is that they saw this world as a disfigured Truth. This world is immediately born out of Inconscience, that is why that there is falsehood, but out of this falsehood truth has to be born. There is the famous prayer: “Lead me from Falsehood to Truth; Lead me from Darkness to Light; Lead me from Death to Immortality”.

This is very powerful because knowing the Reality they

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* aspired for the supreme culmination. Other philosophies gave up on this world saying it is too much in ignorance and falsehood so it is better to leave it. The Vedic seers were heroic people. They said out of this falsehood, darkness, ignorance and death we will arrive at truth, light, knowledge, and immortality.

The lower is for us the first condition of the higher; the darkness is the dense body of the light, the Inconscient guards in itself all the concealed Superconscient, the powers of the division and falsehood hold from us but also for us and to be conquered from them the riches and substance of the unity and the truth in their cave of subconsciousness.

There is the famous story in the Vedas of the sun being stolen by the Panis and hidden in the cave. Then the gods came and retrieved the sun because without it the world was dark. So they send their Ashwins, and other gods and goddesses, and ultimately they find out where that sun is hidden. A war is waged between the Panis and the gods and then the Panis are defeated and the gods retrieve the sun. But this seemingly simple story is important for it signifies what Sri Aurobindo calls involution and evolution.

The subconscious cave is the Inconscient in which the Supermind is hidden and has to be retrieved. For that different gods and goddesses have to come, the different Avatars have to descend to clear the passage for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to retrieve that golden sun from the cave. What the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done with the transformation of the body is to retrieve the Supermind that is hidden in cells of the body; that is the real culmination of their work. This story of the Vedas has

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literally been completed and accomplished by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

This world is not devoid of light. Religions have said this world is dark, no doubt, but there are two kinds of darknesses: one which is devoid of light, and another in which the light is covered. Imagine I have a light bulb covered with a cardboard box, then a wooden box, then an iron box. Ultimately there is complete darkness. But that darkness is not devoid of light. If we want light it is simply a question of removing one box after another, layer after layer. The more we remove the more the light comes out.

Adi Shankaracharya and the illusionists said that there is no light here, no hidden light, nothing. Therefore, they advised us to leave this world. Sri Aurobindo says that there is light, only you must peel off the layers covering it. We have within us a psychic being which is covered over by various layers of substance. There is first the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical, and then there an outer mind, outer vital and outer physical. That is why we cannot feel the psychic being. Yoga is nothing but removing these layers to see the light of the psychic being. This is what Vedas have told us very boldly in their enigmatic language, as Sri Aurobindo calls it.

For, as a matter of fact, while the very keyword of the ideal creation is a plenary self-consciousness and self-possession in the infinite Soul and a perfect oneness, the keyword of the creation of which we have present experience is the very opposite; it is an original inconscience developing in life into a limited and divided self-consciousness, an original inert subjection to the drive of a blind self-existent Force

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* developing in life into a struggle of the self-conscious being to possess himself and all things and to establish in the kingdom of this unseeing mechanic Force the reign of an enlightened Will and Knowledge.

If we think that this unconscious darkness is the beginning and end of our existence and that there is no light hidden in this ignorance, then what happens is that there is the growth of materialistic attitudes, wherein we deny the existence of the soul. We say this world has no meaning, it is just Matter that exists. The soul, the emotions, love and compassion are all a play of chemistry in our body. What we call soul is simply one of the glands working. Today we have all fallen into the trap of materialism where we deny the existence of the soul, its growth, its purpose, and we think that the only thing to do is try to be successful, to amass wealth, a house, some riches, and at the end pass it on to our children.

Sri Aurobindo says that life appears to be a monstrous Ashwattha-tree instead of a divine tree of manifestation. It is full of suffering. If we suppose the soul to be eternal, it appears to be a foreigner, an alien, a not well-treated guest in the reign of this vast Inconscience. If not an accident in the unconscious darkness, it is perhaps a mistake, a stumble downwards from the superconscious Light.

In the earlier chapters we have discussed what are the seven principles of existence, and that the view of the Vedic Rishis was that this world is a composite made of both ignorance and light, and that behind ignorance there is light. But if we do not accept this composite understanding of our existence that behind ignorance there is light we can go to the other extreme of materialism where we suspect that even the existence of the soul is not

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true, or if it is, then it seems the soul has made a mistake and stumbled into this ignorance. This is the trend of the argument that Sri Aurobindo is presenting here: If this view of things had a complete validity, then only the absolute idealist, sent perhaps out of some higher existence, unable to forget

his mission, stung into indomitable enthusiasm by a divine oestrus or sustained in a calm and infinite fortitude by the light and force and voice of the unseen Godhead, could persist under such circumstances in holding up before himself, much more before an incredulous or doubting world, the hope of a full success for the human endeavour.

If we accept that the soul is an alien or stranger in this world, then unless we are an absolute idealist or incorrigible optimist we will never see any hope in this world. We will always think that the world is doomed to failure and one day it will go up in flames. Only an incorrigible optimist could see meaning in this world, but otherwise we will see no meaning. We will become completely pessimistic.

The consistent materialist seeks a partial and short-lived power, knowledge, happiness, so much only as the dominant inconscient order of Nature will allow to the struggling self-consciousness of man if he accepts his limitations.

The materialist says that since we have a short life we should have fun and whatever we can take from this world we should enjoy even if only for a little while. We should seek pleasure because there is no higher truth or happiness. Since there is no beyond, nothing greater than the body, obviously we should take from this world whatever little pleasures we can, as Sri Aurobindo puts it,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* whatever the “dominant inconscient order of Nature will allow to the struggling self-consciousness of man”. This is the view of the materialist.

We can see how much our life depends on our philosophy of life! People tend to think that philosophy is something disconnected from life. They think, I am a pragmatist, I work as an engineer or a doctor and have nothing to do with philosophy. On the contrary, each one of us is guided by our philosophy or at least is influenced by it. We cannot live without a philosophy of life. If you say I don't believe in spirituality, that is a

philosophy of life, and you are probably a materialist. If you say there is no soul, that denial of the soul is consistent with the materialistic philosophy.

Adi Shankaracharya's and the Buddhist philosophy are still widespread in the world. If you believe that this world is an illusion, obviously you will try to escape from it and enter into the transcendent Reality. If you are an Aurobindonian and believe that this world is also a Reality in spite of all its troubles, then you don't try to escape but rather try to change yourself and the world to be a truer expression of Reality. How we face the difficulties of life depends upon our philosophy of life.

Besides the materialist and the illusionist there is the religionist who seeks the kingdom of God in another world where truth and love and joy are eternal. The religious seeker also says that this world is completely full of ignorance so let me escape it and find heaven in the other world. He does not deny the existence of God but he refuses to accept that God is in this world. He says God is in heaven, in a paradise, in Vaikuntha, so I will leave this world and go there.

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These are different attitudes we can take but we can see the value of the Vedantin's attitude who understands fully well the ignorant nature of the world but still believes in the perfectibility of man. Sri Aurobindo has brought back the Vedantic view fully and not only brought it back, he has also fulfilled the Vedic aspiration. It was as if the Vedic work was left incomplete and Sri Aurobindo came to complete the work and aspiration of the Vedas.

We see that the Vedic Rishis aspired for the perfectibility of man and of the society. There is the Alwar's vision of the descent of Vishnu and the gods upon earth, the reign of the saints (*sadhunam rajyam*), the city of God, the new millennium, the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse.

These intuitions have lacked a basis of assured knowledge and the mind of humanity has remained swinging between a bright hope for the future and the grey certitude of the present. The Vedas have given us a beautiful reconciliation and say that it is possible to perfect man and society. The

Vedic Rishis dreamt of the *sadhunam rajyam*, but they could not build it because there was not, at that time, the descent of the supramental consciousness which has the necessary power to fulfill that dream. The Overmind and the nine Avatars were not sufficient. Sri Krishna and Sri Rama have established a certain consciousness but it was not sufficient to establish the *sadhunam rajyam*. It is only the Supermind that can establish this reign of saints and the kingdom of God.

Sri Aurobindo says,

All acceptations of our defeat or our limitation start from the implied or explicit recognition, first, of an essential dualism and, then, of an irreconcilable opposition between the dual principles, between

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the Conscient and the Inconscient, between Heaven and Earth, between God and the World, between the limitless One and the limited Many, between the Knowledge and the Ignorance... We have seen that there can be and is a perfectly rational basis for the hope of our victory; for the lower term of being in which we now live contains in itself the principle and intention of that which exceeds it and it is by its own self-exceeding and transformation into that it can find and develop into a complete form its own real essence.

Today, even among the Western people, even among the common men, there is a hope for a brighter future for humanity. Until recently, people normally thought that a doom's day would come and the world would end in doom. Even Christianity believed that the end of the world is around the corner. But even among the Christians there has been a change of attitude and now it is seen as not so much an end that is coming but rather the second coming of Christ which will be a rejuvenation. There are also authors like Alvin Toffler and other western futurologists who speak of a bright future for humanity. This hope of a bright future is there because, as this crucial sentence says, "the lower term contains in itself the principle and intention of that which exceeds it."

Today the mind of humanity seems to have come to a dead end as we say because it cannot find the way out the many problems that it faces. However, this same mentality has within it the seeds of Supermind, and when the seed is ready to break through the earth, the earth cracks sapling open as an indication that the new plant is going to come. Similarly, we see all the cracks in the civilisation in the form of terrorism and the ugliness of politics.

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These happenings in the vital and mental life of humanity are signs of the coming of the new consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo says, the lower contains in itself the principle and intention of that which exceeds it. It is by its own self-exceeding and transformation that it can find and develop into a complete form of its own real essence.

Sri Aurobindo is of course a great idealist and optimist, but he is not a blind optimist, he had a vision of the future which he himself had realised and has also explained it in rational terms for the mind of humanity. Sri Aurobindo continues:

But there is one point in the reasoning which till now we have left somewhat obscure, and it is precisely in the matter of the co-existence of the Knowledge and the Ignorance. Admittedly, we start here from conditions which are the opposite of the ideal divine Truth and all the circumstances of that opposition are founded upon the being's ignorance of himself and of the Self of all, outcome of an original cosmic Ignorance whose result is self-limitation and founding of life on division in being, division in consciousness, division in will and force, division in the light, division and limitation in knowledge, power, love with, as consequence, the positive opposite phenomena of egoism, obscuration, incapacity, misuse of knowledge and will, disharmony, weakness and suffering.

Sri Aurobindo brings up a new point. We have accepted that even according to the Vedas and Vedanta this world is a combination of Knowledge and Ignorance but the fundamental questions remain as to how they can co-exist and why they should co-exist ?

Sri Aurobindo says that Ignorance “has its roots in the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* nature of Mind whose very office it is to measure off, limit, particularise and thereby divide.” It is one of the main roots but it is not the origin. The roots of Ignorance lie not only in Mind but also in Matter and Life. Now, why mind?

Why is it that mind is one of the root causes of Ignorance?

It is because its very nature is to divide. We have seen that ignorance means separation. If I say I am ignorant of God it means I am separated from God. If I say I am identified with God it means I have knowledge of God. These are simple statements but very crucial.

Ignorance means separation: separation from the Divine, separation from the world, from other human beings, separation from our own true self. Now the question is, what is it that gives me the sense of division between you and me? It is the mind. The body does not say I am separate from these people; it is the mind that says they are different people. Thus, one of the root causes of ignorance is the mind itself whose nature is to separate.

It becomes the root cause of ignorance when it separates itself from the higher principles of which it is a power.

Mind, which is a power of Supermind, divides itself from its source. It says “I am an independent existence”. It also has a tendency to see only one aspect of truth and exclude the rest. So one of its characteristics is separation and another is exclusion.

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The first step of Ignorance is to divide the world into bits saying that this is God and this is not God, this is me and this is Nature, etc. The second step of Ignorance is the exclusivity that ignores everything outside its field of concentration. This sense of exclusivity is upheld by mental ego, vital and physical egos.

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To give an example, when I am concentrating on reading *The Life Divine* my mind is fully focused on the line I am reading and I am ignorant of all that is happening around me. My mind is focused even to the extent I forget my body. I may have a pain in the body but I forget that too because I am so concentrated and focused. But when I come out of the reading my awareness becomes total. My mental consciousness returns, my emotions become alive and my body's pain is felt again. Sri Aurobindo says this is what happens with Sachchidananda. It focuses on a part of its being to the extent that it becomes oblivious of the rest.

In a footnote Sri Aurobindo explains that the Buddha refused to consider how Ignorance came into being, his only concern was how to get out of it. This suggests that the Buddha was a practical man. If we see a bird which is shot and is bleeding it does not help the bird to find out who is the person who shot it. The bird is bleeding, and what is important is to stop it. Similarly, the Buddha went to the extent of saying why bother about whether I have a soul or not, because now I am suffering and what is urgent is the end my suffering. He gave some steps to follow which will end desire and the cycle of rebirth leading to cessation of all suffering. The main target is to get relieved from suffering. The most important thing is to recognise the fact of Ignorance and suffering and find a way out of it.

Sri Aurobindo argues against this attitude: But our mind cannot remain satisfied—the mind of Buddhism itself did not remain satisfied—with this evasion at the very root of the whole matter... But if we are to evade the root-question, we have no means

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of judging whether the assertions advanced are correct or the remedies prescribed the right ones, or whether there are not others which without being so violent, destructively radical or of the nature of a surgical mutilation or extinction of the patient may yet bring a more integral and natural cure.

One does not solve the problem of life by renouncing it! This is what has been done in India for too long a time. If we go to a doctor because of stomach pain he may say it is due to bad liver and will give us medicine for it. Afterwards we may find out through X-rays and tests that the stomach pain is due to pancreas problem.

Then the medicine will change because the diagnosis was wrong. Similarly, the reason for the problem of suffering is important. The Buddha says that we suffer because we are caught in the wheel of rebirth; hence, we must come out of this birth and cycle of rebirth. Sri Aurobindo says let us see if there is some other cure without a “surgical mutilation or extinction of the patient”.

Secondly, it is always the business of man the thinker to know. He may not be able by mental means to know the essentiality of the Ignorance or of anything in the universe in the sense of defining it, because the mind can only know things in that sense by their signs, characters, forms, properties, functionings, relations to other things, not in their occult self-being and essence.

But we can pursue farther and farther, clarify more and more accurately our observation of the phenomenal character and operation of the Ignorance until we get the right revealing word, the right indicating sense of the thing and so come to know it, not by intellect but

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by vision and experience of the truth, by realising the truth in our own being.

Too many people accept what is already there, what is given in the name of shastras and scriptures. Very few people like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo go beyond the established philosophies to find a deeper cause diagnosis of our suffering. But Sri Aurobindo also says that it may not be possible for the human mind to know the Truth because we need a greater instrument to find it. If Adi Shankaracharya questioned the Buddha did not question him with his mind but with a higher intuitive capacity. If Swami Vivekananda could find out new truths it was not because of his mind but

because he acted from higher levels of consciousness. If one wants to seriously challenge Scriptures, one can do but one has to go beyond the mind because true knowledge comes from the intuitive level or even highest from the supramental level. Sri Aurobindo says that we have to go beyond the mind and see from the spiritual mind if there is any other diagnosis of and cure for ignorance.

Mind cannot give us knowledge of the origin of ignorance because mind is itself born from it. We have to go beyond the mind to another consciousness which can see the birth of mind. It is like saying we want to see the entire ocean while swimming in it. But if we take a plane and fly over the ocean then we can see the whole ocean.

Similarly, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went to the level of the Supermind from where they had the “aerial” view of the totality of Existence.

We have then to scrutinise more closely than we have yet done the character and operation of this principle or this power of Ignorance and arrive at a clearer

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* conception of its nature and origin. And first we must fix firmly in our minds what we mean by the word itself. The distinction between the Knowledge and the Ignorance begins with the hymns of the Rig Veda.

So far Sri Aurobindo has given us a little bit of the background. He has said that Ignorance has its roots in the mind. We have also seen that we can take different attitudes towards life depending on what is our view of it and our diagnosis of its problems of ignorance and suffering. We have also seen how the Vedic people reconciled the co-existence of Knowledge and Ignorance.

Now the real argument begins which tells us about Knowledge and Ignorance. He will take us back to the Vedas because that is where for the first time in the human consciousness there was a clear-cut distinction made between Knowledge and Ignorance.

Here knowledge appears to signify a consciousness of the Truth, the Right, *satyam ritam*, and of all that is of the order of the Truth and Right; ignorance is an unconsciousness, *acitti*, of the Truth and Right, an opposition to its workings and a creation of false or adverse workings.

The definition of Knowledge is to be conscious of Satyam and Ritam. Knowledge according to the Vedas is to be conscious of the Truth and the Right, and Ignorance is unconsciousness of the Truth and Right – it is a very simple thing. In Sri Aurobindo's terminology it means that when we are conscious of the Supermind then only we can have Knowledge and below it there is Ignorance. A couple of chapters later Sri Aurobindo defines Knowledge in a similar way and explains that this true Knowledge is achieved by identifying oneself with the object of

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knowledge. Vedas and Sri Aurobindo have the same view regarding this point. Unfortunately, this definition of Knowledge got lost over the course of time and it is only Sri Aurobindo who brought back the same definition and completed this cycle of human evolution. It started with the Vedas and then knowledge came down many levels and now Sri Aurobindo comes to link up the old Vedas to the new Veda called *Savitri*. This is the grand finale. After this first cycle of evolution there will be a new cycle which can be called the spiritual evolution or the supramental evolution. This is why it is important to consider the meaning of Knowledge and Ignorance.

Ignorance is the absence of the divine eye of perception which gives us the sight of the supramental Truth; it is the non-perceiving principle in our consciousness as opposed to the truth-perceiving conscious vision and knowledge.

This is *chit* and *achit*, the first is truth-perceiving and the second is the non-perceiving principle. Knowledge means to perceive truth; Ignorance means not to perceive it.

In its actual operation this non-perceiving is not an entire inconstance, the inconstant sea from which this world has arisen, but either a limited or a false knowledge, a knowledge based on the division of undivided being,

founded upon the fragmentary, the little, opposed to the opulent, vast and luminous completeness of things; it is a cognition which by the opportunity of its limitations is turned into falsehood and supported in that aspect by the Sons of Darkness and Division, enemies of the divine endeavour in man, the assailants, robbers, coverers of his light of knowledge. It was therefore regarded as an undivine

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Maya, that which creates false mental forms and appearances,—and hence the later significance of this word which seems to have meant originally a formative power of knowledge, the true magic of the supreme Mage, the divine Magician, but was also used for the adverse formative power of a lower knowledge, the deceit, illusion and deluding magic of the Rakshasa.

There are many ideas here and we have to take up each one by one. The first idea is that in its actual operation this non-perceiving is not an entire inconscience; it is not the inconscient sea from which this world has arisen. The Inconscience means that there is no knowledge, no light at all. Inconscience is where the consciousness is wrapped up so much that no light can come or is seen. There is no Chit, no Ananda, no Tapas – nothing. But in ignorance there is limited or false knowledge. There is the beginning of knowledge, however small, however imported it may be, because it is based on the division of the undivided Being. It is founded upon the fragmentary, upon the little as opposed to the opulent, the vast, the luminous, the completeness of things. Ignorance has some knowledge but it could be sometimes a false knowledge. I may say something is blue and you may say it is green, whereas in the Inconscient we can't see anything.

He says that this limited or false knowledge “is a cognition which by the opportunity of its limitations is turned into falsehood and supported in that aspect by the Sons of Darkness and Division...” These in the Vedas are called the Panis, the Coverers, the Robbers of Knowledge.

That is why when one is in ignorance one is easily misled.

Somebody may tell us that a certain person did something

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terrible, and we may then begin to treat the person poorly.

But if you tell a yogi the same thing, he is not affected because he knows why the person has done it and that even he may have been right from his own perspective.

This used to happen with the Mother. Complaints would sometimes go to the Mother about X, Y or Z requesting that they should be turned out from the ashram, but she would say I know why that person acted that way. It might be due to something in their present circumstances or it might be due to something in the person's previous life.

Once we know the cause of the action we don't feel like punishing. If a person has stolen a piece of bread we don't punish him if we know that he has been hungry for the past two days. Knowledge adds new perspectives on a situation and then falsehood does not come in. Ignorance and falsehood go together but knowledge keeps falsehood away.

The second idea of importance in this quote is that Ignorance came to be regarded as something false. If we put a stick in a transparent glass of water, what do we see? It will appear to be bent. But this is a false vision.

If I pull out the stick from the glass of water, I see that it is not bent. This falsehood comes like a veil upon our eyes and we begin to look at people and situations in a wrong manner. This veil of falsehood is to be removed.

Sri Aurobindo tells us here that this falsehood is what came to be called as Maya, but originally Maya had a different meaning.

The divine Maya is the knowledge of the Truth of things, its essence, law, operation, which the gods possess and on which they found their own eternal

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* action and creation and their building of their powers in the human being.

So we have here two different definitions of Maya. One Maya is a power of knowledge but in the lower level it became a power of Illusion.

This idea of the Vedic mystics can in a more metaphysical thought and language be translated into the conception that the Ignorance is in its origin a dividing mental knowledge which does not grasp the unity, essence, self-law of things in their one origin and in their universality, but works rather upon divided particulars, separate phenomena, partial relations, as if they were the truth we had to seize or as if they could really be understood at all without going back behind the division to the unity, behind the dispersion to the universality.

The Vedas said Knowledge means consciousness of Satyam, Ritam, Brihat, the supramental consciousness.

Ignorance means there is not the consciousness of the Satyam, Ritam, Brihat. The same idea is now interpreted in a different manner. Knowledge is that which sees the unity behind things, and Ignorance is that which does not see this unity. If I am ignorant I will see all this as multiplicity, as separate, but if I have the Knowledge I would see all this multiple bodies as essentially one.

Even in our common human life if we say we are working from knowledge, that means there must be an effort towards the unification. The more we try to divide people, on whatever basis – religion, caste, creed, nationality, family problems, personal problems – that means we are working from ignorance. And if we work towards division, we are opening ourselves to falsehood,

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and this leads to destruction. Ignorance multiplied by falsehood equals destruction. What we see happening in the world today is because of this ignorance and falsehood.

It is in the midst of this that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have come to bring in the sense of unity – not only on the family level, on the work level, on the national level, but on the level of humanity itself. Sri Aurobindo is pushing hard towards that because there is that opposite and equal force of division, ignorance, falsehood and destruction.

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Sri Aurobindo is going to take up the root meanings of the terms Knowledge and Ignorance. He says the philosophic and the metaphysical distinction between these terms was first made in the Rig-Veda. We have seen that the Vedas defined Knowledge as a consciousness of the Truth and the Right, Satyam and Ritam, which means Supermind in Sri Aurobindo's terminology. Anything short of that is not Knowledge according to the Rig-Veda.

Knowledge of the Brahman is definitely knowledge, but Sri Aurobindo is making it more specific that it must include Brahman in dynamism and in the manifestation, not just Nirguna Brahman. Before one can have this integral knowledge of Brahman one must attain Satyam-Ritam-Brihat, which is the Supermind. We must rise up the ladder of consciousness to the level of Supermind, then only will we know both Nirguna static and Saguna or dynamic Brahman. The latter means Brahman in manifestation, Our old classical yoga said that knowledge of Nirguna Brahman is the highest knowledge. But if we reach beyond manifestation there is no knowledge, there is no knower and there is no known. This is the distinction

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* between knowledge of Brahman and the knowledge of the Supermind.

Ignorance is unconsciousness or *achitti* of the Supermind. Except for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo all of us are in ignorance in the highest sense because only they realised the supramental consciousness. Even the overmental knowledge is still ignorance, it is the beginning of Ignorance. The Overmind is the level of gods, but even they are in Ignorance.

Humanity has the capacity to go beyond Ignorance, beyond the gods, if it wants to. The gods are stuck permanently in this Ignorance.

The divine Knowledge is called the divine Maya, or as it is said in the Rig-Veda, Devi Maya. Ignorance is called Adevi Maya or undivine Maya. When we come to the next stage of the Vedanta, the Upanishads, we have different terminology. In the Rig-Veda there is no other distinction except that knowledge of Supermind is Knowledge and non-consciousness of Supermind is Ignorance. There is nothing in between.

There is another way of looking at this Vedic interpretation. Knowledge is that which tends towards unification. Unity is an interesting word which demarcates all other perceptions. If we are conscious of the unity of this world, that means that we have knowledge of this world. That means Supermind equals a unitarian consciousness. Another word to describe the supramental consciousness is the unitarian consciousness; it is that consciousness which always lives in the sense of unity. To summarise the view of the Veda, knowledge is that which is conscious of the Supermind, or if you prefer, you can say that knowledge is that in which one is conscious of the essential unity of all existence.

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The Mother made it clear that it is this unity she was speaking about when she spoke about human unity. It is this unity that is meant when we speak about the world being one, or when Sri Aurobindo says we must move towards the unity of mankind. Actually, the Mother says there is no question of moving towards unity, it already pre-exists, it is only by rediscovering it that it can be achieved.

We already have this essential unity. There is an evolution which is going back to the Divine, that means it is going back to the unitarian consciousness, going back towards the oneness with the Supreme.

This is the second epithet we can use for Knowledge: Knowledge is consciousness of unity. We can apply this idea at our ordinary mental level also. When we have the sense of unity with others then we feel more wise.

What is wisdom? It is unity, togetherness. It is not wise for Hindus, Muslims and Christians to keep fighting. A wise man, a Rishi or a saint always tries to unify people.

One who divides people is called an Asura, not a saint or an Avatar. Even in human relations if we start separating from each other we feel the pang of separation – suffering and pain will come into our consciousness. So unification is applicable from our pragmatic level all the way up to the level of supramental Knowledge. It is the same quality.

Unity means joy and Ananda, disunity means pain and suffering. We can apply it or look at it from any angle.

This is part of the Rig-Veda.

In the Vedantic thought of the Upanishad we find the original Vedic terms replaced by the familiar antinomy of Vidya and Avidya, and with the change of terms there has come a certain development of significance: for since the nature of the Knowledge is to find the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Truth and the fundamental Truth is the One, —the Veda speaks repeatedly of it as “That Truth” and “That One”,— Vidya, Knowledge in its highest spiritual sense, came to mean purely and trenchantly the knowledge of the One, Avidya, Ignorance, purely and trenchantly the knowledge of the divided Many divorced, as in our world it is divorced, from the unifying consciousness of the One Reality.

The complex associations, the rich contents, the luminous penumbra of varied and corollary ideas and significant figures which belonged to the conception of the Vedic words, were largely lost in a language more precise and metaphysical, less psychological and flexible.

Vedanta narrows down the meaning of the Rig Veda; it restricts it. One of the most of important differences that we see between the Rig Veda and the Upanishads is the language itself. The Rig Vedic language, is full of “complex associations”. If they used the word *go*, which in the Vedas meant

cow, its “luminous penumbra”, gave it also the meaning of light, a ray of Light and even a ray of the light of Supermind. All this was signified by a single word.

Perhaps because of that we don’t understand it. It is so rich that it is beyond our mind’s capacities. It is not just a matter of scholarship. You may be a great pundit in Sanskrit but you may still not be able to understand the Rig Veda because its language reflects a much richer consciousness.

We must remember that language reflects essentially a level of consciousness. Language is not just a few verbs, syntax, and grammar. It is a reflection of one’s consciousness. The Rig Vedic rishis had such a complex and vast consciousness which is reflected in their language. The Upanishadic rishis

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had a great intensity of experience but, their language was less complex and rich. The Upanishadic language is beautiful and highly metaphysical but it is not as complex and suggestive as that of the Rig Veda.

Allow me to digress a bit at this point. Why do we call *Savitri* a great mantra? Why do we often complain that we cannot understand *Savitri*? Why do we say we should not analyse *Savitri*? Simply because it doesn’t relate to the mental consciousness. Let us not try to understand it, let us try to appreciate it, because appreciation comes from different levels. There could be the level of the psychic consciousness which will appreciate *Savitri*. We are not able to understand Sri Aurobindo because our level of consciousness is different. It is as simple as that. Although we may try, with our mental capacity we will not understand such spiritual books. What can happen though is that a trickle of the higher consciousness – from the higher mind, the intuitive mind or the Overmind can seep into our mind and help us, if we can keep our mind silent.

It is the problem of language — it reflects always the consciousness. There is the same difference in Sanskrit literature. Kalidasa is very sensuous and grandiose in his use of language. But we cannot compare Kalidasa’s language with that of Ved Vyasa. Why? Because the consciousness of

Kalidasa and that of Veda Vyasa, the author of the Mahabharata, are completely different. This relates to what Sri Aurobindo tells us about the Upanishads, that it “lost the richness and the complexity” of the Vedas. After the Upanishads, there was a further loss in the level of the language. Even the Bhagavad Gita was written from a different level. Sri Krishna, the Avatar himself imparts a great Knowledge, but the language he used is of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* intuitive level. Further, even the schools of philosophy of Sankhya, Mimansa, Yoga are all schools of philosophy using intellectual language of reason and logic. Thus, it means that this language became cramped, precise and lost the flexibility of interpretation. If I say cow, I mean cow; I do not mean light, I do not mean Supermind. We cannot interpret it otherwise mental language becomes very dry. We have precision but as we go higher in consciousness the words become enriched with symbolism. In Sanskrit each word has many different connotations and different levels of meaning.

This is what Sri Aurobindo emphasises. Vedic language is based on psychological intonations whereas the Upanishadic language is metaphysical.

Still the later exaggerated idea of absolute separation from the true truth of Self and Spirit, of an original illusion, of a consciousness that can be equated with dream or with hallucination, did not at first enter into the Vedantic conception of the Ignorance. If in the Upanishads it is declared that the man who lives and moves within the Ignorance, wanders about stumbling like a blind man led by the blind and returns ever to the net of Death which is spread wide for him, it is also affirmed elsewhere in the Upanishads that he who follows after the Knowledge only, enters as if into a blinder darkness than he who follows after the Ignorance and that the man who knows Brahman as both the Ignorance and the Knowledge, as both the One and the Many, as both the Becoming and the Non-Becoming, crosses by the Ignorance, by the experience of the Multiplicity, beyond death and by the Knowledge takes possession of Immortality.

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The verses that are here referred by Sri Aurobindo are some of the most beautiful verses of the Isha Upanishad: 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. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance. This is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed that to our understanding. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys immortality. (CWSA 17: 8) Sri Aurobindo comes to the rescue of the Upanishads and tells us that though there are some verses open to Adi Shankaracharya's interpretation of the world as an illusion, there are some verses where it says that they who follow after the Ignorance fall into a blind darkness, they who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone fall into a greater darkness. If we are in the Many, in the Ignorance then at least there is a chance that we will see the One after some effort perhaps after many births, after much struggle and suffering. We will come to realise that behind this many-ness there is God, Brahman or the One. But if we see only the One, what happens? We have the example of Adi Shankaracharya. He saw the Light of the One but it was so bright that he could not see the world. It is an experiential thing. One who has the experience of the One is so brilliant, so wonderful, that one cannot come back into the Many. It is like coming back into an illusion.

That is why there is a greater danger in seeking the One exclusively.

The integral solution is to know Brahman as both

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the Ignorance and Knowledge, as both the One and the Many, as the becoming and the being non-becoming; the person who has this knowledge goes beyond That and enjoys immortality. This is the integral solution given by Vedas and by the Isha Upanishad. In other Upanishads something else is said. The Rig Veda, the Isha Upanishad and Sri Aurobindo all follow on the same line of argument and experience. They say that we must have the consciousness of the oneness in the Many.

We must know the Many but also the One. Or we may say that we must know the One in the Many. We must know the Many as the One. There is a triple formula: One in the Many, Many in the One, and One as the Many. That is the integral way.

For the Self-existent has really become these many existences; the Upanishad can say to the Divine Being, in all solemnity and with no thought to mislead,

“Thou art this old man walking with his staff, yonder boy and girl, this blue-winged bird, that red of eye”, not

“Thou seemest to be these things” to the self-deluding mind of the Ignorance. The status of becoming is inferior to the status of Being, but still it is the Being that becomes all that is in the universe.

For the Upanishads this Many is not a merely a

“seeming”. Adi Shankaracharya says that this world is an illusion. It may have a seeming reality because the dream is real to us as long as we are dreaming. Once we come out of the dream it is no more real. But for the Isha Upanishad this world is real because it is the Brahman who is that

“old man walking with his staff”, it is Brahman that is that boy and girl. It is Brahman who is the bird, the red of eye.

That is, Brahman is everything therefore, this world is real. The One Being is more important and the becoming

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of the Many is less important, but at the same time it is the Being that becomes the universe and so the becoming is just as real. There is a difference of importance but not a difference of reality. The energies of the universe could be withdrawn into the Being so the Being is primary and the becoming is secondary and dependent on the One.

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Sri Aurobindo continues:

But the development of the separative distinction could not stop here; it had to go to its logical extreme.

Since the knowledge of the One is Knowledge and the knowledge of the Many is Ignorance, there can be, in a rigidly analytic and dialectical view, nothing but pure opposition between the things denoted by the two terms; there is no essential unity between them, no reconciliation possible.

This is the third level. In the third level knowledge of the One becomes reality, knowledge of the Many becomes illusion. If we go down to the mental level, we lose the integral experience. The whole problem is that we are now arguing only on the mental level, we have lost the experience of the Rig Veda. What was an integral oneness in the Rig Veda is so completely broken up that it becomes atomic and non-existent. I can't even see an atom. For these thinkers this world has become an illusion because it has broken up to atoms, neutrons etc. – atomic reality has hardly any reality for them.

Therefore Vidya alone is knowledge, Avidya is pure ignorance and if pure ignorance takes a positive form it is because it is not merely not-knowing of Truth but a creation of illusions and delusions, of seemingly real unrealities, of temporarily valid falsehoods. Obviously

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* then, the object matter of Avidya can have no true and abiding existence; the Many are an illusion, the world has no real being.

This is the final step towards illusion: the Many is pure ignorance and this pure ignorance takes a positive form of creating illusions. In what way? He has given us the famous example of the snake and the rope. Adi Shankaracharya says that we think that the snake is real, but it is only a rope. Similarly, we think that the world is real but it is only a delusion, a wrong way of seeing, a wrong understanding of things. When we get the true understanding then we will see that this world is an illusion. It is a

seemingly real unreality. It may have a temporary validity. When we see the snake we may fear, we may react, but when we discover that it is not a snake but a rope then our response changes and we become quiet. Our actions and reactions are dependent upon our true or false vision. So too, Adi Shankaracharya says, we act and react according to our false vision of the world.

The Gita describes the world as transient and joyless, but we become attached to life, to our relationships, to our possessions, as if they will last forever. Sri Krishna in the Gita says, “having come to this transient and joyless world, engage in devotion unto Me.” We live under the illusion that things in this world will last. When we realise that all this is fragmentary and temporary, then it becomes possible to detach oneself. The secret of detachment is to consider this world as *anityam*, transient. This temporality is a great help in one’s attitude. The Mother also tells us that the importance we give in our life to relations and positions is what brings us suffering. But the moment we see that even these relations, even this pain and suffering

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is only temporary, then immediately we get detachment.

The over-emphasis on the problem is withdrawn. Our life is only a split second in eternity. If we keep that kind of comparison with Eternity, the problems of life become less manifested. She says that when you have a problem, when you are tense, expand yourself, look at the ocean or the sky and feel yourself expand into this vastness. When you expand your mental consciousness, your tension automatically decreases. It is like if we put one drop of black ink in a glass of water the colour of whole glass becomes black, but if we put it into a bucket it become less black and if we put it in a big tub of water, we may not even see the colour at all. That is the secret for relieving pain and suffering: to expand our consciousness!

Sri Aurobindo continues describing this third view of the Ignorance:

Undoubtedly it has a sort of existence while it lasts, as a dream has or the long continued hallucination of a delirious or a demented brain, but no more. The One has not become and can never become Many; the Self has

not and cannot become all these existences; Brahman has not manifested and cannot manifest a real world in itself...

Here Sri Aurobindo elaborates on what he described earlier as “temporarily valid falsehoods”. They have no real validity, they only seem to have a reality. Avidya has no true and abiding existence – the many are an illusion, the world has no real being. You may ask whether this explanation is escaping the problem of pain and suffering.

But he says, “it has a sort of existence while it lasts”, just as when we are in a dream. When we are dreaming we never think it is an illusion. We may be running or crying

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* or fighting, but we are totally involved in the action and at that time we think that it is real. When we come out of the dream, we say, “oh, that was just a dream, it wasn’t really happening”. Similarly, the world is true for you and me as long as we are involved in it, but the moment we get detached from it, the problems become less. The more we are involved in the drama of the world, the more problems we face, the more we attract the negative forces.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

... it is only the Mind or some principle of which Mind is a result that thrusts names and forms upon the featureless unity which is alone real and, being essentially featureless, cannot manifest real feature and variation; or else, if it manifests these things, then that is a temporal and temporary reality which vanishes and is convicted of unreality by the illumination of true knowledge.

If the Brahman alone is the Reality and the world is an illusion, the question comes, how does this Illusion come about? If we say there is no bridge between Brahman and Illusion, between the One and the Many, how has this Many come about? The Vedas say that out of the One the Many has come, and the Upanishads agree. But Adi Shankaracharya says there is no bridge, so how was this illusion of the Many created? As seen earlier, Adi

Shankaracharya has to bring in something other than Brahman to answer this question. Therefore he brings the theory of Maya, which according to him is a forced solution to a slippery situation. One may say it is a dream or hallucination, but the dream also has an origin.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that for Adi Shankaracharya “it is only the Mind or some principle of which Mind is a

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result that thrusts names and forms upon the featureless unity”. Adi Shankaracharya calls this Maya. The creator of the illusion, the Many, the Ignorance, Avidya is Maya. When people say “everything is Maya”, they have forgotten the Rig Veda and Upanishad and taken to Adi Shankaracharya.

Are we happy with this answer that Maya is the creator of the Many? Perhaps we are. But from where did Maya come? Now Shankaracharya is in a fix. He says, the origin of Maya is *anirvacaniya* – it is inexplicable, indefinable.

Thus the whole solution is left incomplete. We have Maya which has inexplicably thrust upon the featureless Brahman some features, names and forms.

Our view of the ultimate Reality and of the true nature of Maya has compelled us to depart from these later fine excesses of the dialectical intellect and return to the original Vedantic conception... we are obliged to withdraw from the hold so powerfully laid by this conception of Maya on the intelligence.

So now Sri Aurobindo says, let’s not go by this path, it has led us into a trap and we do not know how to get out of it. Let us abandon this dialectical intellectualism and take a new angle. Sri Aurobindo now takes us back to the Rig Veda and reveals the divine plan.

But the obsession of this long-established view of things cannot be removed altogether so long as we do not fathom the true nature of the Ignorance and

the true and total nature of the Knowledge. For if these two are independent, equal and original powers of the Consciousness, then the possibility of a cosmic Illusion pursues us. If Ignorance is the very character of cosmic existence, then our experience

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of the universe, if not the universe itself, becomes illusory. Or, if Ignorance is not the very grain of our natural being, but still an original and eternal power of Consciousness, then, while there can be a truth of cosmos, it may be impossible for a being in the universe, while he is in it, to know its truth: he can only arrive at real knowledge by passing beyond mind and thought, beyond this world-formation, and viewing all things from above in some supracosmic or super-cosmic consciousness like those who have become of one nature with the Eternal and dwell in Him, unborn in the creation and unafflicted by the cataclysmic destruction of the worlds below them.

We have not yet come to the full meaning that Sri Aurobindo would like to bring to Knowledge and Ignorance. This is a transitional paragraph which is discussing some of the consequences associated with Adi Shankaracharya's definition. When he says "the obsession of this long-established view of things", he means that Adi Shankaracharya's view has been prevalent for the past 1200 years in India. It is not so easy to come out of it. To come out, we must go beyond the mind, to the origin of Knowledge and Ignorance. If Ignorance is the very character of the cosmic existence, then our experience of this universe becomes illusory. If I am in this world saying that it is all an illusion, where is the validity of the statement? When we are a part of the falsehood yourself, how can we say something correct? This is one of the arguments against Adi Shankaracharya. It is only if we come out of it that we can see what it is.

If ignorance is the truth of the cosmos, it may be impossible for a being in the universe to know its truth.

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The universe is not ignorant fully, or eternally. Ignorance is only a specific part of the process of evolution. The world is a manifestation of the Supreme Sachchidananda, but in its evolutionary process it has come to a level where it is passing through the stage of ignorance. Why? The world is like a covering which does not allow the higher knowledge of the Supreme to come in. It is like a self-protective cocoon. The world needs time to work on itself.

That is the beauty of the ignorance: it is making us work on Matter, on our physical transformation. If it went too fast into Sachchidananda what would happen to Matter? The Divine strategy is not simply to return to Sachchidananda, it also wants the transformation of Matter. The moment the mind consciousness was brought into the world, it automatically brought in Ignorance. Ignorance was brought into this manifestation of the Divine for the specific purpose of incubation. What happens during incubation?

There is a kind of consolidation, a slow growth. That is how a butterfly develops before it comes out. In the cocoon the insect transforms into a butterfly. Ignorance is that cocoon in which physical matter is getting transformed. Humanity is going to burst forth into the new butterfly. We are still the ugly poisonous caterpillars, incomplete human beings, but we have this possibility of transformation. If this ignorance is only a temporary phase of evolution, then we have a chance of becoming a butterfly. Even while we are in this world we have a chance of becoming the butterfly; we do not need to go out of it.

If that is the truth then no doubt people may want to leave this world, to become ascetic or to commit suicide, because there is no chance of realising the Truth in this life.

What's the purpose of living here? Let's leave this body! But

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo and the Rig Veda add meaning to existence.

Those who have read the Vedas and Upanishads and who are Aurobindonians will never have existential crisis. This world is not eternally ignorant, it is only so temporarily.

We have a chance to realise our own truth. This means not necessarily in this particular body, but our soul which takes birth after birth, one day it will cross that boundary of ignorance and go into that beautiful world of Truth beyond this present world formation.

But the solution of this problem cannot be satisfactorily pursued and reached on the basis of an examination of words and ideas or a dialectical discussion; it must be the result of a total observation and penetration of the relevant facts of consciousness—both those of the surface and those below or above our surface level or behind our frontal surface—and a successful fathoming of their significance.

Sri Aurobindo is very clear – he says these are all dialectical arguments which will not bring us to the Truth; we must go deeper into the experiential level of consciousness to see what is the Truth.

For the dialectical intellect is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths; moreover, very often, by its propensity to deal with words and abstract ideas as if they were binding realities, it wears them as chains and does not look freely beyond them to the essential and total facts of our existence... That reasoning itself can be conclusive only if the perception of things on which it rests is both a true and a whole seeing. Here what we have to see truly and integrally is the nature and validity of our consciousness, the origin and scope of our mentality; for then alone can we know the truth of our being and nature and of world-being

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and world-nature. Our principle in such an inquiry must be to see and know; the dialectical intellect is to be used only so far as it helps to clarify our arrangement and justify our expression of the vision and the knowledge, but it cannot be allowed to govern our conceptions and exclude truth that does not fall within the rigid frame of its logic.

We have not yet come to Sri Aurobindo's view. He is still telling us that the dialectical intellect cannot judge the spiritual truth, because it does not have sufficient perspective. The basis of our inquiry should be "to see and to know". This is Sri Aurobindo's own approach – it is an important sentence in *The Life Divine* – he sees and knows; he experiences and then knows. He uses the dialectical intellect to clarify his arguments and justify his expressions. Sri Aurobindo's great intellect comes into use only after his experience – to put that experience into a proper intellectual expression. *The Life Divine* is the self-experience of Sri Aurobindo put into order and arrangement by his intellect. The development of intellect is necessary. Our sannyasis may have experienced great things, but not many can write them down it requires a capable intellect as an instrument. Sri Aurobindo read the books in England

– poetry, literature, history, everything, not just to acquire knowledge but to develop the faculty of mind.

Our body may be alright, but it cannot be strong if you do not do exercise daily. It is the same with the mind.

The rational mind must be developed. Imagine how developed Sri Aurobindo's rational mind was to capture and express the truths of the Supermind!

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We have to abandon the dialectical approach to understand and define Ignorance and Knowledge and take up once again the Vedantic approach.  
As Sri Aurobindo

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* has argued, if we say that Ignorance is an eternal part of this manifestation, then there is a fallacy that those are declaring this world to be ignorant are themselves a part of this illusion and therefore there is no meaning in their statements. However, if we understand that Ignorance is only a phase in this evolution which has been

brought in for a specific purpose, then there is hope that we can go beyond Ignorance and reach Knowledge.

The dialectical intellect is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths – we need to go beyond it.

Sri Aurobindo's stand is that we should not employ reason and intellect to find Truth; Truth must first be experienced, then the intellect can be brought in to organise and express our experience. But in this organization we should be careful that what does not fit into it is not neglected or rejected, as it happens sometimes. Classical pandits say,

“How can you talk about Supermind? It is not mentioned in our scriptures.” Just because it is not there in the classical systems of Advaita Vedanta one cannot say that it cannot exist. Sri Aurobindo tells us that we have to be open to new experience and use logic as a help to organise our thought.

Illusion, knowledge and ignorance are terms or results of our consciousness, and it is only by looking deeply into our consciousness that we can discover and determine the character and relations of the Knowledge and the Ignorance or of the Illusion, if it exists, and the Reality. Being is no doubt the fundamental object of inquiry, things in themselves and things in their nature; but it is only through consciousness that we can approach Being. Or if it be maintained that we can only reach Being, enter

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into the Real, because it is superconscient, through extinction or transcendence of consciousness or through its self-transcendence and self-transformation, it is still through consciousness that we must arrive at the knowledge of this necessity and the processor power of execution of this extinction or this self-transcendence, this transformation.

Sri Aurobindo's approach is that of consciousness. He tells us that whatever you call illusion or knowledge or ignorance depends more on your level of consciousness than on what the intellect says. Whether one rejects the world or accepts the world is due to the position of one's consciousness. Even if you perceive that this world is an illusion and should be rejected,

that perception is made through consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental means of experience.

This logic can be applied to the Advaitins who tells us that we must go out of this world to see the Brahman, the Reality. But if we want to go beyond this world, how will we go? It is not enough to say this world is Mithya, an illusion. Even if we want to reach the Brahman we have to go through consciousness to reach it. Let's try to get the secret of this logic. When we say we have to go through consciousness, what would it imply? When we approach through consciousness it means that we are approaching through the becoming. Consciousness implies manifestation. It is a subtle way by which Sri Aurobindo is bringing us to accept the becoming.

Let me put it in simpler words. If we want to realise the Divine, how will we approach the Divine? We may say, "I will meditate, I will develop Bhakti, I will do Karmayoga and offer my actions etc.". All that is related to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* our own consciousness. We cannot simply leap out of this manifestation; We have to go through the process of this manifestation, that means going through consciousness, because consciousness and manifestation go together.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that even if you want to become like Adi Shankaracharya you will have to first accept the reality of this manifestation. Adi Shankaracharya too in his own earlier days accepted this reality. He wrote all the treatises, the commentaries on the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads accepting their reality. It was only through his meditations that he had a different experience of the Brahman and felt the world to be Mithya, and that too comparatively. He did not say it is not an illusion per say, but that it is an illusion in comparison to Brahman.

Sri Aurobindo guides us towards the idea that proceeding "through consciousness, to know of the Superconscient Truth becomes the supreme need and to discover the power and process of consciousness by which it can pass into superconscience, the supreme discovery." By the same logic, we need to approach the Being through the becoming, because we are part

of the becoming. And because we are a part of the becoming, we have to go through the entire journey of the becoming, which is another way to say the entire process of the evolution of consciousness. When we speak of the consciousness of human beings, it means more or less a mental consciousness. We have a consciousness of the body, the vital and the emotions too, but the mind is the predominant consciousness.

When we approach the Reality through consciousness, we should first analyse our own mind which at present

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is the predominant vehicle of our consciousness. Then he says,

In fact, however, Mind is not the whole of us; there is also in us a life and a body, a subconscious and an inconscience; there is a spiritual entity whose origin and secret truth carry us into an occult inward consciousness and a superconscience. It might therefore be conceivably held that Mind is the matrix of an Ignorance which makes us create or represent to ourselves a false world, a world that is nothing more than a subjective construction of the consciousness.

We are basically mental but we also have other levels of consciousness including body, life, the subconscious and the superconscient. Mind presents to us a false world because it presents to us a world of division and separation and the reality of the world is that it is united. There is a kind of a oneness but mind falsifies this oneness and presents us with a divided world, “a world that is nothing more than a subjective construction of the consciousness”.

It is false also because each one of us sees the world from our own mental consciousness. Two people can look at the same thing at the same time and yet have a different understanding because their understanding depends on their level of consciousness.

Or else Mind might be the matrix in which some original Illusion or Ignorance, Maya or Avidya, cast the seed of a false impermanent universe; Mind would still be the mother,—a “barren mother” since the child would

be unreal,—and Maya or Avidya could be looked at as a sort of grandmother of the universe; for

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Mind itself would be a production or reproduction of Maya.

When asked from where did this Maya come about, the Advaitin could not answer satisfactory. On the face of Brahman, the Indeterminable, he is superimposing the reflection of a determinate manifestation with names and forms. How can these forms and names be broken reflections of the indeterminable? Even if they are unreal or untrue, from where do they come? This becomes a paradox. Sri Aurobindo and Vedanta do not say this. They say that Brahman is both determinable and indeterminable, that means both the Nirguna and the Saguna have a reality, but Adi Shankaracharya holds that only Nirguna as real. Sri Aurobindo concludes: There must be some manifold truth of the one Reality which is reflected, however falsely or imperfectly, in the manifold images of the mind's universe. It could then very well be that the world might be a reality and only the mind's construction of it or picture of it erroneous or imperfect. But this would imply that there is a Knowledge, other than our mental thought and perception which is only an attempt at knowing, a true cognition which is aware of the Reality and aware also in it of the truth of a real universe.

He says that the world is a reality because it has been created by Brahman, but we do not see the reality as it is because we have a limited and ignorant mind. This limitation is a self-limitation of Brahman. Therefore, there must be a change of consciousness and we must go beyond mind to understand the world as it really is. The Mother has explained in many conversations that when you change your consciousness you see the world completely

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differently. You may see the same people and the same places but your view of them changes. As the inner vision opens you see the world differently. We come back to the original position that this world is a manifestation of the Supreme Brahman but due to the incapacity of the mind we are not able

to see the world as it really is. That is why it is called the Matrix of Ignorance.

If we say that there is on one side Brahman and on the other side Maya, then Maya must have been created by Brahman. This leads to the position that: Maya would be an eternal power of the self-aware Brahman to delude itself or rather to delude something that seems to be itself, something created by Maya; Mind would be the ignorant consciousness of a soul that exists only as a part of Maya. Maya would be the Brahman's power to foist name and form upon itself, Mind its power to receive them and take them for realities. Or Maya would be Brahman's power to create illusions knowing them to be illusions, Mind its power to receive illusions forgetting that they are illusions.

This is the position. Our first stand is that Maya is a power of Brahman. Second, it is a power to delude itself, it is a power to formulate something that is illusory, to create illusions knowing them to be illusions. This is a very strange paradox. It is like saying a woman gets pregnant and gives birth to an illusion. Normally, a woman gives birth to a baby, a form which is real, it is paradoxical to give birth to something nonexistent, an illusion. It is illogical. What the real creates must be something real.

But if Brahman is essentially and always one in self-awareness, this trick would not be possible. If

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Brahman can divide itself in that fashion, at once knowing and not knowing or one part knowing and the other not knowing, or even if it can put something of itself into Maya, then Brahman must be capable of a double—or a manifold—action of consciousness, one a consciousness of Reality, the other a consciousness of illusion, or one an ignorant consciousness and the other a superconscience. This duality or manifoldness seems at first sight logically impossible, yet it must be on this hypothesis the crucial fact of existence, a spiritual mystery, a suprarational paradox.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that the end result of this logic is that Brahman has two parts: one part supremely conscious, the supreme Sachchidananda, the other part unconscious, a consciousness of illusion. In Sri Aurobindo's philosophy there seems to be the same paradox, because we say there is the supreme Superconscious and the Inconscient, two opposite things. The Inconscient is the absolute negation and opposite of the Superconscious.

So where is the link that pulls Sri Aurobindo out of this paradox? If we cannot find the link then we have to conclude that Sri Aurobindo's philosophy falls into the same trap as that of the ancient Acharya. Adi Shankaracharya's theory cannot be accepted then why should Sri Aurobindo's be accepted? Adi Shankaracharya says that Brahman manifests something that does not exist, whereas Sri Aurobindo tells that Sachchidananda produces something called the Inconscient which exists.

Sat is existence, and it produces another existent; it may be dark, it may be inconscient, but at least it is real. So Sri Aurobindo does not fall into the same paradox.

Secondly, it is Sachchidananda who himself becomes the

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Inconscient. There is the link of the involution in which Sachchidananda becomes the Inconscient, and evolution in which the Inconscient can consciously reunite with Sachchidananda.

The difference between Adi Shankaracharya and Sri Aurobindo is that whereas both have an apparently double consciousness, in Adi Shankaracharya the consciousness is split but in Sri Aurobindo there is a continuation of the same consciousness but it exists on two, or even many different levels, between the Superconscious and the Inconscient.

This duality or manifoldness seems at first sight to be logically impossible. This is again a suprarational paradox that the One becomes the Many. We say that reality is One and then we say it produces Many. Why and how? Think of this paradox. Sri Aurobindo is not saying that the One has become Many, but that the Many is always there in the being of the One. He has in a

sense changed the definition of the One. In this indivisible Oneness the Many inherently exist. He is not creating any division. It is like I have one body but I have two hands. When I extend my two hands I am not dividing myself. This is precisely the sense of extension in the word Brihat. Creation is the self-extension of the Supreme in the vastness of Brihat according to a law, Ritam. Satyam-Ritam-Brihat is the Truth which is extending itself or expanding itself according to a Ritam, a law; that is the manifestation. This origin is called, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, the Supermind. The Many is not a division of the One; it is only a self-extension.

Therefore, Sri Aurobindo says, this is easier to accept,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* although at first glance it may seem to be a suprarational paradox. He says,

Or, equally, we can accept, as we have accepted, the conception of an Infinite and Eternal which is capable, by the infinite power of its consciousness, of manifesting the fathomless and illimitable Truth of its being in many aspects and processes, in innumerable expressive forms and movements; these aspects, processes, forms, movements could be regarded as real expressions, real consequences of its infinite Reality; even the Inconscience and Ignorance could then be accepted among them as reverse aspects, as powers of an involved consciousness and a self-limited knowledge brought forward because necessary to a certain movement in Time, a movement of involution and evolution of the Reality. If suprarational in its basis, this total conception is not altogether a paradox; it only demands a change, an enlargement in our conceptions of the Infinite.

Sri Aurobindo says here that Ignorance and Inconscience have been brought about because they are necessary to certain movement in Time, to the movement of involution and evolution of Reality.

The central thesis of this chapter has been presented in the preceding paragraphs, and from now till the end of the chapters there is more or less a kind of winding up. In the next paragraph, Sri Aurobindo says, But the real world cannot be known and none of these possibilities can be put to the test

if we consider Mind alone or only Mind's power for ignorance. Mind has a power also for truth; it opens its thought-chamber to Vidya as well as to Avidya, and if its starting-point

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is Ignorance, if its passage is through crooked ways of error, still its goal is always Knowledge: there is in it an impulse of truth-seeking, a power—even though secondary and limited—of truth-finding and truth-creation. Spirit may have secret and supernal realities of which Mind is only a partial and rudimentary receiver, transcriber or transmitter. It would then be only by an examination of other supramental and inframental as well as higher and deeper mental powers of consciousness that we can arrive at the whole reality.

The mind, as we see here in Sri Aurobindo's analysis, is not just the matrix of Ignorance. It cannot see unity, it sees division and brings in falsehood, but that is not the end of mind, that is not the whole of mind. Mind is open to both Vidya and Avidya, Knowledge and Ignorance. Its starting point is Ignorance because in the evolution we are stuck at this level of Ignorance. But Sri Aurobindo gives us the vision and the hope that it is going to proceed towards a greater knowledge through the evolutionary process. At present, as he says, it is a rudimentary receiver, transcriber or transmitter of Spirit. The knowledge that it gets of life and spirit is very minimal. But as evolution continues this minimal capacity of mind would increase. Higher levels of mind would descend. Mind in reality is a diminution of the Supermind.

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When we say that mind will evolve and become a receiver of higher truths, it does not mean that this same mind that we have at present will receive these truths. It means that higher levels of mind will evolve which will capture the greater knowledge and Truth. Today this mind

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is a matrix of ignorance, but tomorrow it will evolve to levels which use the faculties of intuition and revelation.

Those higher levels of mind will be brought in and will receive a higher knowledge. Sri Aurobindo says, All indeed changes when we penetrate the lower and the higher depths of consciousness and unite them in the one omnipresent Reality. If we take the facts of our and the world's being, we find existence to be one always,—a unity governs even its utmost multiplicity; but the multiplicity is also on the face of things undeniable.

We have found unity pursuing us everywhere: even, when we go below the surface, we find that there is no binding dualism; the contradictories and oppositions which the intellect creates exist only as aspects of the original Truth; oneness and multiplicity are poles of the same Reality; the dualities that trouble our consciousness are contrasted truths of one and the same Truth of being.

This is the essence of the truth that Sri Aurobindo presents: “the dualities that trouble our consciousness are contrasted truths of one and same Truth of being.” It is a magnificent sentence! There “oneness and multiplicity are poles of the same Reality”, like the North pole and the South pole together unite our world. It is not just the North or the South. Similarly, this universe is two-poled.

If we go up we reach the One and if we go down we reach the Many. So we can see this singular connection that Sri Aurobindo makes between the One and the Many.

Anything that exists has these two ends, which are poles of the same Reality. As we move from the Many higher up the ladder we go towards the oneness, and if we move downwards we go towards many-ness. We need not cut

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them apart and say there are two things, the One and the Many; it is the One in the Many and the Many in the One.

Sri Aurobindo says such dualities will disappear once we go into the deeper consciousness.

Thus in the duality of pleasure and pain, we have seen that pain is a contrary effect of the one delight of existence resulting from the weakness of the recipient, his inability to assimilate the force that meets him, his incapacity to bear the touch of delight that would otherwise be felt in it; it is a perverse reaction of Consciousness to Ananda, not itself a fundamental opposite of Ananda; this is shown by the significant fact that pain can pass into pleasure and pleasure into pain and both resolve into the original Ananda.

Here he has given us a very beautiful example of pain and Ananda. They are apparently opposites but not really they are actually one and lead into each other.

In fact, there is a chapter in *The Life Divine* called the

“The Delight of Existence” where he says that pain is the incapacity to experience pure Delight. The Supreme Ananda, the delight of existence, is everywhere, but due to the limitations of the mind, the emotions and the body we are unable to bear this immense joy and it turns into pain.

If we expand our capacity to receive that bliss then pain also disappears. If we can broaden our consciousness, the Supreme Ananda will no more be painful. It is like trying to pack a lot of things in a small box and the box bursts. It is due to our incapacity to receive that a breaking point comes, and that breaking is what we call pain and suffering. A yogi has peace and Ananda within himself because he has a wider consciousness that can absorb that Ananda without feeling pain or sorrow.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* In the chapter “The Delight of Existence”, Sri Aurobindo explains that pain and pleasure can pass into the other.

In one of the “Thoughts and Aphorisms”, he says, “There is no iron or ineffugable law that a given contact shall create pain or pleasure; it is the

way the soul meets the rush or pressure of Brahman upon the members from outside them that determines either reaction” (CWSA 12: 439). The Mother has given an example of a boy who had a nail growing into his skin which has very painful, and who tried to find out how far this pain would go. So he inflicted more and more pain upon himself. Normally, when the body experiences tremendous pain it loses consciousness, which is a kind of a protection for the body. But the Mother relates that this boy went beyond this unconsciousness and bore with the pain until it started turning into delight. There is also the example of Sri Aurobindo who after he broke his thigh bone said he was experiencing Ananda. Those examples show that pain and Ananda are two poles of the same reality of consciousness; they are not opposites.

In this paragraph Sri Aurobindo tells us that there are no opposites, there is no dualism, there is only oneness, but this oneness has an involutory and evolutionary process. In the involutory process the One moves towards the Many and in the evolutionary process the Many move towards the One. In this evolutionary movement all dualities get resolved, and as we come down the ladder of consciousness the dualities become more and more intense and separated.

We have come to the crux of Sri Aurobindo’s explanation of Knowledge and Ignorance:

If this is so, then also it may be, and should be in

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the nature of things, that what we call Ignorance is not really anything else than a power of the one divine Knowledge-Will or Maya; it is the capacity of the One Consciousness similarly to regulate, to hold back, measure, relate in a particular way the action of its Knowledge. Knowledge and Ignorance will then be, not two irreconcilable principles, one creative of world-existence, the other intolerant and destructive of it, but two coexistent powers both present in the universe itself, diversely operating in the conduct of its processes but one in their essence and able to pass by a natural transmutation into each other.

But in their fundamental relation Ignorance would not be an equal coexistent, it would be dependent on Knowledge, a limitation or a contrary action of Knowledge.

This is the conclusion of Sri Aurobindo's approach to Knowledge and Ignorance. They are not opposites or irreconcilable principles, but rather, as he calls them,

“coexistent powers both present in the universe itself, diversely operating in the conduct of its processes...”

Brahman is the upholder of both Knowledge and Ignorance. In Ignorance Brahman wants to focus upon the individuals and the atoms, which are Brahman himself. Ignorance is not the opposite of Knowledge; it is one stance, one kind of specific action of Knowledge. It is a holding back, a measuring, a relating in a particular way, the action of its Knowledge. We should not counterpoise Knowledge with Ignorance, Vidya versus Avidya; they are simply two different movements of consciousness.

Both exist in us, both exist in the Brahman. Like rest and action, the One and the Many, Ignorance and Knowledge are all parts of the single consciousness called Brahman.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* When we say Avidya or Ignorance we have the sense derived from Adi Shankaracharya that it is illusion, something that is false, but in the philosophic sense of Sri Aurobindo it is only a poise of the consciousness; Ignorance is a particular poise of Knowledge.

In the last sentence he says that “in their fundamental relation Ignorance would not be an equal coexistent, it would be dependent on Knowledge, a limitation or a contrary action of Knowledge”. He says the same thing about the Many, that it is a dependent reality, dependent on the One. Similarly, Knowledge is the primary consciousness and Ignorance is a dependent consciousness, but that does not mean that Ignorance is non-existent or an illusion.

First, we find that there is a consciousness behind all, embracing all, within all, which is eternally, universally, absolutely aware of itself whether in unity or multiplicity or in both simultaneously or beyond both in its sheer absolute.

This is the first position, when it is an embrative consciousness, we call it self-knowledge. There are different levels of knowledge. The highest is called the self-knowledge and we have its description here: “it is universally, absolutely aware of itself whether in unity or multiplicity...” We normally call this the Superconscient.

Next, at the other pole of things, we see this consciousness dwelling upon apparent oppositions in itself, and the most extreme antinomy of all reaches its acme in what seems to us to be a complete nescience of itself, an effective, dynamic, creative Inconscience, though we know that this is merely a surface appearance and that the divine Knowledge

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works with a sovereign security and sureness within the operations of the Inconscient.

The highest, we called the Superconscient, and at the other pole is the Inconscient, in which all Knowledge is held back within, such that it is completely unaware in its surface consciousness but it nevertheless acts under the guidance of the Knowledge that is secret within it.

Between these two oppositions and as a mediary term we see Consciousness working with a partial, limited self-awareness which is equally superficial, for behind it and acting through it is the divine All Knowledge. Here in its intermediate status, it seems to be a standing compromise between the two opposites, between the supreme Consciousness and the Nescience, but may prove rather in a larger view of our data to be an incomplete emergence of the Knowledge to the surface. This compromise or imperfect emergence we call the Ignorance...

We now get a clear picture of the Superconscient, the Inconscient, and between them Ignorance. Ignorance a compromise between the

Superconscious and the Inconscious, which means that it has both Knowledge and Ignorance. That is why human beings who are supposed to be ignorant creatures have the Superconscious and the Inconscious within them. The Inconscious is there in our body, in our vital and in our mind, but we also have the Superconscious in us in the form of the psychic being.

Our ignorance is not all darkness. In the plant and animal the consciousness is very dark, but with the mind came a greater light. There is still ignorance, no doubt, but there is also the divine element. Sri Aurobindo calls Ignorance a kind of compromise between the Superconscious and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the Inconscious, but more accurately it is the incomplete emergence of Knowledge out of the Inconscious.

In the light of this we can understand why the coming of Sri Aurobindo is so very important. Till now we have had many Avatars, but all of them were working at the level of the Ignorance, trying to bring more and more light into the phase of Ignorance: man the animal, man the moral man, man the mental man, man the overmental man. It was all within these parameters.

Sri Aurobindo has come now to the borderline where this mixture of knowledge and ignorance turns into a complete Knowledge, because our next level in the evolution is the Supermind. In Supermind there will be only Knowledge; evolution will be from knowledge to greater knowledge. This is why the coming of Sri Aurobindo is of prime importance amongst all the Avatars. The rest of the Avatars brought knowledge into ignorance but now Sri Aurobindo is banishing Ignorance for good and bringing supramental Knowledge.

But if we find that Knowledge and Ignorance are light and shadow of the same consciousness, that the beginning of Ignorance is a limitation of Knowledge, that it is the limitation that opens the door to a subordinate possibility of partial illusion and error, that this possibility takes full body after a purposeful plunge of Knowledge into a material Inconscience but that Knowledge too emerges along with an emerging Consciousness out of the Inconscience, then we can be sure that this fullness of Ignorance is by

its own evolution changing back into a limited Knowledge and can feel the assurance

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that the limitation itself will be removed and the full truth of things become apparent, the cosmic Truth free itself from the cosmic Ignorance. In fact, what is happening is that the Ignorance is seeking and preparing to transform itself by a progressive illumination of its darkneses into the Knowledge that is already concealed within it; the cosmic truth manifested in its real essence...

It is a kind of a culmination put together into a synopsis of what has been said up till now. There is no antinomy between Knowledge and Ignorance.

Ignorance is a poise of the same Knowledge; they are the light and the shadow of the same consciousness.

And also, as he puts it here, we could say that when we have the knowledge of oneness or the unity that is the Supreme Knowledge, anything else below that from the Overmind down to the our own level and below is Ignorance, because, Ignorance means partial Knowledge, limited Knowledge, concealed Knowledge, measured Knowledge. Below the Supermind all is partial Knowledge, it becomes less and less, but all is partial. This has been a metaphysical analysis of Knowledge and Ignorance. Later Sri Aurobindo will apply this metaphysical knowledge to human mind.

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## Lecture Notes

**I. Oneness of the Seven Principles** The seven principles of existence - Existence, Consciousness-Force, Bliss and Supermind (The Upper Hemisphere or *parardha*) and Matter, Life and Mind (The Lower

Hemisphere or *aparardha*) are nothing but spirit itself modified in apparent substance and in dynamism

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of action. The Lower principles are only the subordinate principles of the Higher one in ignorance and division.

## II. Why Ignorance

In such a universal harmony of the seven principles, apparently there is no essential reason for the intrusion of ignorance, bringing in its trail of pain and suffering. The Vedic seers spoke of the higher divine manifestation as *satyam rtam brhat*. They were however aware of this world where truth is disfigured by an abundant falsehood.

a) The present creation is born out of the original inconscience developing in life, matter and mind.

If this were the total perception of creation, then it seems to be a temporary accident, or perhaps a mistake, a stumble downwards of the superconscient Light.

b) To get rid of the present yoke of death and suffering, several schools of thought have come out with different solutions. The materialist tries to make the best of a bad situation in his life. The religionist seeks his reign of enlightened will, his kingdom of god. The philosophic mystic rejects all as a mental illusion and aspires for Nirvana. In spite of everything, there is a keen sense in man about the possibility of a reconciliation between the Light of spirit and ignorance. This is because the lower term of being contains in itself the principle and intention of that which exceeds it.

c) How to still explain the co-existence of knowledge and ignorance? Ignorance, though shared by Matter and Life is basically rooted in Mind whose very

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function is to delimit, divide and particularise. The mind admits ignorance when it basically separates itself from the higher principles of which it is a power. Its exclusiveness forms the very essence of ignorance.

d) This power of the Mind to particularise leading to ignorance does not, however, explain the origin of Ignorance. How does the infinite self-awareness put self knowledge behind it? Some say it is a mystery and others say that Brahman has the double force of knowledge and ignorance. Because of this situation, it is best to escape out of Ignorance by renunciation of life.

e) However, an evasion of the main question cannot be done for long. Depending on the interpretation of what ignorance is, we prescribe the remedy out of it. Secondly, the mind cannot find out the essentiality of ignorance because it judges by external signs and forms.

f) Our mind cannot reach up to the point of where the original ignorance took shape.

g) The distinction between knowledge and ignorance begins with the Rig Veda. Knowledge is consciousness of *satyam rtam* and ignorance is unconsciousness of Truth and Right.

h) In other words, ignorance is in its origin a dividing mental knowledge which does not grasp the unity or oneness. Knowledge, seizes the oneness, the essence of existence. Because of its limitation, ignorance can be intervened and falsehood and error could enter.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* i) In the Upanishads, these terms undergo a change and they are known as Vidya and Avidya, Vidya became the knowledge of the One and Avidya came to be the knowledge of Many divorced from the unifying consciousness of the One Reality. Therefore it is affirmed that one who knows Brahman as both the Becoming and Non-Becoming, goes beyond Death and gains Immortality.

j) This division went further and it came to be that knowledge of the one is knowledge and knowledge of the Many to be Ignorance. Moreover, Ignorance came to be regarded as a creator of illusions and delusions, of Maya. And such a creation the self can never become; Brahman cannot manifest a real world in itself. Therefore it is some other principle which has created these multiple things.

k) Such an interpretation of knowledge and ignorance has to be abandoned and the original Vedic conception brought back. For doing so, we need to know the true nature of Ignorance and Knowledge.

For example, if Ignorance is the very character of this cosmos, then our experience of it becomes illusory. Or else, if it is an eternal and original power of consciousness, then it becomes impossible to know its truth. However, it is necessary to go beyond words and a deeper understanding of ignorance is necessary.

l) Illusion, knowledge and ignorance are terms of our consciousness and it is only by going deeper into our consciousness that we can determine their

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character, dialectical intellects not sufficient to fathom the nature of knowledge and ignorance.

m) At present, Mind seems to be our consciousness because of its dominance. Therefore, there is the need to delve into the nature of Mind.

n) Mind is the matrix of an ignorance which creates a false world. Or else it is the matrix in which Maya or Avidya cast the seed of an impermanent universe.

This would necessitate the imposition of cosmic illusion on the eternal Reality and at the same time it would be impossible to know the origin of such a false imposition - for, an indeterminable Brahman could only be reflected as something indeterminable, not as a manifold universe.

o) If such were the reality, that, Brahman is at once knowing and not knowing, then it would be presupposed a double action of Brahman: one a consciousness of Reality and another a consciousness of illusion. This turns into a suprarational paradox, quite impossible logically.

p) It would be better to accept the logical impossibility of the one becoming many, for in that case there is no longer any need for the intervention of an illusive Maya. An acceptance of this conception, though seemingly paradoxical, demand only a change of our conceptions of the Infinite.

q) Mind is not open solely to ignorance; it is also seeking knowledge and Truth. The limited images that it shows us of Truth have a deeper truth of reality. There are realities supramental or infra-

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mental that need to be looked into as they all form the whole reality.

r) Looking into the whole truth, what we realise is that there is a unity that governs the utmost multiplicity. All multiplicity resolves itself into One consciousness. In the light of this experience, knowledge and ignorance become a power of the one divine Knowledge-Will; they become co-existent powers both present in the universe itself though ignorance would be a dependent on knowledge.

s) Consciousness is the fundamental fact of existence; it is the plenitude of the supreme divine self-knowledge and all knowledge it is also the Inconscience, its own extreme antinomy.

Between the two there is a limited self-awareness, a compromise which is Ignorance.

t) Knowledge and Ignorance are the light and shadow of the same consciousness and that ignorance is only a self-limitation of knowledge. In the process of evolution this ignorance is changing back into knowledge that is already concealed within it.

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