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**Deliberations on**

# **The Life Divine**

**(Chapterwise Summary Talks)**

**Volume - Eight**

# **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**

Lovers of *The Life Divine*

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## Acknowledgements

I here present to my readers with the eighth 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 2005 to 2006.

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.

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 22 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 – VIII**

#### **Memory, Self Consciousness**

## and the Ignorance

In the present chapter there are three main arguments: To begin with, it is necessary to consider some of the essential movements of the partial awareness of self and things which works in us as a mediator between the complete self-knowledge and all-knowledge and the complete Inconscience, and, from that starting point, find its relation to the greater Consciousness below our surface.

What are the principle factors involved in human knowledge? If I say I have some knowledge of the computer, or I have the knowledge of how to do a certain thing, what do I mean by “having knowledge”? We may say “I have read about it” or “I have attended a course on it”, but that is an external thing. Here we are trying to analyse what are the things involved in the process of knowledge itself. The most important one, of course, is that we need to have a mind that has the capacity to understand. But my question is which is the most important aspect of our capacity of? If somebody asks,

“Yesterday you heard my lecture, did you understand it?”

If you say, “Yes, I understood”, what does it imply? The most fundamental factor is the memory. If I say “I don’t remember what he said”, it means that I do not have the capacity of memory. Why memory? Understanding is instantaneous, now, but after ten minutes the knowledge is in the past, and to recall the knowledge from the past

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is the function of memory. So, I need memory. That is why Sri Aurobindo takes up this problem of memory; it is a fundamental principle that the mind utilises. There are other principles such as symbolism, imagination, dream etc. But memory is fundamental because it is linked up with the past. It is not just ten years of the past, it may be one year or one hour before. At one place Sri Aurobindo writes that the present becomes the past even before you can catch it. Even before you can say ‘now’ it becomes the past. Therefore, most of our knowledge, 99.

99 percent, is a function of memory. That is why immediately he addresses this question of what is memory and why is memory so important? In fact, there is a line which says that “Memory is the man”: It has been even said that Memory is the man, —it is memory that constitutes our personality and holds cemented the foundation of our psychological being; for it links together our experiences and relates them to one and the same individual entity.

If someone’s memory is lost it becomes difficult because in a sense he/she loses his/her identity. If we don’t remember our family, we don’t remember anything; what is our personality, the foundation of our psychological existence? We may exist in the body, we still eat and sleep but we do not know our identity. Our psychological existence is as important as our physical existence. Try to think about it sometimes when you are a little quieter, how much this memory of our psychological personality is a part of our evolutionary process.

This psychological personality which is called X, dominates over my nature. If somebody gets into a swoon in the hospital the doctor calls him by his name.

He calls him by Mr. X because Mr. X is the psychological

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personality and the center of Mr. X is his memory.

Therefore, it is not just about the power to memorize things – but the question of our own identity. We, here are not referring to the memory which enables the children to memorize their lessons. We are not speaking about memory power, or that we must have specific training for our memory. Here we are speaking of memory as a basic element in our knowledge.

This is the idea which takes its stand on our existence in the succession of time and accepts process as the key to essential Truth, even when it does not regard the whole of existence as process or as cause and effect in the

development. The real truth of things lies not in their process, but behind it in whatever determines.

When people say memory is the man, there is a truth in it. But then does a man cease to exist when there is no memory? We have seen movies or heard of real life experiences in which a person out of shock loses his memory, but then comes out of the hospital and builds up a new psychological personality. After two years he may be fine but may not know what happened before the accident.

He may remember his new life after the accident. Sri Aurobindo tells us that memory is only a process; it is an important process for sure, but without it we do not cease to exist. When does man cease to exist? When he is dead, of course. But when does death occur? When the soul goes away. So the central existence in man is the soul, which is a delegate of the divine Self. Because of the Self there is this body and there is the experience of this body. Memory is just an important function of the mind.

Sri Aurobindo puts the whole thing into the right perspective. In reality memory is not the man, the divine Being, the Self is the man. And one of the main

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* instruments of this Self is the mind, and one of the main faculties of the mind is memory. Sri Aurobindo says, It is simply one of the workings of the consciousness as radiation is one of the workings of the Light.

We can think of the Self as the divine Light, and memory is like the radiation coming from the Light, it is simply one of its workings.

It is Self that is the man: or, if we regard only our normal surface existence, Mind is the man, —for man is the mental being. Memory is only one of the many powers and processes of the Mind, which is at present the chief action of the Consciousness-Force in our dealings with self, world and Nature.

This is Sri Aurobindo's explanation of memory and the popular idea that memory is the man. Having established the right relations between the Self, the mind and memory, we now take up the concept of memory itself. The title of the chapter has in it the term 'self-consciousness'. Whereas memory, as we have seen, belongs to the past, self-consciousness belongs to the present. These two represent partial knowledge, but we are especially ignorant of the future. The title itself suggests we are referring to knowledge of the past, the present and the future. I am ignorant of the past, but I can recapitulate some of it with my memory. I am conscious immediately of the present, I don't need my memory for that. Of the future, I have no idea. There's no faculty in me to know the future.

Nevertheless, it is as well to begin with this phenomenon of memory when we consider the nature of Ignorance in which we dwell; for it may give the key to certain important aspects of our conscious existence. We see

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that there are two applications which the mind makes of its faculty or process of memory, memory of self, memory of experience.

Now we are getting into a deeper analysis of what memory is. Memory has two applications, two functions.

Fundamentally, it is a memory of self, and memory of experience. The memory of self is the very foundation of our psychological personality. It means that the continuity of my existence is given by my memory. I am now, I was in the past, I shall be there in the future.

Therefore, memory is fundamental to my sense of myself.

Due to my memory I know I was there over the last 50

years. This gives me the confidence to live and think that I will be here tomorrow and the next day. We do much work, struggle to get this material enrichment because we believe that tomorrow we will be here, somewhere we feel completely confident of that. Thus the foundation of my existence is the memory of myself.

“I am now, I was in the past, I shall therefore be in the future, it is the same in all the three ever unstable divisions of time”. Thus it tries to render to itself in the terms of Time an account of that which it feels to be the fact, but cannot know or prove to be true, the eternity of the conscious being. By memory mind can only know of itself in the past, by direct self-awareness only in the moment of the present, and it is only by extension of and inference from this self-awareness and from the memory which tells us that for some time awareness has been continuously existent that mind can conceive of itself in the future.

The second function of memory is closely linked with the first one, that of the memory to the self. If I say I existed yesterday, you may say how do you know? I may say that I took the class, there were so many people, and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* I talked to them. Here I am connecting experiences and events to my existence. The memory of these experiences helps to confirm my own existence. If you say I want more details, then I could say that in the class I talked about this thing, and then someone asked such and such a question. I can gather or recollect more and more experiences to establish myself. Memory of myself gives me confidence that I was there, but I get support and further assurance by the events and experiences that took place.

If you ask me, can you tell me what happened when you were 10 years old, I would have to answer “No, I don’t remember”. I may just say I was in Hyderabad, that is all I know. If you ask what did you do at the age of four, I have absolutely no memory! If I go to a psychiatrist and he hypnotizes me and asks what I was doing at the age of four maybe I will recollect some events of my childhood.

Otherwise, normally memory does not last.

In fact, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo tell us that memory is there to help us grow, and we remember those things that are helpful for our growth. It is not that we should remember everything; our ‘hard disk’ of memory should not be filled up with unnecessary details. Our memory has a certain

capacity, so it does not help to keep unnecessary data in it. It is better we forget all that is unnecessary. If we keep narrating what has happened, if we keep reminding ourselves of these things, then the groove becomes deeper and deeper but it does not help us in our growth. It is better to get rid of those things so that the 'hard disk' has more space to remember the Mother, to remember positive things. Life, after all, is meant to go forward in our evolution, so why go back and play the same record?

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The things of the past may therefore be erased from the memory, but some files you keep and those are the files that the Mother would say belong to "the psychic memory". There are such things as – when we were with Mother; our vision of the Mother; a letter from her; a dream of the Mother; a look at a flower and its experience; a look at the sunrise and the beautiful experience of the Divine! Those are psychic memories which remain in our back-up file called the psychic memory. Only such instances and experiences we should recollect again and again and intensify. The events which are only sentimental, emotional, vital, will not help us to grow. If we forget them, we should not bother. Perhaps sometimes we suffer the consequences of forgetting things, but it is more important to give space to the psychic memories. It is not the mind, but the psychic that brings us the memories of our past lives. It is because the psychic carries these experiences from birth to birth.

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We have seen how Sri Aurobindo responded to the idea that "memory is the man". He said that memory is a process, it is one of the instruments of the mind, like other instruments such as imagination, analysis and judgment. Of course, memory does have a prominent place in an individual's consciousness and is crucial for the psychological foundation of our personality, our experience of being a persisting individual, of existing as a person with a past, a present, and a future. He argues, however, that behind memory and behind all the instrumentation of the mind there is the self of man.

Sri Aurobindo says that memory is not the man, the self is the man. Still, in our day-to-day existence we are not aware of our self, we are aware only of our mind, our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mental consciousness. On a pragmatic, day-to-day level we could say that the mind is the man because mind is the most predominant aspect of our nature, of our surface consciousness at present.

Further, we have said that memory has two important aspects: memory of the self and memory of experience.

Memory of the self is the sense of its continuity from the past to the present, to the future – the sense that I existed before, I exist now, and I shall exist in the future.

Memory of the self gives us that sense of continuity.

Memory of experience further connects us to the past, and gives substance to our conviction that we existed in the past. Sometimes, if you ask an old lady what is your age she cannot remember because there is no birth certificate. She might say, “I know I was a child in 1947

when Independence Movement was going on, because when India got her freedom I heard all those cries of Vande Mataram in the streets. She confirms her own self-existence at that time by an experience. These two aspects put together form a sense of continuity of ourselves which easily extends into a conviction of eternity. We say we exist continually from the past to the present and into the future.

Now we continue reading the text starting with the third paragraph:

This conviction may be either the reflection in the mind of an endless past which it has forgotten but of which something in it retains the formless impression, or it may be the shadow of a self-knowledge which comes to

the mind from a higher or a deeper plane of our being where we are really aware of our eternal self-existence.

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Sri Aurobindo here gives two possible reasons for which we may get the conviction of having an eternal self-existence. The first one is the reflection in the mind of an endless past which it has forgotten. The mind cannot remember but something of it is retained as a formless impression. There is something in us which could retain this impression and that is the psychic being.

In the previous class I talked about the psychic memory.

It may carry the impression that I have existed always, not in this form, but in different forms. The second reason for the conviction is due to the shadow of a self-knowledge which comes to the mind from a higher or a deeper plane of our being where we really are aware of our eternal self-existence. I have had a lot of Western audiences during my talks some of whom have spoken to me about their past existence. They have said they had a clear memory, like one who said that they had lived in Wales and experienced some great grief. There can be a kind of a shadow of self-knowledge of an existence of the past which comes to the mind from a higher or a deeper plane. We have higher planes of our existence that carry the knowledge of our past lives. We may be open to the subliminal consciousness and suddenly have a flash of memory that “I was there”. It may happen that we visit a certain place and we feel we know that place very well.

It is as if we have been there, if not lived there. We know that in this life we have never been there but somewhere we have a strong impression, almost a kind of magnetic pull for the place.

Then Sri Aurobindo describes a third possible reason for this conviction:

Or, conceivably, it might be a hallucination; just as we cannot sense or realise in our foreseeing

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* consciousness the fact of death and can only live in the feeling of continued existence, cessation being to us an intellectual conception we can hold with certainty, even imagine with vividness, but never actually realise because we live only in the present, yet death, cessation or interruption at least of our actual mode of being is a fact and the sense or prevision of continued existence in the future in the physical body becomes beyond a point we cannot now fix a hallucination, a false extension or a misapplication of our present mental impression of conscious being, —so conceivably it might be with this mental idea or impression of conscious eternity.

Well, that is the third one – it might be only a hallucination. I think most of the people who have a sense of their existence in former lives suffer with this hallucination, because I have seen, when they say “I have been to England, to this place..., I have been to California etc it is more their wishful thinking. It is just that they wish they were there; they have a desire to be there, they have a liking for the place, which gets translated to: “I have been there”. It is a kind of mental trick. What we call hallucination is our mind’s own trick. People can be victims of these and then confirm their reality with great conviction. It is not so easy to get impressions of the past lives; either one has to be in the subliminal consciousness or connected with the higher planes of being, or connected with the psychic being. These are the three levels where we can get these impressions. We do not deny those all who say they have had an impression, but we must be careful to realise that they may be mistaken.

Then Sri Aurobindo gives a fourth explanation: Or it might be a false transference to ourselves of

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the perception of a real eternity of the universe or of something which exceeds the universe. The mind seizing this fact of eternity may falsely transfer it to our own conscious being which may be nothing more than a transient phenomenon of that only true eternal.

This fourth one is very interesting. We may get a sense of our eternity not from our own past, but from the eternity of the universe. I know for certain that the world existed before I came. It has existed for billions of years. I have seen the scientific proofs; everybody says the earth has existed for billions of years. And Sri Aurobindo speaks about the future of the earth with the coming of the superman etc. That has made a very strong impact on my mind that the world is eternal. This strong sense of eternity, I may transfer to myself and say that I am part of this eternal world. I was there before, I am here now, and I shall be there in the future.

These questions our surface mind by itself has no means of solving; it can only speculate upon them endlessly and arrive at more or less well-reasoned opinions. The belief in our immortality is only a faith; the belief in our mortality is only a faith.

We may say that we have a sense of being eternal, but can reason prove it? No. I may have a strong feeling, but rationally I cannot prove it. Because it cannot be proven rationally, Sri Aurobindo says, it can only be taken on faith.

It is impossible for the materialist to prove that our consciousness ends with the death of the body; for he may indeed show that there is yet no convincing proof that anything in us consciously survives, but equally there is and there can be in the nature of things no

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* proof that our conscious self does not outlast the physical dissolution.

Here Sri Aurobindo argues against the scientist. The scientist says that we are mortal, but Sri Aurobindo says how do you know you are mortal? It is only your faith. If the yogi says I am immortal, the scientist says how do you know you are immortal? Both can question each other.

What is interesting is that most people take it for granted that they are mortal. Sri Aurobindo asks, why? How do you know that you are mortal? The scientist may say the body dies so everything dies. You cremate the

body and it is all over. Sri Aurobindo says, how do you know that it is all over? Since we think that man is only the body, and when the body dies, we think it is all over. But man is not just the body, there are layers and layers of being in man, some layers are mortal, some layers are immortal. We cannot say that when Mr. X dies, he is fully mortal; part of him is mortal, but something in him called the soul is immortal.

You may say life has gone out of this person, but Sri Aurobindo asks where has it gone? The same energy that keeps up the body dissolves the body. The energy that came into the body goes out, but the energy is not dead! The force of the consciousness that was in the body has not come to a stop, it will continue, it will go into the earth and continue in another shape. When we say ‘mortality’ and ‘death’ it applies just to the physical form, not even to the physical consciousness and energy.

It is just the outer form of the pot that is broken, but the broken pot can again be softened down and reshaped into a new form; that’s what the life-energy does.

Sri Aurobindo says here that the question of mortality or immortality is decided on the basis of faith. If we say

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that man is mortal it is based on faith, and if someone else says that man is immortal it is also based on faith, because this issue cannot be proven one way or the other.

Just as the yogi cannot prove that the soul continues, so also the scientist cannot prove that there is nothing beyond the death of the body.

This perhaps relates to the incident in which Amal Kiran had written about the “mortal remains of Sri Aurobindo” when Sri Aurobindo was laid in the Samadhi, and the Mother struck out of the word “mortal”, and said there is “nothing mortal about Sri Aurobindo”.

“Mortal remains’ is an English phrase, everybody says “mortal remains”, meaning just the body. It does not refer to the soul. But the Mother struck

off that phrase. That means even his body is immortal. In what sense is it immortal? It suggests that in the Samadhi Sri Aurobindo's body may be still intact!

Survival of the body by the human personality may hereafter be proved even to the satisfaction of the sceptic; but even then what will be established will only be a greater continuity and not the eternity of the conscious being.

We have a sense of eternity that memory has given us, but this sense of eternity cannot be proven by reason. As we said, reason has no means of proving if you are mortal or immortal. For you and me what we know of time is actually only the present moment. Although we have divided time into three sectors – past, present and future

– what we actually deal with is only the present. All that is past in time we try to bring back into the present with our memory, and what is in the future we can only imagine in our present state of mind based on our memory of the past and our experience of the present.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* In contrast, the supramental consciousness stands above the past, present and future; it sees the eternity of time, all of it in one view simultaneously from its perspective in the timeless beyond time. The supramental perspective is what we call *trikaladrishti*, the simultaneous vision of the past, present and future. I can give an analogy. If I look at this room, I just have to turn my head from left to right and I can see the whole panorama. In the same way, we can imagine that the Supermind sees on the left side the past, in front the present, and on the right the future. It does not have to use memory to recover the past, it stands before its vision just like the present and the future.

For Sri Aurobindo, the coming of the Supermind in 1956 and the war in 1947 were both existing simultaneously. In 1905, in Calcutta, he could see the freedom of India in 1947, both remained in front of him simultaneously. When he started writing *The Life Divine* in 1914, in instalments for the *Arya*, no one else would have written this because the world was in the

thick of war. The world was getting destroyed, so how could anybody write about a divine life on earth when human life was getting destroyed on a massive scale? Perhaps one would write novels, stories, histories, records about the war, or about the human consciousness of those times, the suffering of those times. But here was a man who was writing about something that would only come after thousands of years! Why did he write it? Was he not aware of what was happening and was he not bothered by the human suffering? Actually, people would bring to him newspaper cuttings of what was happening, but still he was writing *The Life Divine* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

That is because he lived in the triple consciousness of time where the war was on one side and the supramental

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descent was on the other: for him it was all seen in the same instance. He was seeing the Supermind, so he wrote about it. He saw the war, so he spoke about it.

Sri Aurobindo says that “there is nothing in mind-evidence to show that eternal time really exists or that time itself is anything more than the conscious being’s way of looking at some uninterrupted continuity”. It is interesting that he says “there is no mind-evidence”. He could have written there is “no evidence”, but instead he wrote there is “no mind-evidence” that eternal time exists. Why? Because mind is ignorant, because the mind lives in time itself.

Sri Aurobindo could have written there is conscious evidence to prove that there is eternity of time. Brahman sees the eternity of time but Brahman cannot be known by mind. It can however be experienced by our consciousness.

What does Sri Aurobindo mean when he says, “it must be the Eternal of the Vedanta”? Sri Aurobindo seems to be saying that if there is an eternal existence, it must be Brahman the timeless Eternal who is using time to manifest himself, and that is the eternal time. He says that

“the timeless self-knowledge of this Eternal is beyond mind; it is a supramental knowledge superconscient to us and only to be acquired by the stilling or transcending of the temporal activity of our conscious mind”. (Ibid) Mind cannot get the knowledge of the timeless eternal, it is only the supramental consciousness that can give us this knowledge. In one of her experiences, the Mother tells us that she travelled beyond time into the very origin of creation. She being the Supramental Mahashakti could go beyond this creation, beyond the whole framework of space and time and live in that timeless eternity.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo continues:

From all this the one great fact emerges that the very nature of our mind is Ignorance; not an absolute nescience, but a limited and conditioned knowledge of being, limited by a realisation of its present, a memory of its past, an inference of its future, conditional therefore by a temporal and successive view of itself and its experiences. If real existence is a temporal eternity; then the mind has not the knowledge of real being; for even its own past it loses in the vague of oblivion except for the little that memory holds; it has no possession of its future which is withheld from it in a great blank of ignorance... On the other hand, if real existence is a time-transcending eternity, mind is still more ignorant of it; for it only knows the little of it that it can itself seize from moment to moment by fragmentary experience of its surface self-manifestation in Time and Space.

The idea here is straightforward and presents no metaphysical problems. We have seen the concepts of timeless eternity and eternal time which the mind cannot know. The past is only partially recovered by memory, the present we know based on our experience of it, and our knowledge of the future is based on inference. Inference is a judgment that is made based on past experiences. I do not know my future, but I can make predictions about it which may or may not come true. Unless I silence my mind I will not know anything about the timeless eternity.

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If, then, mind is all or if the apparent mind in us in the index of the nature of our being, we can never

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be anything more than an Ignorance fleeting through Time. But if there is a power of self-knowledge beyond mind which is timeless in essence and can look on Time, perhaps with a simultaneous all-relating view of past, present and future, but in any case as a circumstance of its own timeless being, then we have two powers of consciousness, Knowledge and Ignorance, the Vedantic Vidya and Avidya. These two must be, then, either different and unconnected powers, separately born as well as diverse in their action, or else, if there is a connection between them, it must be this that conscious as Knowledge knows its timeless self and sees Time within itself, while consciousness as Ignorance is a partial and superficial action of the same Knowledge which sees rather itself in Time, veiling itself in its own conception of temporal being, and can only by the removal of the veil return to eternal self-knowledge.

This paragraph throws light on the Upanishadic concept of Vidya and Avidya. We are in fact getting into a new argument. In the first line Sri Aurobindo writes that if the “mind is all then we can never be anything more than an Ignorance fleeting through Time.” This is something very important for our conception of evolution. If mind is the highest faculty of knowledge and there is nothing beyond, then evolution can never go beyond Ignorance, and we are condemned to be eternally in it. But if, as Vedanta says, there is a power of self-knowledge beyond mind which is timeless in essence and can look on Time, perhaps with a simultaneous all-relating view of past, present and future, then there is the possibility for a true Knowledge and a greater power.

A question then arises whether these two powers of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* consciousness, Knowledge and Ignorance, are separate or connected. If they are not connected, and are separately born as well as diverse in their action, self-existent, we deduce the philosophy of

Dualism. It is hard to reconcile such an idea because then the question arises as to what is the source of Ignorance? If it is independent of Knowledge, if it has a different source and a diverse action, then what is its source? Sri Aurobindo brings out this contradiction in the next paragraph but let us finish this first.

If there is a connection, then it is possible that Knowledge knows its timeless self and sees Time within itself. That means consciousness knows itself as Knowledge and looks into itself. Then consciousness as Ignorance would be a part of the same single consciousness which acts as Knowledge and is fully self-aware as well as aware of Time within itself. Ignorance would be the same consciousness veiling itself in its own conception of temporal being and limiting itself. Once it removes this veil of self-limitation then it could go back to Knowledge.

In the next paragraph he elaborates why the argument that Knowledge and Ignorance to have come from the same consciousness is a better one: For it would be irrational to suppose that the superconscious Knowledge is so aloof and separate as to be incapable of knowing Time and Space and Causality and their works; for then it would be only another kind of Ignorance, the blindness of the absolute being answering to the blindness of the temporal being as positive pole and negative pole of a conscious existence which is incapable of knowing all itself, but either knows only itself and does not

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know its works or knows only its works and does not know itself, —an absurdly symmetrical equipollence in mutual rejection.

If we say that Knowledge and Ignorance are disconnected then we land up in what Sri Aurobindo calls an “absurdly symmetrical equipollence in mutual rejection”. If that consciousness which is Knowledge does not know itself in Time then it also becomes an Ignorance, a blindness of the Absolute. Then even the Absolute would not fully know itself! That cannot be. It would mean that it knows itself but not its works in Time, how it is manifesting, why it is manifesting. That is like saying I know myself but I do not know what I am doing!

This creates a paradoxical situation if we say that there is no connection between Knowledge and Ignorance.

From the larger point of view, the ancient Vedantic, we must conceive of ourselves not as a dual being, but as one conscious existence with a double phase of consciousness: one of them is conscient or partly conscient in our mind, the other superconscient to mind; one, a knowledge situated in Time, works under its conditions and for that purpose puts its self-knowledge behind it, the other, timeless, works out with mastery and knowledge its own self-determined conditions of Time; one knows itself only by its growth in Time-experience, the other knows its timeless self and consciously manifests itself in Time-experience.

This para deals with the same concept that we dealt with in the previous paragraph, but focuses on the explanation that Knowledge and Ignorance are related.

According to Vedanta we do not have a dual being, we have one existence with a double face of consciousness.

There is one part situated in the Time consciousness and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the other part is beyond Time. Alternatively, we can say that one part is a lower consciousness on the level of the mind, and there is another higher consciousness beyond the mind. The consciousness of the mind is working itself out in actions in day-to-day life within the limits of Time, whereas the consciousness beyond mind knows itself but also manifests itself in time-experience through the ignorance of the mind. In this view consciousness is a single consciousness working simultaneously on two different levels, one is situated in Time the other is situated beyond Time. Sri Aurobindo says that the timeless consciousness works out with mastery and knowledge its own self-determined conditions of Time.

Therefore, the consciousness of Ignorance is determined by Time and the consciousness of the superconscient determines its own conditions in Time.

It is a master of Time whereas the lower one is a slave of Time. Sri Aurobindo continues with the same idea in the next paragraph: We realise now what the Upanishad meant when it spoke of Brahman as being both the Knowledge and the Ignorance and of the simultaneous knowledge of Brahman in both as the way to immortality. Knowledge is the inherent power of consciousness of the timeless, spaceless, unconditioned Self which shows itself in its essence as a unity of being; it is this consciousness that alone is real and complete knowledge because it is an eternal transcendence which is not only self-aware but holds in itself, manifests, originates, determines, knows the temporally eternal successions of the universe. Ignorance is the consciousness of being in the successions of Time, divided in its knowledge by dwelling in the moment, divided in its conception of self-being by dwelling in the divisions of Space and the

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relations of circumstance, self-prisoned in the multiple working of the unity.

There is a famous verse in the Isha Upanishad, verse number 11, which speaks of the way to immortality, and that way is the simultaneous knowledge of both Knowledge and Ignorance. Now we understand why the Upanishad emphasised upon this. As seen in the previous paragraph, Knowledge is basically a knowledge of oneness, it is a unity of being, and it is an eternal transcendence. It is completely self-aware and at the same time determines and knows the temporally eternal successions of the universe, it is constantly manifesting itself in the universe of Time. Ignorance is just the opposite; it is the consciousness of being within the successions of Time and is divided in its knowledge by dwelling in the moment. One is dwelling in the present moment whereas the consciousness of Knowledge is lives in the timeless and spaceless. These are two apparently opposite levels of consciousness. But we see here that both Knowledge of the timeless and Knowledge of Time are necessary to attain immortality.

In the next line Sri Aurobindo further clarifies what Ignorance is:

It is called the Ignorance because it has put behind it the knowledge of unity and by that very fact is unable to know truly or completely either itself or the world, either the transcendent or the universal reality.

Ignorance is not really a complete absence of Knowledge but it has put behind this Knowledge of unity.

It is only by regaining this consciousness of unity that we gain full Knowledge. He writes:

Living within the Ignorance, from moment to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* moment, from field to field, from relation to relation, the conscious soul stumbles on in the error of a fragmentary knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

It is not a nescience, but a view and experience of the reality which is partly true and partly false, as all knowledge must be which ignores the essence and sees only fugitive parts of the phenomenon. On the other hand, to be shut up in a featureless consciousness of unity, ignorant of the manifest Brahman, is described as itself also a blind darkness. In truth, neither is precisely darkness, but one is the dazzling by a concentrated Light, the other the illusive proportions of things seen in a dispersed, hazy and broken light, half mist, half seeing. The divine consciousness is not shut up in either, but holds the immutable One and the mutable Many in one eternal all-relating, all-uniting self-knowledge.

This is a beautiful and brilliant explanation of the verse of the Upanishad quoted above. If we live in Ignorance then the conscious soul stumbles on in error, because this is going from moment to moment in partial knowledge, in partial light, and therefore there is no certainty. That's why we call it Ignorance. We go from place to place, from day to day, from moment to moment. That is why there is danger in this world; we do not know what will happen the next moment.

Sri Aurobindo says this is not the way to live, he also says like the Upanishad that to be shut up in a featureless consciousness of unity is also a

blind darkness. True immortality is to know both the immutable one and the mutable many, and as we said before, both are single

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consciousness. In the knowledge of unity alone there is a dazzling but concentrated light, whereas in Ignorance there is a “hazy and broken light, half mist, half seeing.”

But the manifestation, in spite of its broken light, also reflects in its own way, to the extent it can, the same immutable one. Immortality requires that one is able to see One in the mutable many, not separating them.

After clarifying this Vedantic view of Knowledge and Ignorance Sri Aurobindo returns to the topic of memory.

We see the role of memory vis-a-vis the mind which is part of the lower consciousness of Ignorance. Mind is in this Ignorance with its “broken light, half mist, half seeing”, and because of its incapacity there must be something supports it. Sri Aurobindo says: Memory, in the dividing consciousness, is a crutch upon which mind supports itself as it stumbles on driven helplessly, without possibility of stay or pause, in the rushing speed of Time. Memory is a poverty-stricken substitute for an integral direct abiding consciousness of self and a direct integral or global perception of things.

Memory is a crutch upon which mind supports itself because it does not have a direct vision of the consciousness of Knowledge. It does not have the triple vision of the past, present and future. Instead it takes the help of some other faculties. Memory is one of them but there are other faculties also like imagination and thought that help the mind in its journey through Time.

Mind can only have the direct consciousness of self in the moment of its present being; it can only have some half-direct perception of things as they are offered to it

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* in the present moment of time and the immediate field of space and seized by the senses.

Mind can never have the vision of the whole or as Sri Aurobindo says a “direct integral or global perception of things”. Memory helps to recollect a little of the past, giving it a sense that it knows something. But it is nothing much. It takes up from the immediate field through the senses whatever little knowledge it can get. But once the moment is gone the mind does not have a capacity to hold or to really retain much of what has happened in the past. That power of retention is memory.

It makes up for its deficiency by memory, imagination, thought, idea-symbols of various kinds. Its senses are devices by which it lays hold on the appearances of things in the present moment and in the immediate space; memory, imagination, thought are devices by which it represents to itself, still less directly, the appearances of things beyond the present moment and the immediate space.

This is a little easier to understand because it is our own experience. The deficiency of the mind is partly made up by imagination, memory, thought, etc. As we said, the mind has an immediate knowledge of itself in the present moment and a partial knowledge of its surroundings in the moment brought by the senses, but these faculties of memory, thought and imagination give the mind a slightly larger scope and some capacity to understand the past and imagine the future. These faculties help the mind to sustain itself and to move about in the context of Time.

The one thing which is not a device is its direct self-consciousness in the present moment. Therefore

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through that it can most easily lay hold on the fact of eternal being, on the reality; all the rest it is tempted, when it considers things narrowly, to look on not merely as phenomenon, but as, possibly, error, ignorance, illusion, because they no longer appear to it directly real.

It is interesting to see that the one thing which is not a device is the mind's direct self-consciousness in the present moment. Memory brings us something of the past, and symbolism, thought, imagination help the mind to bring something of the future. But mind can have a direct self-consciousness of the present without the need of any of these devices. He says that it can lay hold on the fact of eternal being, on the reality. What is real for the mind is the present because it has a direct contact, a direct consciousness of the present. The future does not exist yet for the mind and the past has gone beyond the ken of its perception, therefore they are more open to illusion or error.

Different philosophies have looked at memory and life itself in different ways. For example, as Sri Aurobindo writes here:

So the Illusionist considers them; the only thing he holds to be truly real is that eternal self which lies behind the mind's direct present self-consciousness.

The Illusionist or Advaitin would say that what is real is the Reality that is behind the present, the eternal Self which lies behind the mind's direct, present self-consciousness. And what lies behind that? The Brahman.

The Illusionist would say everything that exists in Time, in the past, present and future, is dependent upon the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mental faculties which are erroneous, and that the consciousness of the Brahman is the only Reality.

Or else, like the Buddhist, one comes to regard even that eternal Self as an illusion, a representation, a subjective image, a mere imagination or false sensation and false idea of being.

At least the Illusionist accepts that there is a Reality, but the Buddhist will not even accept that. He says that even that eternal Self as an illusion, a subjective image, a chimera. For the Buddhist there is nothing eternal. In

their philosophy of the *Ksanikavada*, the momentariness, there is nothing that is permanent. There is a constant flux, constant change.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Mind becomes to its own view a fantastic magician, its works and itself at once strangely existent and non-existent, a persistent reality and yet a fleeting error which it accounts for or does not account for, but in any case is determined to slay and get done with both itself and its works so that it may rest, may cease in the timeless repose of the Eternal from the vain representation of appearances.

In Buddhism the mind is like a magician because what it sees may seem to be real but it is unreal, because in that *kshana*, in that moment, everything becomes non-existent. There is a paradox of the existent and the non-existent, a reality and a fleeting error, and all this is due to the mind's capacity to see only the present moment as reality. For the Illusionist behind the present there is the eternal Self, but for the Buddhist this eternal Self does not exist. In this flux or momentariness there is neither the present nor the past nor the future nor the eternal – all is constantly changing.

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What had started with the discrimination of Knowledge and Ignorance and the role of memory has led to a discussion of the Illusionist philosophy as well as the Buddhist. That our knowledge of our own existence and our philosophical ideals are based largely on the role of memory is wonderfully brought out here.

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We have discussed the importance of the present moment which alone seems to be Real. This is important because then the past which is based on memory and the future which is based on imagination and inference from the past lose their importance and relevance. The theory of Illusion considers that what is truly real at the moment is not the surface reality but the reality behind, the eternal Self. That eternal Self is the only real thing, and the reality we see is an illusion. Sri Shankaracharya would want us to

realise that ultimate Reality because it is the only Reality according to him; the rest does not exist, neither the past nor the future, it is all an illusion or hallucination. The Buddhists take it a step further and say that even the eternal Reality is not certain. As Sri Aurobindo writes,

“one comes to regard even that eternal self as an illusion, a representation, a subjective image, a mere imagination or false sensation and false idea of being”.

Behind the mind and using it as its own surface activity there is a stable consciousness in which there is no binding conceptual division between itself in the present and itself in the past and future; and yet it knows itself in Time, in the present, past and future, but at once with an undivided view which embraces all the mobile experience of the Time-self and holds them on the foundation of the immobile timeless self.

This consciousness we can become aware of when we

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* draw back from the mind and its activities or when these fall silent.

Our experience of ourselves is based on the division of Time into past, present and future and is constantly in flux. This changing experience divided into the three times requires behind it something that is immobile. For example, when, standing on the platform we see a train moving, we realise its movement because we are seeing it against the immobile platform. Sri Aurobindo tells us that behind the mind and using it as its own surface activity there is a stable consciousness. The Buddhist says there is no Self, there is no immobility. He is caught up too much by the surface movement and its pain and suffering.

Vedanta would tell us that behind all this flux there is a stable consciousness, an immobile status. Against this backdrop of stability the flux that we experience can come into some kind of meaning and understanding.

But this self-absorption is only an act and resultant state of our consciousness, just as much as was the self-dispersion in thought and memory and will. The real self is the eternal who is obviously capable of both the mobility in Time and the immobility basing Time,

—simultaneously, otherwise they could not both exist; nor, even, could one exist and the other create seemings. This is the Supreme Soul, Self and Being of the Gita who upholds both the immobile and the mobile being as the self and lord of all existence.

There is a famous verse from the Upanishads that says there are two birds sitting on a tree, one sitting above watching the bird that is on the lower branch eating the fruit of the branch. The bird above is the immobile, the bird on the lower branch is the mobile experience. But, ultimately they are both sitting on the same tree; that tree

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upholds both the immobile and the mobile aspects, and that tree is called the Purushottama.

So far we arrive by considering mind and memory mainly in regard to the primary phenomenon of mental self-consciousness in Time. But if we consider them with regard to self-experience as well as self-consciousness and other-experience as well as self-experience, we shall find that we arrive at the same result with richer contents and a still clearer light on the nature of the Ignorance. At present, let us thus express what we have seen—an eternal conscious being who supports the mobile action of mind on the stable immobile self-consciousness free from the action of Time and who, while with a knowledge superior to mind he embraces all the movement of Time, dwells by the action of mind in that movement.

This is simply a synopsis of the same idea that we saw in the last sentence, but with a greater explanation, that we have an eternal consciousness which supports the mobile action of the mind, and the one who supports both the mobile action of mind and the stable, immobile self-consciousness is the Purushottama.

As the surface mental entity moving from moment to moment not observing his essential self but only his relation to his experiences of the Time-movement, in that movement keeping the future from himself in what appears to be a blank of Ignorance and non-existence but is an unrealised fullness grasping knowledge and experience of being in the present, putting it away in the past and again appears to be a blank of Ignorance and non-existence partly lighted, partly saved and stored up by memory. He puts on the aspect of a thing fleeting and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* uncertain seizing without stability upon things fleeting and uncertain.

Sri Aurobindo says that this Purushottama in his movement in Time is playing a kind of game of hide and seek. That is, he keeps the future hidden from him as a blank of ignorance. He knows the future but he is keeping it out of his vision. Similarly, the past also is obliterated, except for some memory of it. He puts on the aspect of someone fleeting and uncertain. Sri Aurobindo concludes here that it is the Purushottama who has become involved in Time.

But in reality, we shall find, he is always the same Eternal who is for ever stable and self-possessed in His supramental knowledge and what he seizes on is also for ever stable and eternal; for it is himself that he is mentally experiencing in the succession of Time.

Mobility is the Supreme's experience of himself from the mental level. When he experiences himself from the mental level he puts certain conditions upon his self-view. He does not foresee the future and does not remember the whole past because he wants to focus on the present. The sum and substance is that the Supreme Consciousness plays a game of delight with himself. We have observed in children, when they play the game of hide and seek, one who seeks the other and the one who is found, both of them have a great joy. If on the mental level the Supreme knew the future, there would be no joy in the play.

Time is a great bank of conscious existence turned into values of experience and action; the surface mental being draws upon the past (and the future also) and coins it continually into the present; he accounts for

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and stores up the gains he has gathered in what we call the past, not knowing how ever-present is the past in us; he uses as much of it as he needs as coin of mental, vital and physical action in the commerce of the present which creates to his view the new wealth of the future.

From all the experiences that have gone into the past, the present takes out only as much as is required for the present utility. Just like if I have a lot of money that I have put away in the bank, there is the bank of memory, and when I need to use some money I withdraw as much as is required now. Today I will not take out Rs. 10,000

because I do not need it; I will require only Rs. 2000, so I will draw from the bank only that much as is needed for my present living. Similarly, when I am talking now, maybe I have a lot of things stored in my memory. I have read *Savitri*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and other books, but I am bringing forth only that knowledge, I am taking out only that which is relevant to the present discussion. That is the bank of memory from where I draw my coins for my present usage.

Ignorance is a utilisation of the Being's self-knowledge in such a way as to make it valuable for Time-experience and valid for Time-activity; what we do not know is what we have not yet taken up, coined and used in our mental experience or have ceased to coin or use.

Behind, all is known and all is ready for use according to the will of the Self in its dealings with Time and Space and Causality. One might almost say that our surface being is only the deeper eternal Self in us throwing itself out as the adventurer in Time, a gambler and speculator in infinite possibilities, limiting itself to the succession of moments so that it may have all the

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* surprise and delight of the adventure, keeping back its self-knowledge and complete self-being so that it may win again what it seems to have lost, reconquering all itself through the chequered joy and pain of an aeonic passion and seeking and endeavour.

What we call ignorance and knowledge and memory and self-experience and the future is in fact like a running stream of consciousness, but we cannot see where the stream begins and where it ends, we only see that part of it where we are standing at that time. We only know what is within my visual and intellectual grasp, but otherwise, behind that there is the full and eternal stream which cannot be divided and is known by the Supreme Self. The Self enters into Time and purposely shuts his knowledge of the future so that it may have all the surprise and delight of adventure. Discovery is always a great joy. This discovery and surprise of adventure is the main reason of our ignorance. The divine Self wants to keep back its knowledge and complete self-being so that it may win again what it seems to have lost and experience the joy of that discovery.

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## **Lecture Notes**

### **I. Memory is the man**

- a) There is a line of thought which says that Memory is the man for it is memory that constitutes our personality and holds together the foundation of our psychological being.
- b) The truth is Memory is only a part of the process of Time but the real truth of things is behind in the Being who unfolds in the becoming.
- c) So, we have to say it is Self that is the man or else, on the surficial level, Mind is the man.

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### **II. Two types of Memory**

a) There are two applications: Memory of self and Memory of experience. It is memory that tells us that it is the same 'I' that existed in the past, that exists in the present and that shall exist in the future. Also, it reminds us of our past experiences and relates them to the present personality.

b) Our mind can know of itself through memory, the present through direct awareness and the future by a certain inference, yet the mind has a sense of a persistent continuity which easily extends itself into a conviction of eternity.

**III. Basis of the conviction of eternity** a) The basis of this conviction could be any one of these reasons:

b) The reflection in the mind of an endless past of which it has retained an impression

c) A self-knowledge brought to it from a deeper level of our being

d) It may be an hallucination

e) It may be a false transference to ourselves of the perception of a real eternity.

**IV. The Incapacity of the Mind** Our mind can go through endless speculation but it cannot be sure whether our consciousness survives or ends with the death of the body. The belief in our mortality is only a faith. Nothing can be proven.

## **V. The Enigmas**

Even the concept of eternity that the human mind has is false for it considers eternity to be a succession of moments of being in an eternal time. So, the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* fundamental questions that are raised are: Is there an eternal existence which is Timeless? Or else, is this Eternal Existence a Being or not? It is only the supramental knowledge which can

answer these questions by “an entry into silence or a passage through Silence into the consciousness of eternity.”

## **VI. The nature of our mind**

It could be seen from all these questions that the nature of our mind is Ignorance - not an absolute nescience but a limited and conditioned one. It has only a knowledge of its present changings from time to time, the march of flux of cosmic kinesis.

**VII. A Power of self- knowledge** There is beyond mind a power of self knowledge which is capable of an integral vision and can look on time with a simultaneous view of past, present and future.

If such a power exists, then we could have two powers of consciousness: Vidya and Avidya. These two, Knowledge and Ignorance, are two actions of one being

- one knowing the timeless self and the other having the partial and superficial view of Time.

## **VIII. One conscious existence**

This would lead us to the Vedantic view that we are not a dual being with a complete separation between Knowledge and Ignorance but one conscious existence with a double phase of consciousness - one conscient and the other superconscient to mind.

**IX. Brahman as Knowledge-Ignorance** The Upanishads had in this manner proclaimed Brahman as being both Knowledge and Ignorance and that the simultaneous experience of both is the way to Immortality. Knowledge is the inherent power of consciousness of the timeless self. Ignorance is

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the consciousness of the being in Time. The divine consciousness or the Brahman is not shut up in either, but holds the immutable One and the

mutable Many in an all uniting self knowledge.

## **X. Substitutes for Memory**

Memory is used as a poverty-stricken substitute for an integral direct abiding consciousness of self. It makes up for its deficiency by memory, imagination, thought, idea - symbols of various kinds which bring to mind appearances of things beyond the present moment.

The only real existent thing for the mind is the present moment and the rest is merely a phenomenon. This is the essential idea behind the Adwaitins concept of Brahman as the sole Reality. So is the case with Buddhism rejecting eternal Self as an illusion.

## **XI. Para Purusha**

Behind the mind and using it as its own surface activity is a stable consciousness of which we can become aware when the mind falls silent. When that is realised, the rest becomes a dream. The higher self is the Para Purusha of the Gita upholding both the mobile and the immobile being. It is the same Eternal who is for ever stable and self-possessed in His supramental knowledge and what he seizes on is also for ever stable and eternal; for it is himself that he is mentally experiencing in the succession of Time.

**XII. The Surprise and the delight** In fact, one could say that the eternal self in us is throwing itself out in time, in succession of moments, so that it may have all surprise and delight of the adventure of consciousness.

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## **Chapter – IX**

**Memory, Ego and Self-Experience** In the previous chapter we studied the idea of the eternal Self having both the mobile and immobile aspects. In this chapter we start with the idea of Self. Normally, we live on the surface consciousness and do not even think of this deeper Self. Because of this surface living we are always influenced and affected by the winds that

constantly keep changing. Let us read the first few sentences of this chapter to know what Sri Aurobindo wants to convey:

The direct self-consciousness of the mental being, that by which it becomes aware of its own nameless and formless existence behind the flow of a differentiated self-experience, of its eternal soul-substance, of its self behind the ego, goes behind mentality to the timelessness of an eternal present; it is that in it which is ever the same and unaffected by the mental distinction of past, present and future. It is also unaffected by the distinctions of space or of circumstance... Distinguishing these, detaching itself from these, it perceives that the self of which it is directly conscious does not in any way change by these outward changes, but is always the same, unaffected by the mutations of the body or of the mentality or of the field in which these move and act.

It is in its essence featureless, relationless, without any other character than that of pure conscious existence self-sufficient and eternally satisfied with pure being, self-blissful.

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Sri Aurobindo recapitulates the last paragraph of the previous chapter: deep within we are the Self which is unaffected by the mutations of the body because the Self is relationless and featureless. I will not elaborate much on this because we have already discussed in the previous chapter that there is this deeper Self. We can think of it as an ocean: when we go deep into the ocean all is immobile, but when we come to the surface it is the same ocean which has all the turbulence. We cannot separate the surface from the base, and the surface can act with all its waves because there is the immobile base supporting it. The immobile depth expresses itself on the surface by its play and joy of waves. Normal waves or tidal waves or Tsunami waves - are all expressions of the same ocean but deep below the immobile ocean is not affected.

Similarly, our own being has a double aspect. There is this external aspect, the surface consciousness in which we have disturbance and anger and perturbation because the waves clash with each other. The other aspect is if

we dip below the surface none of these things affect us because they do not sink to that level.

It is in its essence featureless, relationless, without any other character than that of pure conscious existence self-sufficient and eternally satisfied with pure being, self-blissful. Thus we become aware of the stable Self, the eternal “Am”, or rather the immutable “Is” without any category of personality or Time.

The immobile part is the eternal existence ‘Sat’ which eternally ‘Is’, eternally existent. The surface of the ocean is the ‘Chit’ because Chit is the movement of consciousness with forms. The waves are forms, Chit takes forms. Of course, there is ‘Ananda’ both on the level of the waves and at the base. On the surface level there is a turbulent

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Ananda which can be alternations of pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness, but the Ananda at the bottom level is the pure Ananda unperturbed by the senses and the waves. That was the recap of what was already discussed.

Those who live in this surface Time-self and have not the habit of drawing back inward towards the immutable or the capacity of dwelling in it, are even incapable of thinking of themselves apart from this ever self-modifying mental experience. That is for them their self and it is easy for them, if they look with detachment at its happenings, to agree with the conclusion of the Buddhist Nihilists that this self is in fact nothing but a stream of idea and experience and mental action, the persistent flame which is yet never the same flame, and to conclude that there is no such thing as a real self, but only a flow of experience and behind it Nihil: there is experience of knowledge without a knower, experience of being without an existent; there are simply a number of elements, parts of a flux without a real whole, which combine to create the illusion of a knower and knowledge and known, the illusion of an existent and existence and the experience of existence.

If we have never gone deep into our being and experienced the immobile being, if we constantly live on the surface self, we would think life to be just a flux.

We might agree with the conclusion of the Buddhists that life is nothing but a continuous stream of ideas or experiences, action and reaction, cause and effect, going on perennially. We never see action coming to a stop.

We may stop acting but action itself does not stop. You may be the doer but if you remove yourself someone else

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will come and do it. Since time immemorial, since the beginning of creation, action has been going on.

Someone like Heraclitus or the Buddha would conclude that life is a river into which one can never step twice; it is never the same river, it is always changing. By the time you put your second foot in the water the river has changed. Or there is the image of a flame which is continuously alight but never the same. We think the flame is still, but it is not still, there are so many changes in its flickering every moment. This Buddhist philosophy is sometimes called the philosophy of momentariness or the philosophy of the '*Kshanikavada*'. They believe in the '*Kshana*' the reality of the moment, nothing beyond it. Sri Aurobindo says it is but natural that the materialist could not believe in God, because he is fully caught in this tremendous flow of time and events and acts and experiences and ideas and thoughts. We may come to the conclusion that reality is change; change itself is the only permanence. Nothing else is permanent in this world.

In this philosophy the knower does not exist. If I ask who is the knower, who is the experiencer, the Buddha would say there is none. At every moment there is awareness and then it is gone. But there is one kind of psychological association between the knower and the present moment, so there comes in the question of memory. For the Buddha there is no knower, no self, but there is the memory which acts like a link between the past moment and the present moment. This connection is so swift that we think

we are the same person but actually every moment we are changing. Of course, from the scientific point of view the Buddha is right –

we are changing every moment, the blood in our body is constantly flowing, new ideas, new vibrations, new

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* emotions constantly overwhelm us. Literally, we are not the same person from one moment to the next. What keeps me as the same personality is the memory of myself, it is the memory of these immediate actions which give me a false sense of the continuity of 'I'. Otherwise, there is no true self, there is nobody experiencing all this, it is only the memory which gives me the false sense of stability.

Or they can conclude that Time is the only real existence and they themselves are its creatures. This conclusion of an illusory existent in a real or unreal world is as inevitable to this kind of withdrawal as is the opposite conclusion of a real Existence but an illusory world to the thinker who, dwelling on the immobile self, observes everything else as a mutable not-self; he comes eventually to regard the latter as the result of a deluding trick of consciousness.

If staying in this change I can see nothing as permanent, it could very well be that if I stay in the permanent, in the consciousness of Brahman, I will not see any change because I am so immersed in that immobile consciousness. If somebody is at the bottom of the ocean, he cannot even perceive the changing waves on the surface. Similarly, we may deny change if we are living in the consciousness of the changeless. These are the two opposite views, depending which consciousness we are experiencing.

But let us look a little at this surface consciousness without theorising, studying it only in its facts. We see it first a purely subjective phenomenon. There is a constant rapid shifting of Time-point which it is impossible to arrest for a moment. There is a constant

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changing, even when there is no shifting of Space-circumstance, a change both in the body or form of itself which the consciousness directly inhabits and the environing body or form of things in which it less directly lives. It is equally affected by both, though more vividly, because directly, by the smaller than by the larger habitation, by its own body than by the body of the world, because only of the changes in its own body is it directly conscious and of the body of the world only indirectly through the senses and the effects of the macrocosm on the microcosm.

Sri Aurobindo says let us analyse what is this surface consciousness. First of all, it is purely subjective. In what sense is it subjective? It is constantly changing due to the movement of Time as well as movements in Space.

Our consciousness lives first of all in our body. When I say consciousness, it could be mental consciousness, vital consciousness, body consciousness or the psychic consciousness. This body is again living in a larger body, the world body or the universal body or the environing body as he calls it. We are actually a body within a body, an individual body within a cosmic body. Our consciousness within these bodies is affected by both. In what way? If I have a pain in my body, immediately my consciousness gets affected. I come to know of it directly and immediately. But if something happens outside my body, in the larger universal body, I come to know of it only through my senses, but if I do become aware of it, then it also affects my consciousness. That is the basic idea here.

This change of the body and the surroundings is not so insistently obvious or not so obviously rapid as the swift mutation of Time; yet it is equally real from

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* moment to moment and equally impossible to arrest.

But we see that the mental being only regards all this mutation so far as it produces effects upon its own mental consciousness, generates impressions and changes in its mental experience and mental body, because only through the mind can it be aware of its changing physical habitation and its

changing world-experience. Therefore there is, as well as a shifting or change of Time-point and Space-field, a constant modifying change of the sum of circumstances experienced in Time and Space and as the result a constant modification of the mental personality which is the form of our superficial or apparent self. All this change of circumstance is summed up in philosophical language as causality; for in this stream of the cosmic movement the antecedent state seems to be the cause of a subsequent state, or else this subsequent state seems to be the result of a previous action of persons, objects or forces: yet in fact what we call cause may very well be only circumstance.

How do I know about the changes inside my body or in the outer body? In the philosophical language, it can be said we come to know of these changes through cause and effect. In this stream of movement the antecedent state seems to be the cause of a subsequent state. There is a cause and then an effect. If I see that the pen has moved from one position to another, the cause of that movement is some force that has moved it. Each effect itself becomes a cause for a further effect. There is a chain of action and reaction. This is one of the theories for the continuous changes that take place.

Thus the mind has over and above its direct self-consciousness a more or less indirect mutable self-

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experience which it divides into two parts, its subjective experience of the ever-modified mental states of its personality and its objective experience of the ever-changing environment which seems partly or wholly to cause and is yet at the same time itself affected by the workings of that personality.

In addition to my direct self-consciousness, I have an indirect self-experience determined by all that is happening in my own body and in the enviroing body. That indirect self-experience can be further subdivided into a subjective experience of the effects of what is happening in those bodies upon my mental state and personality, and an objective experience of the changes in those bodies. And the connection between the subjective and

the objective experience are the senses. Then the most important thing is the last line which follows:

But all this experience is at bottom subjective; for even the objective and external is only known to mind in the form of subjective impressions.

Actually, there is nothing that is objective. How can we say that? Normally we define all that is happening in the environing body as objective, it is what is independent of my experience of it, and we get knowledge of this objective world through our senses. Now, take for example an ice cube. Someone may touch that ice cube and feel that it is cold. Someone else who has got a high fever may touch the same ice cube and get a tremendous shock and say it is terribly cold. Or sometimes in January you see people in Pondicherry dressing warmly and wearing coverings over their ears because they are cold, but people coming here from colder climates feel that it is very hot. The very same objective situation will be experienced differently by different people. Why?

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Because the experience depends on their different subjective states. So Sri Aurobindo says that ultimately all experience is subjective. I may say, I am simply using my senses, my eyes and ears, but your experience still depends on what impact it has on your mind and that impact depends on the changing condition of your mind.

Now we come back to the topic of memory: Here the part played by Memory increases greatly in importance; for while all that it can do for the mind with regard to its direct self-consciousness is to remind it that it existed and was the same in the past as in the present, it becomes in our differentiated or surface self-experience an important power linking together past and present experiences, past and present personality, preventing chaos and dissociation and assuring the continuity of the stream in the surface mind. Still even here we must not exaggerate the function of memory or ascribe to it that part of the operations of consciousness which really belongs to the activity of other power-aspects of the mental being.

We have come across this idea before when Sri Aurobindo dealt with the two aspects of memory, memory of self and memory of experience. Our subjective experience is the memory of self: I was, I am, I shall be. But our objective experiences also influence and become intertwined with the memory of ourselves, because we relate the memory of events and experiences with ourselves. I may remember the inner challenges I was experiencing near the end of 2004, and where I was and what I was doing, because a significant event occurred then, a huge Tsunami hit India, and I link those

### Memory, Ego and Self-Experience 45

subjective experiences of myself with my memory of that outer experience.

Next, Sri Aurobindo adds the role of intelligence to the memory in shaping our self-experience.

It is not the memory alone which constitutes the ego-sense, memory is only a mediator between the sense-mind and the coordinating intelligence; it offers to the intelligence the past data of experience which the mind holds somewhere within but cannot carry with it in its running from moment to moment on the surface.

He adds a new angle that memory is a mediator between the sense-mind and the coordinating intelligence. Sense-mind is what we call *manas* and the coordinating intelligence is *Buddhi*. In the last two years I have had many day-to-day experiences, and I cannot hold all of them in my active mind. It is like what we do on the computer: we type a letter, but you cannot keep it on the desktop all the time, so we give it a name and transfer it to a folder. Our screen is empty again and new impressions can come onto the screen. We can now type another letter. If somebody says please give me that letter you sent five months ago to the Vice-chancellor, you can click on the file name and it comes up on the screen. This is exactly what the coordinating intelligence does; the memory holds the letter in storage, but the intelligence is needed to select and bring the stored memories needed for the present situation to the front. The letter itself was written in words which were observable to the sense-mind. So memory is the link between the sense-mind and the coordinating intelligence.

We have in all functioning of the mentality four elements,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the object of mental consciousness, the act of mental consciousness, the occasion and the subject.

Four elements are included in the process of our thinking. The first one is “the object of the mental consciousness”:

The object is always some state or movement or wave of the conscious being, anger, grief or other emotion, hunger or other vital craving, impulse or inner life-reaction or some form of sensation, perception or thought activity.

‘Object’ indicates the focus or direction of our mental consciousness. Our focus is at this moment in thought activity, but otherwise it could have been on any other experience, such as, grief, or sadness or music or TV etc.

If we are hungry and we go to a food store, we are not thinking of philosophy. We are thinking of food, so the object of our mental consciousness is food. When we are angry with somebody, then we are not thinking of any other person or any other thing, the focus of our attention is anger. Or one may be in a mood of withdrawal, and the mind is observing the inner being. The focus of mental consciousness is the first element while we think.

The second element is the act of mental consciousness: The act is some kind of mental observation and conceptual valuation of this movement or wave or else a mental sensation of it in which observation and valuation may be involved and even lost, —so that in this act the mental person may either separate the act and the object by a distinguishing perception or confuse them together indistinguishably. That is to say, he may either simply become the movement, let us put it, of angry consciousness, not at all standing back

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from that activity, not reflecting or observing himself, not controlling the feeling or the accompanying action, or he may observe what he becomes and reflect on it, with this seeing or perception in his mind 'I am angry.'

In the second element there is a mental observation and conceptual valuation of the movement of consciousness.

If my focus is on anger, I say "I am angry". There are two things that are happening. One is that the focus of my mental consciousness is anger. The second is that there is somebody in me telling me I am angry. It is as if there are two consciousnesses working. One is angry the other one says "I am angry". That is called the act of mental consciousness. The mental consciousness is aware that it is angry. Sometimes when you are terribly angry with somebody you become "anger" itself. That is the difference. When you become "anger" you don't even say I am angry, you can't say it because you have become anger itself. There the mental object is so forceful that the act of mental consciousness is lost. For the act to occur one must be detached. If one loses one's poise, or what Sri Krishna said, if you lose your *mati*, it means you lose your balance of mind. If I can say I became angry, there is a detachment. You can question yourself and say,

"Sorry, I became angry." You have got that thinking mind which acknowledges that you became angry, but if you completely identify with anger you will never say you are sorry because there is no objectivity in thinking. When someone is overcome by fierce violence, he doesn't think twice that he may kill a person and end up in jail. He knows the consequences but at that time he becomes such an incarnation of violence that he doesn't think about the consequences. If there is an act of mental consciousness,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* he may tell himself, 'if I kill him I will go to a jail', and that may stop him from doing it.

In the former case the subject or mental person, the act of conscious self-experience and the substantial angry becoming of the mind which is the object of the self-experience, are all rolled up into one wave of conscious-

force in movement; but in the latter there is a certain rapid analysis of its constituents and the act of self-experience partly detaches itself from the object.

When we become the anger and the passion, we are rolled up into one wave of passion, there is no distance between our mental consciousness. Manhood means to be able to have this distance in thinking, this possibility of distancing oneself.

However there is usually a defect even in this act of self observation; for there is indeed a partial detachment of the act from the object, but not of the mental person from the mental act: the mental person and the mental action are involved or rolled up in each other; nor is the mental person sufficiently detached or separated either from the emotional becoming.

Detachment can give the possibility of self-control, of changing the situation, but most of the time it is very difficult to detach ourselves. Why is it so difficult for us when we are angry to tell ourselves “I am angry”? It is difficult because I am myself part of the becoming, because it is my mental consciousness which is getting angry. It is like when we are being carried away in a flood, we cannot stand out from the water and say, “I see myself being swept away in the flood”. We are part of what is being carried away. Sri Aurobindo would tell us that it is relatively easier to say I am angry than to control

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oneself because the mental consciousness is part of the becoming.

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We have discussed the first two out of four elements of the mental functioning: the object of mental consciousness and the act of mental consciousness. The object of mental consciousness is its focus, for example, it could be anger, quietness, jealousy, whatever object on which the mind is focused. In the act of mental consciousness, I may stand back from the object a little distance in order to observe it, or I may experience the object in my mental consciousness as a sensation. In the first type, I am able to

discriminate the object of my consciousness from myself and observe or analyse or evaluate it. However, it is also possible that I may not be able to separate myself from the object, that I lose myself in it and experience the sensations of it. For example, I may identify with the movement of anger and its sensations. If I can separate myself from the object of consciousness and analyse myself very sincerely, I reach a level where I come first to the pure or sheer ego, and then if I detach myself from that also, I will experience my witness purusha.

Now, we may ask why has Sri Aurobindo analysed these four elements in our thinking? The main idea here is to see where memory comes in. It is in the third element of the occasion that memory comes in: It is this succession of experiences and it is this fact of an indirect or secondary action of the experiencing consciousness under the conditions of our mentality that bring in the device of Memory. For a primary condition of our mentality is division by the moments of Time; there is an inability to get its experience or to hold

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* its experiences together except under the conditions of this self-division by the moments of Time. In the immediate mental experience of a wave of becoming, a conscious movement of being, there is no action or need of memory; I become angry, —it is an act of sensation, not of memory; I observe that I am angry, —it is an act of perception, not of memory.

This tells us beautifully that in the first two elements there is no role of memory at all. If I become angry and directly experience and identify with its sensations, or if I am able to observe myself being angry, there is no role of memory. It is simply a perception of the present moment, there is an immediacy of experience. If I say I *was* angry, then the question of Time would come in.

Memory only comes in when I begin to relate my experience to the successions of Time, when I begin to relate my experience to the successions of Time, when I divide my becoming into past, present and future, when I say, “I was angry a moment ago”, or “I have become angry

and am I still in anger”, or “I was angry once and will be again if there is the same occasion”.

This is where the word “occasion” comes in. If I say “I was angry”, that involves memory, and if I say “if the same situation arises I will be angry again” that also involves memory. Sri Aurobindo gives a very interesting analysis here:

Memory may indeed come immediately and directly into the becoming, if the occasion of the movement of consciousness is itself or wholly or partly a thing of the past, — for example, if there is a recurrence of emotion, such as the anger, caused by memory of past wrong or suffering and not by any immediate occasion

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in the present or else caused by an immediate occasion reviving the memory of the past occasion.

This is where memory plays its trick and mischief.

Maybe two years back someone told me something that made me angry. I may have even forgotten it, but when I see that same person again, my memory brings back the occasion and it revives the anger. This is a problem of memory and it can form prejudices. To get cleansed of these prejudices is very difficult. Once our relations are spoilt with somebody it has a tremendous effect on our mind. We always have the impression that the person is bad. It is difficult to erase unless one is very open and forgiving. We have to cleanse and widen ourselves and wipe out this memory. Memory brings back the occasion, but the effect of that occasion needs to be wiped off. We can do it with the strength of a higher consciousness for otherwise human prejudices can be extremely strong and beyond our control.

Another example of this could be of a woman who has lost her husband: she cries when she sees his photograph because all her memories of the lovely time spent together come back. She may not be feeling grief then, but the photograph or the mention of his name brings back the memory of

that person and she again experiences the grief she felt at his passing. It is not only the memory of the occasion, but the accompanying emotion of the occasion that also comes in. Sri Aurobindo continues: Because we cannot keep the past in us on the surface of the consciousness though it is always there behind, within, simultaneously present and often even active, therefore we have to recover it as something that is lost or is no longer existent, and this we do by that repetitive and linking action of the thought-mind which we call

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* memory, —just as we summon things which are not within the actual field of our limited superficial mind experience by the action of the thought-mind which we call imagination, that greater power in us and high summoner of all the possibilities reasonable or unreasonable into the field of our ignorance.

Therefore, of the four elements of mental functioning, memory has a role in the third element relating to the past occasion of an experience. In the first two elements of mental functioning it has no role because both of them pertain only to the present.

Just as memory can make us live in the past, imagination can make us live in the future, and some people do live in the future very strongly.

Memory is not the essence of persistent or continuous experience even in the succession of Time and would not be necessary at all if our consciousness were of an undivided movement, if it had not to run from moment to moment with a loss of direct grasp on the last and an entire ignorance or non-possession of the next. All experience or substance of becoming in Time is a flowing stream or sea not divided in itself, but only divided in the observing consciousness by the limited movement of the Ignorance which has to leap from moment to moment like a dragon-fly darting about on the surface of the stream: so too all substance of being in Space is a flowing sea not divided in itself, but only divided in the observing consciousness because our sense-faculty is limited in its grasp, can see only a part and is therefore bound to observe forms of substance as

if they were separate things in themselves, independent of the one substance. There is indeed

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an arrangement of things in Space and Time, but no gap or division except to our ignorance, and it is to bridge the gaps and connect the divisions created by the ignorance of Mind that we call in the aid of various devices of the mind-consciousness, of which memory is only one device.

The essential idea here which we have already discussed is that Time is like a flowing stream or a sea, not divided in itself. For example, if we go on the top of a mountain we might see three kilometers of a river at one stretch, depending on the height of the mountain.

If we go up in an airplane, we may see a few kilometers of the river in a single view, in one glance. But when we come down on the ground and stand on the bank of the river, we see only about 10 meters or perhaps 50 meters of the stream. There is a limitation of the senses. It is the same thing with the Time consciousness. If I am in the higher consciousness, I may be able to see Time for 10 years at a stretch. In the supramental vision I maybe able to see Time for 1000 years in a single glance. In our present consciousness I cannot see even one hour back, and I have to use my memory. Sri Aurobindo says, just as our sense-faculty is limited and we are bound to observe forms of substance as if they were separate things in themselves, due to our mental incapacity we break Time into the past, present and future to perceive it.

There is then in me this flowing stream of the world-sea, and anger or grief or any other inner movement can occur as a long-continued wave of the continuous stream. This continuity is not constituted by force of memory, although memory may help to prolong or repeat the wave when by itself it would have died away into the stream; the wave simply occurs and continues

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* as a movement of conscious-force of my being carried forward by its own original impulsion of disturbance.

Memory comes in to prolong the disturbance by a recurrence of the thinking mind to the occasion of anger or of the feeling mind to the first impulse of anger by which it justifies itself in the repetition of the disturbance; otherwise the perturbation would spend itself and only occur when the occasion itself was actually repeated.

One important thing which we could put into practice is not to use memory unnecessarily to prolong disturbances of the mind. If I was angry or disturbed by you or insulted by you and I got angry at that time, I use my memory to keep on refreshing that incident and those emotions. Otherwise, if left to itself, such events would quickly fade away because there is not enough space in my present capacity to retain it. Sri Aurobindo tells us that memory prolongs disturbances by their recurrence in the thinking mind. That is one kind of misuse of memory that we make. Of course, we can use it for good things also. For example, I can keep remembering the Mother, remember the occasions on which I went to Her and the letters that she wrote to me. Those are positive uses of memory. The negative uses – remembering all the jealousies, all the quarrels, all the negative emotions I had with people – if I keep remembering those things, my being will be disturbed always. It is better, if we want to forget these things it is not better to speak about them, because that reinforces and prolongs them.

The natural recurrence of the wave, the same or a similar occasion causing the same disturbance, is not any more than its isolated occurrence a result of

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memory, although memory may help to fortify it and make the mind more subject to it.

It is very rare that the exact occasion comes back and recurs again. On one occasion you may become angry with another person who does something you don't like. When a similar occasion arises the memory says, last time I saw him he did the same thing, even though it was a different context, the conversation was different, and the actions were different. The memory

fortifies, reinforces, and mixes our present experience with our past experience and therefore brings the past anger to the present. What then happens is that we become doubly angry. The past anger is remembered and it reinforces the present anger, so this time we become furious.

There is rather the same relation of repeated occasion and repeated result and movement in the more fluid energy and variable substance of the mind as that we see presented mechanically by the repetition of the same course and effect in the less variable operations of the energy and substance of the material world. We may say, if we like, that there is a subconscious memory in all energy of nature which repeats invariably the same relation of energy and result; but then we enlarge illimitably the connotation of the word. In reality, we can only state a law of repetition in the action of the waves of conscious-force by which it regularises these movements of its own substance. Memory, properly speaking, is merely the device by which the witnessing Mind helps itself to link together these movements and their occurrence and recurrences in the successions of Time for Time-experience, for increasing use by a more and more coordinating will and for a constantly

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* developing valuation by a more and more coordinating reason.

Just as there are repetitions in our conscious memory, there are similar repetitions of the same causes and the same effects in the operations of the energy and substance of the material world. We may say there is a subconscient memory in material forces and things. We see something of this in our habits, which become part of our subconscient memory. When we do something over and over for a long time, it becomes part of our subconscient, we don't even think about it. But then he says that

“Memory, properly speaking, is merely the device by which the witnessing Mind helps itself to link together these movements and their occurrence and recurrences in the successions of Time for Time-experience, for increasing use by a more and more co-ordinating will and for a constantly developing valuation by a more and more co-ordinating reason”. Thus, he distinguishes

memory as a device of the witnessing mind to link together events and these subconscious repetitions.

Memory is a device used by the witness Purusha within us to get a more complete experience of the Prakriti.

The psychic being comes into the body for a particular experience, but the body with the mind, vital and physical has incapacities. But it has a tendency to lose good experiences. For example, I went to the Mother many times, but if I cannot recall those times, my psychic being loses some of their benefit. Recalling those experiences enriches the psychic itself. The psychic being utilises different devices to enrich its time-experience and one of them is memory.

It is a great, an indispensable but not the only factor in the process by which the Inconscience from which

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we start develops full self-consciousness, by which the ignorance of the mental being develops conscious knowledge of itself in the becomings. This development continues until the coordinating mind of knowledge and mind of will are fully able to possess and use all the material of self-experience. Such at least is the process of evolution as we see it governing the development of mind out of the self-absorbed and apparently mindless energy in the material world.

Memory is an indispensable factor in the process by which, starting from the inconscience the psychic being develops full self-consciousness in the course of its evolution.

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The animal has a sense of location, has a sense of continuity, but it cannot say where it was ten days back, whereas human beings can say where they were. We have a coordinating mind of knowledge which bases itself on a distinct idea of itself as an ego and which senses and feels like the animal, but in addition has Buddhi – the coordinating mind of knowledge. And it is

this Buddhi which tells us that we were angry at that time, that we were blissful at that time, that we were meditative at that time. The animal has a sense of continuity but it is imprecise, whereas humans have a sense of continuity that is fully precise and we can know the condition of our being at a past moment in time.

This conscious mind-substance, it says, is always that of one and the same conscious person who feels, ceases to feel, remembers, forgets, is superficially conscious, sinks back from superficial consciousness into sleep; he is the same before the organisation of memory and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* after it, in the infant and in the dotard, in sleep and in waking, in apparent consciousness and apparent unconsciousness; he and no other did the acts which he forgets as well as the acts which he remembers; he is persistently the same behind all changes of his becoming or his personality. This action of knowledge in man, this coordinating intelligence, this formulation of self-consciousness and self-experience is higher than the memory-ego and sense-ego of the animal and therefore, we may suppose, nearer to real self-knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo is trying to establish the fact that this ego-sense or ego-being is there all through the changes in the outer being. If sometimes I forget myself, I cannot remember, it doesn't mean I did not exist. The sense of my existence is not dependent on memory. This formulation of self-consciousness and self-experience is greater than the memory-ego and sense-ego of the animal. In the animal, as we have explained, there is a sense-ego, but not self-consciousness and self-experience. It can know that this is my family, but it cannot reflect upon itself and what it is doing and why it is doing it; it is conscious but it is not self-conscious.

The importance of memory becomes apparent in the well-observed phenomenon of double personality or dissociation of personality in which the same man has two successive or alternating states of his mind and in each remembers and co-ordinates perfectly only what he was or did in that state of mind and not what he was or did in the other.

This is the double personality phenomenon which in psychology is called dissociative identity disorder.

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Sri Aurobindo writes that memory becomes important when the same person has two successive or alternative states of his personality and each remembers and coordinates perfectly only what he was or did in that one and not in the other. We may also have this feature in us in a less dramatic way. Whenever I see X I quarrel with him, and whenever I see Y I smile at him! At such times memory has a role. We have different sides, it is not a split personality, because we do not completely forget the other side, but here memory comes into play also.

But, on the other side, we must see that dissociation of memory occurs also without dissociation of personality, as when a man in the state of hypnosis takes up a range of memories and experiences to which his waking mind is a stranger but does not therefore think himself another person, or as one who has forgotten the past events of his life and perhaps even his name, still does not change his ego-sense and personality.

In the state of hypnosis a person may be carried into another level of consciousness in which he forgets his name and his past but he still feels like he is the same person as before.

And there is possible too a state of consciousness in which, although there is no gap of memory, yet by a rapid development the whole being feels itself changed in every mental circumstance and the man feels born into a new personality, so that if it were not for the coordinating mind, he would not at all accept his past as belonging to the person he now is, although he remembers perfectly well that it was in the same form of body and same field of mind substance that it occurred. Mind-sense is the basis, memory the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* thread on which experiences are strung by the self-experiencing mind: but it is the coordinating faculty of mind which,

relating together all the material that memory provides and all its linkings of past, present and future, relates them also to an 'I' who is the same in all the moments of time.

Now, this is the third case where Sri Aurobindo speaks about a complete change of personality, like it happened, for example, to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Adi Shankaracharya, who in a moment became completely different personalities. But still Gauranga would always recognise his mother, Adi Shankaracharya came back to his mother. Even if there is a kind of a new birth and one becomes a spiritual person, this change of personality does not de-link one with one's past self. The emotions may be different, Gauranga is so different from Chaitanya and his relations and responses all change, but if we met him on the road his memory would recognise us.

The ego-sense is only a preparatory device and a first basis for the development of real self-knowledge in the mental being. Developing from inconscience to self-conscience, from nescience of self and things to knowledge of self and things, the mind in forms arrives thus far that it is aware of all its superficially conscious becoming as related to an 'I' which it always is. That 'I'

it partly identifies with the conscious becoming, partly thinks of it as something other than the becoming.

In the last resort, by the aid of its reason which distinguishes in order to co-ordinate, it may fix its self-experience on the becoming only, on the constantly changing self and reject the idea of something other than it as a fiction of the mind; there is then no being, only becoming. Or it may fix its self-experience into

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a direct consciousness of its own eternal being and reject the becoming.

In this evolution from the Inconscient to self-consciousness, human beings have reached the stage at which one is conscious of oneself, of one's emotions, thoughts, feelings and responses as well as conscious of others,

things, the environment. An animal is also conscious of others but has not reached the stage of self-consciousness. Humanity is able to say 'I', which means that we have individualised ourselves. This sense of the 'I'

has two centers of its identity. One is the ego personality, which is the centre and the nodus of the outer personality, the becoming. The other 'I' is the true being, the self.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that you can have a direct consciousness of your eternal being and reject the outer ego personality. A great yogi identifies his 'I' as the Supreme Atman, the eternal being, he does not speak of the ego. When we are in the becoming we reject the true being. The integral realisation is when you say I am both the becoming and the being; I am both the self and the outer personality. That is the integral realisation.

Otherwise normally, we are either here or there. A true ascetic does not bother about the world he is only concerned with his eternal being. He says, "let the world go to hell, I do not care." That is he rejects the becoming.

But it is evident that a self-knowledge based on the separative ego-sense is imperfect and that no knowledge founded upon it alone or primarily or on a reaction against it can be secure or assured of completeness. First, it is a knowledge of our superficial mental activity and its experience and, with regard to all the large rest of our becoming that is behind, it is an ignorance.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo tells us about the deficiencies of the self-knowledge that is based on the separative ego. What are its imperfections? Why is it not the full self-knowledge?

First, because our knowledge is only a superficial mental activity. We just look around at the world, the environment, the material things and people, but we are ignorant of all that is behind this material world, that is, the occult and the spiritual world. We see only the tip of the iceberg. We know something of the material world, but below that there are many other levels of which we are ignorant. So how can we say we have knowledge?

Secondly, it is a knowledge only of being and becoming as limited to the individual self and its experiences;...

I have the knowledge of this material world only to the extent that I have studied. If you are a marine biologist you know about marine life but not much about philosophy. If I am a philosopher I may know some philosophy, but not much about science. Only to the extent of my limited capacities can I know the outer world. And even the inner world I know only to the extent of my inner experience. If I can go into a deep state of meditation I can find out something about other realms, but if not, I can't even go into my own inner being. I may be completely ignorant of the inner levels.

Actually, I am largely ignorant of both the inner and the outer levels. This is the second drawback.

Thirdly, the true relation between the being and the becoming has not been worked out on the basis of perfect self-knowledge but rather by the Ignorance, by a partial knowledge.

Thirdly, we are unable to find out the relation between our true eternal being and our becoming in time because we have a partial knowledge that is based on an original

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Ignorance, a mental consciousness that has evolved from inconscient matter. The first thing this partial knowledge does is to separate the inner and the outer. The mental consciousness always divides, it cannot deal with the whole, it can only compare and contrast things and look at their relations. It cannot even conceive that our eternal being and our becoming in time are one and the same.

As a consequence the mind in its impetus towards an ultimate knowledge attempts through the coordinating and dissociating will and reason on the basis of our present experience and possibilities to drive at a trenchant conclusion which cuts away one side of existence.

Because of this mental inability we cut off one side of our existence. We either cut off the inner as a sacrifice to the outer, or we cut off the outer as a sacrifice to the inner.

The true relation has not been seized, because these two sides of existence must always appear discordant and unreconciled to our intelligence so long as there is only a partial knowledge. An integral knowledge is the aim of conscious evolution. For if some immobile self were all, there could be no possibility of world-existence; if mobile nature were all, there might be a cycle of universal becoming but no spiritual foundation for the evolution of the conscient out of the inconscient.

These concluding sentences tell us that we cannot live in this self-experience which cuts off the inner or the outer existence, we must have an integral knowledge.

Integral knowledge means accepting both the reality of the inner and the outer existence. If we think that there is only the Nirguna Brahman, the immobile self, then

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* there cannot be any world at all. Or if we think there is only the Saguna Brahman, the mobile self, then there would be an endless creation but there would be no evolution. Endlessly Prakriti would have repeated itself, but there would never have been an evolution. This is the important point we need to remember.

Our surface existence is only a surface and it is there that there is the full reign of the Ignorance; to know we have to go within ourselves and see with an inner knowledge. All that is formulated on the surface is a small and diminished representation of our secret greater existence. The immobile self in us is found only when the outer mental and vital activities are quieted; for since it is seated deep within and is represented on the surface only by the mental, vital, physical ego-sense, its truth has to be experienced in the mind's silence. But also the dynamic parts of our surface being are similarly diminished figures of greater things that are there in the depths of our secret nature. The surface memory itself is a fragmentary and

ineffective action pulling out details from an inner subliminal memory which receives and records all our world-experience, receives and records even what the mind has not observed, understood or noticed.

The first idea here is that whatever is on the outer surface we can call ignorance. But we are not calling it ignorance in the sense of the Advaita Vedanta because there ignorance is something unreal. Here ignorance is a limited and partial knowledge. In contrast, the inner knowledge is full knowledge, a real knowledge with a capital 'K'. If we want to get the full knowledge we have to quieten the outer mental and vital. That is where meditation comes in. We must try to quieten our being so

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that we enter deep within and establish ourselves in the inner being; only then this true knowledge will develop.

At the same time the outer is not something disconnected with the inner, it is only the outer extension of the inner. The ego is an outer extension of the psychic, a kind of instrument for its early development. It is due to this that the ego can go back and dissolve itself into the psychic being. When I want to withdraw into my psychic being I must have a path, and the path is already pre-existent because the psychic being through its influence on the subliminal has come to express itself through the ego. The backward road is from the ego into the subliminal and then back into the psychic being. If they are de-linked I cannot go back but because of the continuity I can.

Similarly, he tells us that even our surface memory is not something disconnected with the inner being.

It is connected with our subliminal memory. We have seen that there is a subconscious memory, a subliminal memory, a surface memory and the deepest one is the psychic memory. The surface memory is like the tip of the iceberg. What comes to the surface memory is already there in the subliminal. And the subliminal memory is something which absorbs and encodes what man has not seen as well as what he has seen. It is very interesting to observe that sometimes our dreams reflect of something I have never thought about but the subliminal has caught the idea from the

environment. Sometimes the idea may come to us after a time gap. I might have seen five years ago that something happened in Delhi, but I had forgotten it. The surface memory has forgotten, but if I go into the subliminal it may come into my memory and I may remember. Sometimes the memory may come back

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* suddenly. When we go to some of the old sadhaks and say please tell me about the Mother, they may say they cannot tell because their surface memory does not retain it. But when you are conversing with them suddenly the subliminal memory erupts, and they say, oh yes, I remember now! The surface memory is limited, it cannot be always consciously working. When we prick it, when we give it some impetus it may recollect.

A psychic entity is there behind these occult activities which is the true support of our individualisation; the ego is only an outward false substitute; for it is this secret soul that supports and holds together our self-experience and world—experience; the mental, vital, physical, eternal ego is a superficial construction of Nature. It is only when we have seen both our self and our nature as a whole, in the depths as well as on the surface, that we can acquire a true basis of knowledge.

The psychic memory is the true memory which has the knowledge of the outer and the inner. It has the memory of the past lives and the present life. True memory comes only when we dip into the innermost being or go above into the spiritual consciousness. The fullness of memory is there, the fullness of imagination is there, the fullness of consciousness is there in the psychic. As we have seen, in the highest consciousness we don't even need memory because we can have the knowledge of the three times –

past, present and future – *trikaladrishti*. There all is in one vision of knowledge.

*Question: It has been said that we carry the experiences and events of not only our past human lives but even our animal lives in our subconscious.*

*But after death the soul or the psychic being goes to its place of rest and the other parts of the being are dissolved, then how does the*

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*subconscious bring memories to the next birth?*

Answer: When we say subconscious, it is in this context more the universal subconscious, not the individual subconscious. We have an individual karma but this subconscious refers to a memory common to all of us.

When we take birth again, when we come in a new form, as part of our human heritage this memory comes into all of us. We all have the same subconscious. You can imagine that we are all waves on top of the same subconscious ocean. When I come into a new birth my urges of hunger, sex, passion, anger, of all these are common to our animal nature. We do not have to learn or acquire them. Even if we keep someone in isolation on top of the mountain he will have the same instincts because he is drawing from the same subconscious nature which is universal and common to us all. All the basic urges of the lower nature are common. It is not the question of how it comes back, the moment we take birth, the body takes up all of these things as part of the physical consciousness.

This subconscious cannot be cleansed by us, it has to be completely done by the Divine Force. Till now Sri Krishna and Sri Rama had a nice play with the mental, and the vital and the physical, they could have a *rasa lila*.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother had to deal with the worst part of human nature, that is, this subconscious ocean of ignorance. The most we can do, Sri Aurobindo said, is to put the force and psychic energy into the subconscious.

But there also from the point of view of the sadhana it is no use berating ourselves, we have to think of the positive line, of the psychic energies, and let the Mother take over this cleaning of the subconscious.

I am cautioning you about this because a lot of people talk about the supramental consciousness working here

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and there, including working in the sex-energy. I still remember when the Mother had left her body, the advise given by Nolini-da – he said, “let’s not talk about all these high things, forget about the Overmind, the Supermind and all that. Just follow your *yama* and *niyama*, your day to day duties and activities that will lead you to the Mother’s love and consciousness and work”. I think that is the essence of it. We need to prepare ourselves so that the Mother can do her work in us.

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# Lecture Notes

## I. The Self

The direct self-consciousness of the mental being could lead it to the nameless and formless, relationless which does not get in any way affected by the outward changes. It is the support of the outer surface experiences. It is the stable self, the eternal 'Am' the immutable 'I'.

## II. No Self

Those who live on the surface Time-self or consciousness do not have the habit of drawing back inward towards the Self, they think that the surface-consciousness is their real self. They naturally tend to think with the Buddhists that the self is nothing but a stream of ideas, a flux of experiences.

Or else, they conclude that time is the only real existence and they themselves are its creatures.

**III. The two levels of mental experiences** The surface-consciousness is changing and the form or the body which it inhabits is constantly being affected by its own body and the body of the world.

All this change is perceived only through the mind

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which as a result undergoes a modification in the mental personality. All this change of circumstance is summed up in philosophical language as causality.

Thus there are two levels of change: the subjective experience of the ever-modified mental states of its personality and the objective experience of the ever-changing environment, through even this experience is essentially formed of subjective impressions.

#### IV. The role of memory

The role of memory is to link together past and present experiences, past and present personality, continuing the stream of the mental consciousness.

It is in fact a mediator between the sense-mind or manas and the coordinating intelligence, the buddhi.

However, memory is not the only device of the mind.

**V. The four elements ...The first two** a) The objective mental consciousness For example, when I am angry, at that moment anger becomes the object of the state of my mental consciousness. Thus, with each object of my mind-consciousness such as hunger or grief, the state of my mind changes.

b) The act of mental consciousness ...

This act is a kind of mental observation and conceptual evaluation of the state of mind at a particular moment, calm or excited or in joy.

Sometimes such an evaluation may not be possible because, for instance, one may be fully caught up by the paroxysm of rage and the entire being, as it were, becomes anger. But, if detachment can come through, one could control to some extent the feeling or action.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* VI. **The defect in the act of self-observation** There is usually a defect in the act of self-observation

- the mental person and the mental action are rolled up in each other and it is difficult to separate them fully. It is only when one succeeds in detaching the mental person from his act of self-experience, that one becomes aware of the sheer ego and in the end of the witness self or the thinking mental Person.

**VII. No two selves**

However, one should not think that there are two separate selves - the outer self, the ego is only a distorted reflection of the real self that becomes eternally in the succession of Time. By this throwing itself up in waves, there is no real change just as there is no change in the original stuff of Matter or Energy. This throwing up of the self is called phenomenon because it manifests itself to the sense-perception and sense-relation and not directly to the deeper consciousness.

**VIII. The third element: Occasion** Memory is brought in, not in the first two elements but in the third one: the occasion. That is to say, memory may indeed come immediately and directly into the becoming, if the occasion of the movement of consciousness is itself wholly or partly a thing of the past. For example there could be a recurrence of emotion caused by memory of past wrong. This bringing back of the occasion is what is called memory, just as we summon things by imagination.

**IX. Memory as one of the devices** If our consciousness were of an undivided movement, then memory would not have been required. All experience is in reality a flowing stream or sea not

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divided in itself but only divided in the observing consciousness in Ignorance. It is to bridge the gaps created by ignorance of mind that we call in the aid of devices and memory is one of them.

**X. The subconscious memory and the occasion** Memory often prolongs the occasion although the perturbation would spend itself and only recur when the occasion itself was repeated. Here too, when there is a recurrence of the occasion, memory may fortify it - that is to say it assures the same or similar occasion causing the same disturbance. This could in a way be called a subconscious memory.

**XI. The fourth element: subject or the ego-sense** The ego-sense is the subject that experiences the first three elements. At first we may think that it is memory that forms the ego-sense, but it is not so. Memory can only confirm the same conscious occasion.

In man especially there is the co-ordinating mind of knowledge which, basing itself on the united action of mind-sense and the memory, arrives at the distinct idea of an ego-sense. In fact all ego-sense, all ego-memory, is a pragmatic contrivance of a secret coordinating power or mind of knowledge that is present in the universal conscious-force.

**XII. Memory and the double personality** The importance of memory increases very much in the phenomenon of double personality in which the same man has two successive or alternating states of mind. Here memory would seem to be the Man.

In a state of hypnosis also the memory is the link. Or else, when a man undergoes a radical change, even then it is the memory that plays a great role. Mind-sense is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the basis, memory the thread on which experiences are strung by the self-experiencing mind; but it is the co-ordinating mind which relates them into a continuous 'I'.

### **XIII. The Ego-sense**

The ego-sense is the first basis for the development of real-self-knowledge in the mental being. The Mind is normally identified with the conscious becoming, on the constantly changing self and reject the idea of something other than it as a fiction of mind. Or else, it may fix on the higher self-experience and reject the becoming.

**XIV. The knowledge of ego-sense is imperfect** The knowledge based on ego-sense is imperfect because -

a) Such a knowledge belongs only to our superficial mental activity and the rest of our becoming is out of its ken.

b) Such a knowledge is knowledge only of being and becoming limited to the individual self and its experiences.

c) The true relation between the being and the becoming is rather worked on ignorance and partial knowledge and not on the basis of perfect self-knowledge.

d) As a consequence, the mind tends to cut off trenchantly the being and becoming for they appear discordant to the Mind.

e) An integral knowledge must be the aim of the conscious evolution.

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**XV. The immobile self in us is found only when the outer mental and vital activities are quieted.**

The dynamic parts of our surface being are only diminished figures of greater things that are there in the depths of our secret nature. Seen in this light, the surface memory only pulls out details from a subliminal memory which records all that the mind has seen or unseen or understood or noticed. Similarly, imagination too is a diminished figure of the image-building power of consciousness. Similarly, the ego is only false substitute of the psychic entity. It is only when we see both the inner and outer simultaneously that we gain true knowledge.

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**Chapter – X**

**Knowledge by Identity**

## and Separative Knowledge

This chapter "Knowledge by Identity and Separative Knowledge" is one of the crucial chapters regarding Sri Aurobindo's theory of knowledge. In this age of knowledge, we need to discriminate between different types of knowledge. Is all knowledge the same or are there variations or distinctions between them? Sri Aurobindo distinguishes between two types of knowledge, one which he calls Vedantic knowledge and another he refers to as scientific knowledge. I will read out a passage from Chapter Seventeen that gives us the distinction between these two types of knowledge: It follows at once that the knowledge we have to arrive at is not truth of the intellect; it is not right belief, right opinions, right information about oneself and things,

– that is only the surface mind's idea of knowledge.

(CWSA 17: 712)

He explains that scientific knowledge is a surface knowledge which deals with "right belief, right opinions, right information about oneself and things" – all that is associated with the surface mind. In one word we can say it is an external knowledge. Then he says, To arrive at some mental conception about God and ourselves and the world is an object good for the intellect but not large enough for the Spirit; it will not make us the conscious sons of Infinity. (Ibid)

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He translates a very beautiful phrase from the Upanishads - *amritasya putraha* - sons of immortality , to a new phrase - 'sons of Infinity'. All our religions have given us a mental conception about God and about the world. It may be based on an experience of the Divine, but for us, it is more or less a concept: for us God is still a concept which we have not yet realised. He says that is good to begin with, it is good to know, but that is not sufficient to make us "sons of Infinity", we will not be transformed inwardly.

There is at present a craze about computers, but all that is only to sharpen our mind. It may satisfy our mental curiosity, but for sadhaks or yogins this knowledge is not helpful because it does not lead one deep within. He continues:

Ancient Indian thought meant by knowledge a consciousness which possesses the highest truth in a direct perception and self-experience;... (Ibid) In India we speak of real knowledge and wisdom, but it has nothing to do with the scientific knowledge of the external, outer world. It is something of the inner world.

It is something that bases itself on self-experience.

...to become, to be the Highest that we know is a sign that we really have the knowledge. For the same reason, to shape our practical life, our actions as far as may be in consonance with our intellectual notions of truth and right or with a successful pragmatic knowledge, —

an ethical or a vital fulfillment, —is not and cannot be the ultimate aim of our life; our aim must be to grow into our true being, our being of Spirit, the being of the supreme and universal Existence, Consciousness, Delight, Sachchidananda. (Ibid)

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* In this single passage we see what Sri Aurobindo means by Vedantic knowledge; it has always emphasised direct perception. What is important is that it is the perception of truth. It is not talking about truth, knowing about truth, reading about truth! We have gone far in this in our modern life, but there is no direct perception of truth, be it in religion, morality, ethics or anything. We always depend on external knowledge. For example, in our medical sciences the doctors have no intimate direct perception of the patients. They always ask us to bring this report and that X-ray – there is always an external support for their knowledge.

Vedanta emphasises on subjective knowledge, which means a knowledge of oneself. Science gives us the knowledge of the other, the not-self. This is

the basic difference. Scientific knowledge depends on long explanations, whereas Vedantic knowledge, as we see in the Upanishads, is expressed in brief verses. It is a kind of indication of truth. Truth cannot be explained whereas outer knowledge needs to be explained. Truth must be directly perceived. The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita, and even the Quran and the Bible, do not have long explanations. Truth cannot be caught by the intellect and that is why the scriptures use symbols.

If that is so, why has Sri Aurobindo written so copiously the book we are reading, *The Life Divine* - his longest book? Why didn't Sri Aurobindo write in brief verses like in the Upanishads? What Sri Aurobindo has tried, perhaps for the first time in spiritual history, is to bring the great truths onto the intellectual level. Prior to Sri Aurobindo, experiential knowledge of spirituality could not be expressed by the mind, because there is such a big gap between the mind and the experience. But

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Sri Aurobindo has broadened the mind's ken itself, has expanded its horizon, and has kind of transformed it. He could thus use intellectual thought as a means to express spiritual truths.

That is the charm of *The Life Divine*. In reading it we do not stay on the intellectual level, it takes us deeper into the truth. It does not just give us information about God, or about rebirth, or about ignorance - it constantly takes us towards the higher truth and to the consciousness behind his words which is the real guide.

In fact, in one of his sentences he writes that by reading the Mother's works, you can identify your consciousness with her. The same is true of his works. This is the most important benefit of reading them, that it becomes a means to identify with their consciousness. We read the Mother and Sri Aurobindo not just for intellectual information or intellectual satisfaction; the great advantage of reading them is that, even though we may not understand much, there is this consciousness behind the words - the very consciousness of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. This enables us to be in contact with them, and even creates the possibility of identifying with the Mother's consciousness. What we do through prayer, meditation, Bhakti

Yoga or Karma Yoga can also be done through reading their works. That is why I always emphasise that we must read the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. There are many people who think that it is not necessary, because they are doing the Mother's work, or doing meditation and Japa and all that. Those also are means, no doubt about it, but why not read? In reading these words of Sri Aurobindo there is a direct contact with his consciousness.

Now, what Sri Aurobindo does in this chapter is to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* bridge scientific knowledge with Vedantic knowledge.

There is a bridge between the knowledge of the self and the knowledge of the not-self, and in this bridging there are four steps. We now come to the first paragraph of this Chapter X. I will read it out:

Our surface cognition, our limited and restricted mental way of looking at our self, at our inner movements and at the world outside us and its objects and happenings, is so constituted that it derives in different degrees from a fourfold order of knowledge. The original and fundamental way of knowing, native to the occult self in things, is a knowledge by identity; the second, derivative, is a knowledge by direct contact associated at its roots with a secret knowledge by identity or starting from it, but actually separated from its source and therefore powerful but incomplete in its cognition; the third is a knowledge by separation from the object of observation, but still with a direct contact as its support or even a partial identity; the fourth is a completely separative knowledge which relies on a machinery of indirect contact, a knowledge by acquisition which is yet, without being conscious of it, a rendering or bringing up of the contents of a pre-existent inner awareness and knowledge.

Here we get in brief the four types of knowledge.

He says, "knowledge by identity" is the first –

that is the highest or the deepest. “Knowledge by intimate direct contact” is the second, “knowledge by separative direct contact” is the third, and last is “a wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact.”

Sri Aurobindo is now going to distinguish between these four types or methods of knowledge.

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Normally, when we say ‘knowledge by identity’ we tend to keep it to the supramental level and think that it is only in the supermind where we can have ‘knowledge by identity’. But Sri Aurobindo would say that even in our present level of consciousness there is this sense of ‘knowledge by identity’. What is our normal way of getting knowledge? When I look at an object in my hand, how do I get knowledge of this object? It is through the senses. My eyes bring back to me the round shape and silvery colour of this object in my hand and then once it gets into my brain, it analyses and says, “it is a round, steel object”. We get knowledge through the instruments of the senses. But if I say, for example, “I exist”, there is no need for any instrumentation. There is a fundamental sense or feeling that I exist. Nobody has to prove it to me.

This is what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘knowledge by identity’.

I am identified with my own self. This identification tells me that I exist. So, this is the highest level where I know myself purely by identity.

Similarly, when we say ‘Sat’, ‘Chit’ and ‘Ananda’,

‘Sat’ comes first because ‘Sat’ is existence. Existence comes first. It is not as the famous western philosopher Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am.” Is it not wrong?

Because you exist that you think; it is not because you think that you exist. The whole thing changes. In western philosophy, the mind is important and there was the question of the difference or division between the mind and body. So Descartes asked, “how do I prove my existence?” Sri

Shankaracharya did not arrive at the conclusion that the world is an illusion by a logical deletion of things. He arrived at the truth of the Brahman, then he said the world is an illusion. But Desecrates started by deleting. He made a whole list, and said, “no. I can’t be sure that the street exists, I can’t be sure this house

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* exists, they could be a dream”. Then he realised, “these thoughts are occurring in me, I am thinking, therefore I must exist”. He could not delete these thoughts, they were self-evident. As he was thinking, he therefore concluded he must also be existing. Of course, I am putting his philosophy in simple terms.

From the Indian standpoint, it is a poor conclusion, because if I get into a deep samadhi and stop my thinking process, does it mean that I stop existing? Thought can be suspended or silenced. But the western philosopher would not know about the silence of the mind. Therefore, we have in India this concept of ‘Sat’. Self-existence is the first thing; once you exist, then you have ‘Chit’, consciousness; and then you can have ‘Tapas’, conscious-force; and then you can have ‘Ananda’, bliss. Otherwise, where will ‘Ananda’ and ‘Consciousness’ inhabit? If I say there is joy, where is it? In me! There is consciousness.

Where is it? In me. My self-existence becomes primary.

In the second paragraph Sri Aurobindo says, The first way of knowing in its purest form is illustrated in the surface mind only by our direct awareness of our own essential existence...

Sri Aurobindo is very clear. The knowledge by identity is illustrated in the surface mind only by our direct awareness of our own existence. He clarifies that

...it is a knowledge empty of any other content than the pure fact of self and being; ...of nothing else in the world has our surface mind the same kind of awareness.

It is empty of any other content. That means, I know simply that I am. I cannot doubt my own existence. I can doubt the existence of everything else in the world,

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but not myself. This is the surest knowledge. What is the conclusion? That 'knowledge by identity' alone is the surest knowledge. This is the conclusion that we need to draw, because any other knowledge can be doubted and debated.

Sri Aurobindo says that this is the kind of knowledge you have in the supramental consciousness. In the supramental consciousness all knowledge is absolute conviction, is absolute surety. We have the simple example of the knowledge I have of myself; but in the supramental consciousness, all knowledge is absolute. There is no doubt, there is no debating, there is no uncertainty, because all supramental knowledge is 'knowledge by identity'.

Continuing in the next paragraph, Sri Aurobindo says, This identification is possible, and also this simultaneous separation and partial identification, because these things are becomings of our being, determinations of our mind stuff and mind energy, of our life stuff and life energy; but, since they are only a small part of us, we are not bound to be identified and occupied... Thus we have a double knowledge of the subjective movement: there is an intimate knowledge, by identity, of its stuff and its force of action...

One of the things we learn here is that in 'knowledge by identity' the difference between subject and object is non-existent. It is not 'objective' knowledge. Once we catch this main idea, the rest would fall in place. In ordinary knowledge, as we have seen, there are three steps: the

'knower', the 'known' and the 'faculties of knowledge'.

That is what Sri Aurobindo is trying to emphasise here, that we have to erase this division between the knower,

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the faculties of knowledge and the object to be known.

He explains,

There is an intimate knowledge, by identity, of its stuff and its force of action, more intimate than we would have by any entirely separative and objective knowledge, such as we get of things outside us, things that are to us altogether not-self; there is, at the same time, knowledge by detached observation, detached but with the power of direct contact which frees us from engrossment by the Nature energy and enables us to relate the movement to the rest of our own existence and world existence.

The second type of knowledge is what Sri Aurobindo calls ‘a knowledge by intimate direct contact’. That means we detach ourselves from a particular state of mind and achieve the position of the witness, the ‘knower’ and the

‘ruler’. When I say “I am angry”, what is the state of my mind? I am able to watch myself being angry. There is a kind of a distancing that comes in, a detachment of one state from another state of mind. When I first become angry, I am in the first stage of identity, I lose myself in the movement of anger. I lose my own existence, I forget that ‘I am’. When I am angry or in lust or in passion or any of these impulsive movements, I lose the sense of my own primary existence of myself.

Why do we meditate? It is to get back to the sense that ‘I exist’. The state of consciousness of ‘Sat’ comes in meditation. That is why meditation is good. Normally, during the whole day, we forget that we even exist. We are either a teacher, a worker, a businessman; but here

‘I am’ is missing. In meditation we remove ourselves from all these outer personalities and we are ‘our’ selves.

Apart from the other advantages of meditation, one

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great advantage is that it brings us the sense of our own existence. We begin to contact 'Sat'. Meditation is not just to silence our mind. The process may be to silence the mind, but the end is to become 'ourself', what we basically are. What is that? We are the 'Brahman'. That is why Sri Aurobindo tells us that the best object of meditation is

'Brahman'. It is not acquiring 'love' or 'peace' or 'silence' or anything. In meditation, 'you simply are'. 'I am' connotes

'Sat'. We begin to realise 'I am', the 'Sat'. In the ancient Vedantic method of meditation we would say: '*Aham Brahmasmi*', I am the Brahman, I am the Absolute.

At the second level, when "I am angry", one state of my mind is watching the other state. This is a 'knowledge by intimate direct contact'. We need to understand the distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect.' Sri Aurobindo uses the word 'indirect' when there is the intervention of the instrumentation of the senses and 'direct' when there is no intervention or utilisation of the senses. When I say

"I am angry", there is no sight, there is no hearing, there is no smell, there is no touch; none of these senses have told me that I am angry. I know that I am angry directly. It is a state of my own consciousness which I realise intimately.

The second level is seen more clearly with the observation of the emotions than the observation of thoughts. Sri Aurobindo says,

In thought separation of the thinker and the thinking is more difficult. The thinker is plunged and lost in the thought or carried in the thought current, identified with it; it is not usually at the time of or in the very act of thinking that he can observe or review his thoughts,

—he has to do that in retrospect and with the aid of memory or by a critical pause of corrective judgement before he proceeds further: but still a simultaneity of

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* thinking and conscious direction of the mind's action can be achieved partially when the thought does not engross, entirely when the thinker acquires the faculty of stepping back into the mental self and standing apart there from the mental energy.

Sri Aurobindo says that it is not usually at the time of our thinking that we can observe or review our thoughts, it is usually "with the aid of memory or by critical pause of corrective judgment before he proceeds". This happens also with emotions. When I become angry, the thought may come that 'anger is not good'. That is a pause of self-critical judgment. Or we may say, yesterday I was angry with that person, recalling it in memory, and then observe it from a distance. When we are in the midst of emotions or thoughts, we often temporarily lose contact with ourself and then gain it afterwards. This is why the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and other great gurus tell us to have control on our emotions and passions. It is to our own disadvantage when we lose contact with this self-pause, and we might add what the Gita tells us, where Sri Krishna explained that when you become angry you lose your right to be called a human being.

Being human is to have the mental consciousness, but when we are angry, we become so confused that we lose the mental consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has given us a greater clarification; when one is angry we lose contact with 'ourself'. Therefore, all these external emotions and commotions are bad because they take us away from

'ourself'. People may say, "no, every day I meditate; what is the fuss?" During the meditation they may get the contact with the 'self', but the moment they come out meditation, they go back to their emotions and commotions. They again distance themselves from their 'self' and become involved in their emotions.

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All the observable movements of our physical being also are known and controlled by us in both these ways, the separative and the intimate; we feel the body and what it is doing intimately as part of us, but the mind is separate from it and can exercise a detached control over its movements. This gives to our normal knowledge of our subjective being and nature,

incomplete and largely superficial though it still is, yet, so far as it goes, a certain intimacy, immediacy and directness...

An example of 'separative direct contact' is the knowledge that I have a pain in my leg. 'I' is the subject, the 'pain in my leg' is the object. Is this object outside of me? No, it is part of myself. That is the directness. I can feel the exact position of the pain, it is direct. And yet, there is a separation because my mind is detached from it and I can say the pain is in my leg.

The fourth one is 'A wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact'. We need to focus on the words that Sri Aurobindo has used: 'indirect' and 'separate'. Let us say I have a ball in my hand. 'I' is the subject. The object is the 'ball in my hand'. So there is separation between the subject and the object. The contact is 'indirect' because there is an involvement of the instruments of the senses.

When I say, "I have a ball", how do I know it is a ball? It is because of the touch and the sight. That is why he calls it

'separative indirect contact'.

Let us remember that the first level is pure Vedanta, a direct knowledge by identity of our own existence, of our self. You may say, "I am Brahman", "I am Sachchidananda", "I am Parabrahman". It is not illogical, even the Upanishads say, "*Aham Brahmasmi*". But also on my finite level I know directly by identity that 'I exist'. It

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is a fact of my existence that just as the 'Brahman' exists, I also exist. Brahman exists eternally, and perhaps I exist temporarily, but at least temporarily I exist. The fourth level, knowledge by indirect contact corresponds to scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge depends not just on the instrumentation of the five senses, but on a thousand different instruments – computers, scanning machines, x-ray machines and so on. The more the instruments we use, the more separated we become from the objects of our knowledge. These two types of knowledge are the extremes, but all four are normally active in our human consciousness. Sri

Aurobindo emphasises that they are not something foreign, you don't have to be a great yogi to get this knowledge.

The beauty of Sri Aurobindo's explanation is that he makes this Vedantic knowledge and philosophy part of our human existence. We should not feel that the supermind is something alien and will come only 5000 years later.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that the supramental consciousness is not alien to the human body or the human consciousness. We have already got a preview of the supramental consciousness and it is that of 'knowledge by identity'. That is how he establishes a rapport between the present and the future. The in-between stages of 'intimate direct contact' and the 'separative direct contact' are also a part of our experiential domain. That is in brief the basic idea of these four levels of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo continues describing the fourth type of knowledge:

In the cognition of external things, our knowledge has an entirely separative basis; its whole machinery and process are of the nature of an indirect perception.

We do not identify ourselves with external objects,

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not even with other men though they are beings of our own nature; we cannot enter into their existence as if it were our own, we cannot know them and their movements with the directness, immediateness, intimacy with which we know, —even though incompletely, —ourselves and our movements. But not only identification lacks, direct contact also is absent...

We have no identification with the 'not-self' and we have no direct contact. There is no touch between our consciousness and their consciousness, our substance and their substance, our self of being and their self being.

The only seemingly direct contact with them or direct evidence we have of them is through the senses; sight, hearing, touch seem to initiate some kind of a direct intimacy with the object of knowledge: but this is not so really,

not a real directness, a real intimacy, for what we get by our sense is not the inner or intimate touch of the thing itself, but an image of it or a vibration or nerve message in ourselves through which we have to learn to know it. These means are so ineffective, so exiguous in their poverty that, if that were the whole machinery, we could know little or nothing or only achieve a great blur of confusion.

In the fourth type of knowledge, we have said, there is the utilisation of the instruments of sense. We know an external object through our senses. Nature has created these senses in us with the purpose of contacting the outside world, the 'not-self'. If we want to find our

'Atman', we do not need the senses; it is only when we want to know about the not-self that we need the senses.

In the second quotation given at the beginning of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* chapter, the Katha Upanishad tells us: "The Self-Existent has pierced the doors of sense outward, therefore, one sees things outwardly and sees not in one's inner being.

Rarely a sage desiring immortality, his sight turned inward, sees the Self face to face."

How do the senses give us this contact with the outside world? What is the process? When we see something outside, we receive what Sri Aurobindo would call

"images of it or a vibration". Scientifically, when you are seeing this pen in my hand, your eyes are carrying an image of this to your retina. But, even if the image goes into my retina, how do I know it is a pen? Science tells us that the image goes to my retina and then this image is sent to the brain. In the brain, the cells will convert this image or vibration into information. There is something more that is happening in this conversion into information. Sri Aurobindo takes us into its details.

The image comes into my retina, the nerves send it to my brain and in the brain there is a kind of a hard disc which has the knowledge of this. Sri Aurobindo explains what happens:

There intervenes a sense-mind intuition which seizes the suggestion of the image or vibration and equates it with the object...

What is this sense-mind intuition? The mind has thoughts and imaginations and the sense-mind is a part of the physical mind in which the moment it receives a sense-impression produces an immediate intuition of what the sense-impression signifies. There is some other knowledge that automatically senses it. There is also a vital intuition which seizes the energy or figure of the object through another kind of vibration created by the sense contact. Intuition is not just to give us great ideas

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for poetry and scientific discoveries. The sense-mind catches the image taken to the brain, but the object has a kind of energy, its figure of power, a pranic energy that is related to my own pranic energy within me which I can use to identify the object. There is also a third type of intuition:

...an intuition of the perceptive mind which at once forms a right idea of the object....

In this one little paragraph there is so much of psychology! These are happening at such lightning speeds that we do not even understand that they are happening. The moment I say, "What is this?" all of us will say, "a marker pen". In this split-second the sense-mind intuition, the vital intuition, and the intuition of the perceptive mind are giving you the right idea. And then, there is one more faculty that comes into play: Whatever is deficient in the interpretation of the image thus constructed is filled up by the intervention of the reason or the total understanding intelligence.

Whatever is deficient in the interpretation of the image by these intuitive faculties is filled up by the intervention of the reason – the last step is the 'reason'. Now we understand the importance of the proper development of

reason. If our reasoning capacity is not strong, then even our understanding of objects becomes doubtful.

Sometimes we must be very sure but when lawyers ask us questions in the court and try to confuse our mind, if the reason is strong we can say, “I am hundred percent sure that I have seen that person walking up the street with a gun in his hand”. How does that hundred percent come in?

It is because of our reason. This is what Indian psychology calls the buddhi, the “total understanding intelligence”.

Reason as an intellectual rational capacity is not the same

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* thing as the ‘buddhi’. ‘Buddhi’ is a higher integrative comprehending faculty; as he calls it “total understanding intelligence.

If the first composite intuition were the result of a direct contact or if it summarised the action of a total intuitive mentality master of its perception, there would be no need for the intervention of the reason except as a discoverer or organiser of knowledge not conveyed by the sense and its suggestions: it is, on the contrary, an intuition working on an image, a sense document, an indirect evidence, not working upon a direct contact of consciousness with the object.

Without the instrumentation of the senses, reason also would not have been necessary. Reason comes into picture only in the fourth type of knowledge. In the other types of knowledge there is still a direct relation with the object of knowledge. We have the direct knowledge that ‘I am’. We have an intimate connection with our anger that allows me to say ‘I am angry’. We do not say “I am angry”

because of our reasoning capacity; we feel it directly. In the third type, knowledge by separative direct contact, such as in “I have a pain in my leg”, again it is not reason.

My mind knows that I have exactly this kind of pain in my leg. I do not have to go to the doctor to prove it.

Reason comes only in the fourth type of knowledge to supplement and correct my senses. The more inward we go the lesser is the need of reason; the more outward we go the greater is the role of reason. This may help explain the stronger development and use of reason in the western world, which is wedded to the outer world of the senses, whereas in India we emphasise more on a direct intuitive knowledge. We are more oriented towards Vedantic knowledge than scientific knowledge.

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Of course, this is generic statement only; exceptions are always there in every rule.

Sri Aurobindo writes:

...had there been a kind of a direct contact, reason would not be there... But since the image or vibration is a defective and summary documentation and the intuition itself limited and communicated through an obscure medium, acting in a blind light, the accuracy of our intuitional interpretative construction of the object is open to question or at least likely to be incomplete. Man has had perforce to develop his reason in order to make up for the deficiencies of his sense instrumentation, the fallibility of his physical mind's perceptions and the paucity of its interpretation of its data.

He says that mankind had to develop reason in order to make up for the deficiencies of his instruments of sense.

If we relied more on a direct intuitive knowledge, reason would not be so necessary. When I was a child, in my student days, the Mother would say that the age of reason is over and that the coming age is that of intuition. She would tell the students, “develop your intuitive faculties”.

I wrote a letter to the Mother, “how do we develop this intuition?” She told me to quieten my mind and make it like a mirror turned upwards and be quiet. I am not quoting exactly, but the idea was “Quieten your emotions,

silence your mind and turn it upwards, aspire upwards so that the intuitions may drop into your mind.” The most important thing is to calm your emotions.

Sri Aurobindo explains why it is that we are so limited by this external sense knowledge:

If we look for the reason of this limitation and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* imperfection, we shall find first, that it is because we are concentrated on our surface; the depths of self, the secrets of our total nature are shut away from us behind a wall created by our externalising consciousness, —

or created for it so that it can pursue its activity of egocentric individualisation of the mind, life and body uninvaded by the deeper and wider truth of our larger existence: through this wall we can look into our inner self and reality only through crevices and portholes and we see little there but a mysterious dimness.

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We have covered the four types of knowledge and after this there is a long section on the ‘subliminal’. This is one of the most important descriptions of the ‘subliminal’

we will find; except in the *Letters on Yoga* here and there we may not find anything as clearly presented. This is the section that we are going to take up next and it is an important one in Indian psychology. Before coming to the explanation of the subliminal consciousness, Sri Aurobindo explains something starting right in this paragraph about how and why the subliminal consciousness is so difficult to penetrate into. He says that the outer being is so limited because there is a wall between the outer and the subliminal being that has been constructed by nature for a specific purpose: “so that it can pursue its activity of egocentric individualisation of the mind, life and body uninvaded by the deeper and wider truth of our larger

existence.” The reason for this wall is that ego is being built. We are given a space, a secluded time undisturbed by the subliminal so that the ego of the physical, the vital and the mind can fully develop. We are shut off purposely from the subliminal so that we can concentrate on developing an egoistic individuality. This

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reminds us Sri Aurobindo’s famous saying – “Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar”. (CWSA 13: 199) We all have to become conscious egoistic individualities, egoistic in the right sense. Egoism is the individualisation of our being.

Otherwise, if we do not have a specific form, if we are just an amorphous being, then we are not an individualised being. We must have a specific form to be a ‘being’. This

‘being’ is not just a physical being, but also our capacities, our character, our unique qualities. We may be an artist, a philosopher, a teacher, a worker or a businessman etc.

We have got to become someone. A lot of us perhaps, in the name of yoga, forget to become ‘myself’. If we start surrendering too early it is also dangerous, because what are we surrendering? An amorphous something. It is important, even in yoga, that we develop an individual personality.

In Integral Yoga, in ashramas, in centers, in this country and all over the world, there are always clashes.

Why? Because we are still at this level of developing the ego. Just because we belong to a particular Ashram or a Centre, does not mean that we are yogis, not at all.

Most of us are still in the stage of formation of the ego.

Those who have already formed this ego-self, they can go beyond; but most of us are still in the formation period.

Therefore the clashes come.

We are walled off from our inner being, but there are some crevices and portholes here and there through which the influence comes in or through which we can see sometimes within. When we are in meditation, when we are in the right emotion, at the right moment when we are quiet, we may get a peep into the subliminal.

But when looking through a key-hole what is seen in the room is not very clear, as Sri Aurobindo says,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* just a “mysterious dimness”. There is no clarity. But this dimness can be dangerous, because people start

“interpreting”. People will say, I have seen a light, and that is the psychic light. Or people will say, I have seen a vision, it is the Mother who came to me in the vision. We get a little peep and see a dimness and start giving it great symbolism, interpretations, and in-depth significance.

That is why, I think, the wall is there. If right from the start we see a few of these lights and start interpreting them as great spiritual visions, we may be carried away.

Therefore, nature has taken care to build this wall so that first of all we become a formed individual being.

Sri Aurobindo adds,

At the same time our consciousness has to defend its egocentric individualisation, not only against its own deeper self of oneness and infinity, but against the cosmic infinite...

This is a second wall that protects us but also keeps us away from the cosmos around, just as the first wall keeps us away from the inner worlds. We are sandwiched between the outer cosmos and the inner infinity. We feel comfortable confined to our individuality, and that allows us to grow. When

a new tree is planted, we put around it a little fence so that goats and cows won't come and eat it up. In the same way we want to be protected from the invasion of things outside. We shut ourselves within our ego – myself, my family, my people – and tell others you may come to my house only after calling and taking an appointment. This is the wall protecting us from outer influences. Our outer nature is not limited due to chance.

It is a limitation brought about by nature in its design of the evolution of the individual. It is not a simple process that children are born and then you give them some food

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and send them to school and they grow up – it is not as simple as it seems to be. There is an entire cosmic nature that is working in a child. They grow up not only because of parents, relatives and teachers; there is a cosmic energy working it out and it is beautiful.

Fortunately, there are a few crevices and openings in these walls. There are the five gates of senses. We are enclosed in these walls but we need to be in contact with the world. My body is matter and I need to get food to maintain it. We need to communicate, we cannot be isolated islands. These means of communication are the senses. We have a few crevices to look into the subliminal and the five senses to look outward into the cosmos. But what happens? Sri Aurobindo says,

...its defence against the invasion of the cosmic energy is equally insecure and partial: in spite of its notice of no-entry without permission...

It's a beautiful phrase. He says that the senses allow us not only to go out into the world, the world also gets into us. In the West, it is mandatory to take prior appointment with anyone if we want to meet. We need their permission to go to them. But in India, anybody can walk into our house anytime. Even if we write 'private, no-entry', people will come in. That is entry without permission; the world comes into us. When we go to a place, we see people, we mix with people, and we have kept some of those gates open, so the influences come in and we don't even know that we have been invaded. We are being invaded constantly. We may claim that these gates

are under my control but we are mistaken. The moment we open the gate number one to go out and get some food from the supermarket, the supermarket invades through the same gate. Sri Aurobindo says that we have these gates for

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* communication, but through the same gates the cosmos invades us. That is how we are influenced by what Sri Aurobindo calls the ‘circumconscient’. It is difficult to protect ourselves from the invasion of the world.

Among Shakespeare’s plays, I have always liked the scene in which Macbeth returns from a battle. He has had a great victory, and when he is returning to his kingdom he encounters three witches. These witches are whispering among themselves about how they can influence Macbeth. They find it the most opportune moment to speak with Macbeth. Why is it the right moment? When we feel we have a victory, when I feel I am a hero, when I feel I am invincible, the invisible forces are there waiting for this moment because you are off guard.

In sadhana too the pitfalls come when we think we have succeeded most, that is when we are most vulnerable.

That is why they tell us never to be boastful and say, I am a great sadhak, I have done this and I have opened myself to the Mother etc. It is because the back door is open to the Devil too at the same time. When Macbeth comes closer, the witches provoke his ego – “Look Macbeth, you are such a great hero, why should the king rule over you? He is a fool, you are the real king.” This is not the exact quotation though. Macbeth does not accept this suggestion but a seed of ambition, has been planted in him. It is not just in spirituality that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo warn us to be aware of the invisible forces, but Shakespeare plays upon this idea very beautifully in Macbeth.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

...it must maintain some means of communication; it has too to make excursions out of its wall of ego and wall of self-restriction within the body in order to cater

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for those needs which the not-self can supply to it: it must learn to know in some way all that surrounds it so as to be able to master it and make it as far as possible a servant to the individual and collective human life and ego...

We have ambition and desire, we want to master the outside world. We have kept the inner world closed, and the inner is the real influence that can really master the outer, but the ego says, 'I am Macbeth, I can become a great king' because the three witches have put that into his mind.

The body provides our consciousness with the gates of the senses through which it can establish the necessary communication and means of observation and action upon the world, upon the not-self outside it; the mind uses these means and invents others that supplement them and it succeeds in establishing some construction, some system of knowledge which serves its immediate purpose or its general will to master partially and use this huge alien environmental existence or deal with it where it cannot master it.

The body has been given the five senses and the mind adds to them and invents others. That is the capacity of the mind. It can add imagination and say, "Wow, if I go to a hill-station, I can enjoy a lovely, cool weather".

Recently I went to Europe thinking it will be a wonderful escape from the Indian heat, but I was hit by the worst heat there at 35o. We may add imagination thinking, I will be in a beautiful place, but, things can be just the reverse. The mind brings in imagination, memory, recognition, associations to help us enjoy and conquer our environment.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* But the knowledge it gains is objective; it is mainly a knowledge of the surface of things or of what is just below the

surface, pragmatic, limited and insecure.

The mind goes out to conquer. There is popular Latin phrase: ‘ *Veni, Vidi, Vici.* ’ – ‘I came, I saw, I conquered’.

But the truth is that: ‘I went, I saw, I was conquered. ’

We do not conquer, we get conquered by these universal forces. It is the false ego which says, ‘I conquered’. It is all objective knowledge and we have not really got much of anything. It is “pragmatic, limited and insecure”.

Its defence against the invasion of the cosmic energy is equally insecure and partial: in spite of its notice of no entry without permission, it is subtly and invisibly invaded by the world, enveloped by the not-self and moulded by it; its thought, its will, its emotional and its life energy are penetrated by waves and currents of thought, will, passion, vital impacts, forces of all kinds from others and from universal Nature.

You see the strong words he uses: we get “penetrated by waves and currents ...” We are so insecure, it is not just one thing influencing us – there are waves of thoughts and passions and emotions and vital impacts and forces.

When we say that we are really nothing in this universe, it is really true. The idea that I am somebody big is a false thinking. In spite of saying, “do not enter my being”, there are waves and currents which enter without our being aware of them.

Its wall of defence becomes a wall of obscurity which prevents it from knowing all this interaction; it knows only what comes through the gates of sense or through mental perceptions of which it cannot be sure or through what it can infer or build up from

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its gathered sense data; all the rest is to it a blank of nescience.

We admire Sri Aurobindo for his absolute clarity.

There is no mincing of words and he detects the subtlest movements. He says, when these things come into our being, we do not know it at all. Instead of having a wall that stops the outside things from coming in, on the contrary, this wall simply obscures my vision so I cannot see what is coming in. Forces come in through waves and currents and occupy our being every minute, occupy the mind and the body and the vital, including ailments and illnesses and diseases. All of this is nothing but an invasion of the outside forces. When these forces come into our being, he says, we only know it through mental perceptions and the gates of senses. A mother might scold the child saying: “you got wet in the rain, so you got a cold this evening”. But she does not know that when the child went into the rain, some vital force came into him! We do not know about these forces; we know only what the senses tell us. He says, “...all the rest is to it a blank of nescience.” We are in absolute ignorance of what is happening to us.

This is the greatest paradox, I think, in our life. We think that we are the master of our decisions, that it is we who have decided, but due to our ignorance, something else is constantly pushing us to act – both negatively and positively – both the Divine and the Devil. Both are acting, and all depends on which gate is wider in us, the Divine gate or the Devil gate.

The next point to understand is what lies behind the first wall. We have seen that the second wall is quite open to all the invasions of the outer world and that it only obstructs our awareness. But it is very important to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* know what is behind this first wall because it is only by contacting the subliminal part of in that we can stop the invasions from outside. Sri Aurobindo says that,

...the awakening to our inner realities, imposes itself as the prior necessity because it is by this inward self-finding that the second, —the cosmic self-finding, —

can become entirely possible...

We have to first go within and then only can we master the without. Otherwise, with our mental will, with our vital decision, with our physical changes in life, nothing happens. You know, people want to change their lives suddenly on the 15th of August. But nothing happens. Most of us who are old enough to realise that all the external dates and decisions have little worth, because the forces are not coming from within. The outer part of us says, I will plug this hole, I will plug that gate, I will shut this door, but nothing happens. This invasion is so big that nothing can stop it except the inner being. Therefore, it becomes a dire necessity to know this inner being.

But the first of these two movements, the awakening to our inner realities, imposes itself as the prior necessity because it is by this inward self-finding that the second,

—the cosmic self-finding, —can become entirely possible... All that we are on the outside is indeed conditioned by what is within, occult, in our inner depths and recesses; it is thence that come the secret initiatives, the self-effective formations; our inspirations, our intuitions, our life-motives, our mind's preferences, our will's selections are actuated from there, —in so far as they are not shaped or influenced by an insistence, equally hidden, of a surge of cosmic impacts: but the use we make of these emergent powers and these influences

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is conditioned, largely determined and, above all, very much limited by our outermost nature. It is then the knowledge of this inner initiating self coupled with the accurate perception of the outer instrumental self and the part played by both of them in our building that we have to discover.

That is the conclusion. First, let us contact this inner initiating self. We need to remember these words:

‘initiating self’. It is not just an inner self, it is a self that initiates. The entire subliminal consciousness, what we call the ‘inner-self’, is the initiator. What does it initiate or start? Our inspirations, our intuitions, our life-motives, our mind's preferences, our will's selections – they all start in the subliminal. Suddenly you may say, “I have got an inspiration, I am

going to write a poem” – the idea, the language, the concept, the imagery, the will to write comes to you, and you do not know why. Somebody may ask you, “why did you use this image?” You will not be able to tell. All of that has come from the subliminal into your vital, into your physical, into your mental. The subliminal is the ‘initiating self’ – that captures the whole characteristic of the ‘subliminal’.

If we imagine a diagram of concentric circles — the

‘outer being’, the ‘inner being’ also called the ‘subliminal being’, and the ‘innermost being’ which is composed of the ‘Annamaya Purusha’, the ‘Pranamaya Purusha’ and the ‘Manomaya Purusha’. And right at the centre is the

‘inmost being’, the ‘psychic being’. The subliminal has lot of space around it. The outer being is a small layer, but the inner being, the subliminal, occupies the largest space. You may say, “why psychic being is not the largest?” Yes, the psychic being is the most important, no doubt about it, but unfortunately most of us are not

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* under the influence of the psychic being, we are quite far away. What is closest to the outer being is the subliminal; it is the next chamber. That is why we call the ‘subliminal’

the most important part, because we are constantly under its influence. We say ‘constantly’, but remember we did see earlier that its influence comes through the wall’s crevices, it is only a little of it that comes through.

There is sufficient infusion of the subliminal through these little crevices into our mind, life and body that it is able to guide us in our life. We may create a beautiful painting, a song, or a lovely design with the little that comes from the subliminal. Imagine if the subliminal crevices became big openings or the whole wall was broken down! Then life would become a magnificently life of creative.

We can compare it with a mango. The biggest part is the pulp, the skin is hardly two mm, and inside, we have the seed. Our being is like that. Our mind, vital and physical of which we are so proud of, all this is like the skin of the fruit. The main part of our being is the subliminal, the pulp of the fruit. The psychic being is the seed. Rebirth is like sowing the seed in the ground again. The psychic being is like the seed which can take rebirth. The Mother explains that we human beings are like the fruit, the subliminal is the pulp of our being. That comparison opened up my understanding – that this is the importance of the subliminal, and this is something that psychologists have not discovered. Freud and Jung seem to have dipped a bit into the subliminal, but mainly into the subconscious part.

Let us now look at the different characteristics, powers, and functioning of the subliminal. Sri Aurobindo writes, For a larger mental being is there within us, a larger

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inner vital being, even a larger inner subtle-physical being other than our surface body-consciousness, and by entering into this or becoming it, identifying ourselves with it, we can observe the springs of our thoughts and feelings, the sources and motives of our action, the operative energies that build up our surface personality.

This subliminal consciousness consists of the subtle physical being, the inner vital being and the inner mental being. There are these three inner chambers corresponding to our gross physical being, our outer vital being and our outer mental being. They are subtle

– *sukshma*. What do they do? We know what the outer physical, mental and vital do, but these outer parts of ourselves are constantly under the influence of the subliminal. Outside of us the whole cosmos is influencing our outer being, and this whole subliminal consciousness is also influencing our outer being. This outer mind, vital and physical is a victim sandwiched between the ‘outer cosmic infinity’ and the ‘inner subliminal infinity’. When we say, ‘I have a bright and creative idea, actually I have received all these from the subliminal. Our outer mind, vital and physical are only receiving stations. There is nothing original about them.

Those great ancient sculptors and artists never signed their names under the Ajanta and Ellora paintings because they knew it was not theirs. Today, we make a little sketch and we want to sign it, print it and distribute it for all to see. That is our ignorance. The higher we go in consciousness the more we understand that it is not we, but something else has worked through us.

This ‘subtle physical’, ‘subtle mind’ and ‘subtle vital’ are the springs of our deeper thoughts, feelings and actions,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* they are like fountain springs pouring them out from a deep inner source. The subliminal is closer to our psychic being so the creativity, the divine impulses, feelings, thoughts come from within. Sri Aurobindo would say, “...

they are the springs of our thoughts, feelings, sources and motives of our action.”

This chapter has been fundamental in my understanding psychology and yoga in the light of Sri Aurobindo. When you say, “I want to do Integral Yoga” what does it mean? Have I gained contact with my psychic being? “No, but I am meditating every day, I am going to the Ashram every day.” All that is good, but that is still my skin-deep personality. He tells us to go deeper into the source of our personality, into the motives of our action and the operative energies that build up our surface personality. Into a single sentence he has packed so much meaning! The subliminal has the operative energies that enable my mind to write good poetry, to understand deep philosophy, to understand difficult mathematics; it provides not only the understanding but also the energy to express. Why is it that sometimes we get into a depression? It is because this inner wall to the subliminal gets completely blocked up; there is not even a crevice that it can go through.

At such times we may pray to the Mother. There are different ways of understanding how the Mother works.

There is one Divine Shakti to whom we pray, but the Divine Shakti does not say always ‘*tathastu*’ and there is a miracle of light going directly from her

into us. The Mother opens up our own inner sources. She is here within us, she is the psychic being. The Mother is not always outside of us. We may feel grace coming from her eyes, that is fine, wonderful! But the Mother not only

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enters our external being from outside, she wants us to open to our own divinity within us. She unleashes the psychic sources within.

Let us not think of the Mother only as the external divinity and personality. That is why when in the early seventies, once I had written something of this nature:

“Mother, now that you have withdrawn to your room, we have no connection with you”. Just a year before we used to see her in the Sports Ground. When we were wrestling in the sand-pit, she would sit near the doorstep and watch two young kids wrestling. Can you imagine that Aditi comes down and watches two young boys wrestling or boxing? Our only prayer to Mother was let me not be beaten too hard! But it didn't help me, I still got good jabs and some people even got knocked out while Mother was sitting there! But she was there. It was a kind of grace to see the Mother everywhere. When I wrote the letter she responded something to this effect; “Now develop the habit of seeing me within you. That is the real sadhana.

We have to begin to see her here as the psychic being.

What she does is that she opens up the knots of our own inner resources so that we become really spiritual.

I would not say that just worshipping the Mother outwardly is spiritual; to contact the Mother inwardly is the real contact. The outer Mother is wonderful. She is the occasion, she is the Event in evolution who has brought down a new manifestation. But what happens after five centuries or five thousand years? Perhaps people may not even know who Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were. But the Atman will ever be known.

Millions of years have gone, but it has remained the same.

This Atman, somebody called it ‘Sri Krishna’ said – ‘I am within you’. And now, Mother says – ‘I am within you’. Sri

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Rama said – ‘I am within you’, Christ said – ‘I am within you’. After five thousand years, it may get a new name.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will come in new forms.

My understanding is that we should find the Divine within. That is why the Mother emphasised that must try to seek her within us, because she is there.”

Remember that famous sentence, “Go deep inside the temple, and you will find me there”? As a child of maybe 13 or 14 years I took up that sentence and made a painting, the very first painting in my life and it is still here with me. Amita Sen, who was my English teacher, sent my painting to the Mother, and the Mother gave her blessings on that. That was the first sentence that had really touched me: “Go deep inside the temple, and you will find me there”. I did not know about the subliminal and all that, but, somehow, I made seven steps into the being and then the seven steps landed into the psychic being, and there I said, Mother is there. This is where the source is – the Divine – in all of us.

Unfortunately, as the Upanishads say, the self-existence has pierced the doors of sense outward. Sri Aurobindo says that this subliminal has the operative energy in us. Why are the yogins so energetic? They do not eat *rasagollas*, *samosas*, and *biryani*! They get this source of energy from within. If we do not want to have the psychic being, at least we can have the energy, to become a greater poet, a better businessman, a nobler person living upon earth in every aspect. Enough has been said about the outer physical, mental, and vital parts of us, now we must go into our inner personality.

For we discover and can know the inner being that secretly thinks and perceives in us, the vital being that secretly feels and acts upon life through us, the subtle-

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physical being that secretly receives and responds to the contacts of things through our body and its organs.

It is a magnificent thing that we can go inward from the gross body to the subtle body and from there to the subtle physical purusha, and from there to the psychic being and the soul. Similarly we can go within from the outer vital or outer mind through the inner levels to the psychic being.

So there are several gates we can go through to reach the Divine within us.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

We find that the contradictions and the struggle of our surface consciousness are largely due to the contrary or mutually discordant tendencies of our mental, vital and physical parts opposing and unreconciled with each other and these again to the discord of many different inner possibilities of our being and even of different personalities on each level in us which are behind the intermixed disposition and differing tendencies of our surface nature. But while on the surface their action is mixed together, confused and conflicting, here in our depths they can be seen and worked upon in their independent and separate nature and action and a harmonization of them by the mental being in us, leader of the life and body, —or, better, by the central psychic entity, —is not so difficult, provided we have the right psychic and mental will in the endeavour:...

On the outer level of the mind, vital, physical we have no harmony, they are all quarrelling with each other. But on the subliminal level, he says, there could be a greater harmony. However, the moment some people think of the great capacities and possibilities of the inner being they want to go within so that they can have more power. They

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* have a kind of intention to have greater power to control others. Instead of trying to control themselves with the power, the first thing they want to do is to control others.

So Sri Aurobindo warns us:

...for if it is with the vital-ego motive that we make the entry into the subliminal being, it may result in serious dangers and disaster or at the least an exaggeration of the ego, self-affirmation and desire, and enlarged and more powerful ignorance instead of an enlarged and more powerful knowledge.

He warns us not to enter the subliminal with any kind of ego-motive. This is something that we need to know.

This is where the false gurus gain power and become popular. They gain entry into the subliminal, they gain a little more power than you and me, and the first thing is, they have this vital ego that likes to have control over others, and that leads to a great disaster for the yoga. In yoga what are we trying to do? To decrease the ego. If we have an ambition to control others or have follower then we are working towards increasing our ego. That is why Sri Aurobindo warns us not to enter the subliminal with a false motive, with a vital egoistic ambition. That is also perhaps why the Mother wants us not to try to become gurus in Integral Yoga.

In the next paragraph he says,

Knowledge by identity, on the surface a vague inherent sense of our self-existence and a partial identification with our inner movements, can here deepen and enlarge itself from that indistinct essential perception and limited sensation to a clear and direct intrinsic awareness of the whole entity within: we can enter into possession of our whole conscious mental being

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and life being and arrive at a close intimacy of direct penetrating and enveloping contact with the total movements of our mental and vital energy; we meet clearly and closely and are, —but more freely and understandingly, —all the becomings of ourself, the whole self-expression of the Purusha on the present levels of our nature.

The 'knowledge by identity' which on the surface is limited to an inherent sense of our self-existence can here deepen and enlarge itself. We spoke earlier about this

'knowledge by identity', that our experience of it is limited to the knowledge that 'I am'. I know that I exist. This is a knowledge that nobody can challenge. But if somebody asks you, "who is this 'I'?" it is difficult to answer. You may say, "I am sorry – that is a difficult question – give me 24 hours." I would reply, "I will give you 24 days to find out who is that 'I'." Then you start wondering. The

'I' – is it my mind? Is it my heart? Is it my body? The real problem comes with this simple question "Who is this

'I'?" Being a good philosopher, you might say: "Existence,

'Sat' means existence, so 'I am' means I am Existence".

When we get into the subliminal we will know that we are not the gross physical, the gross vital, the gross mental, but something deeper. We have greater clarity.

Not that we find the psychic being immediately but at least we are surer, clearer about the psychic being. This is one the advantages of coming in contact with the subliminal.

All the movements of the surface being can be seen with a complete detachment, but also with a direct sight in the consciousness by which the self-delusions and mistakes of self of our outer consciousness can be dispelled; there is a keener mental vision, a clearer

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and more accurate mental feeling of our subjective becoming, a vision which at once knows, commands and controls the whole nature.

I marvel at this paragraph about the subliminal because it is an extremely practical thing that Sri Aurobindo is suggesting. We have read so much about the Integral Yoga, but this chapter has revealed the pragmatics of the Yoga. We have talked about aspiration, rejection, surrender, honesty, and faith, but here we discover how to get them the solution is to go within into the subliminal.

He says that there we can find “ a keener mental vision, a clearer and more accurate mental feeling of our subjective becoming, a vision which at once knows, commands and controls the whole nature.” (If you are in the inner zone of consciousness) when our near and dear ones are in trouble, we do not get emotional and panicky.

We are detached. When we are detached, we can have the right understanding not when we are attached! Our attachment confuses our thinking. It is like we have “a retina problem” in our understanding. When we have a retina problem, we do not see a straight line all the lines are bent. They are all crooked. Attachment gives that crookedness to our understanding. We never see a thing straight. That is why Sri Aurobindo calls it “a keener mental vision”; This distancing makes the lines straight; it gives clarity of understanding.

On the other hand, if the mental and the psychic parts are weak and the vital strong and unruly, power is increased by entry into the inner vital, but discrimination and detached vision are deficient; ...

By detachment we get a keener understanding of the situation; by going into the inner vital, we get power. This power can be used to control our unruly outer vital being.

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By going into the subtle vital we can gain the strength to control our outer vital. The mind has no power over the vital. The inner vital gives power, the inner mental gives clarity, a keener vision.

In the next paragraph a new idea is introduced. We have seen already that the subliminal can have control over our outer being. But now we will see

that the ‘subtle physical’ is also open to the worlds beyond: But the subliminal being has also a larger direct contact with the world; ...

In fact, that is one of the most interesting capacities of the ‘subtle physical’. The ‘occult worlds’ penetrate into the

‘subtle physical’. These ‘occult worlds’ are connected with the ‘subtle physical’, and from there, they get connected with the ‘outer being’. The most important thing about the ‘subtle physical’ is that it has a universal contact. My outer being sees its immediate environment. If I am in Pondicherry, I know about this place, but not about the other parts of the country or the world. My body has its limitations, it knows only as far as my senses can go. But, the ‘subtle physical’ is universal; this is the advantage, but at the same time it is a disadvantage, and we will see how.

Sri Aurobindo says:

...it is not confined like the surface Mind to the interpretation of sense-images and sense-vibrations supplemented by the mental and vital intuition and the reason. There is indeed an inner sense in the subliminal nature, a subtle sense of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste; but these are not confined to the creation of images of things belonging to the physical environment, —they can present to the consciousness visual, auditory, tactual and other images and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* vibrations of things beyond the restricted range of the physical senses or belonging to other planes or spheres of existence.

That is magnificent! The subliminal has also got subtle senses of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste.

Long back, my father told me a story. Once somebody entered a prayer-hall where the devotees sang bhajans to Sri Krishna. Suddenly, the person had a very strong smell of jasmine flowers, but there were no jasmines at all in the hall. These are flowers associated with Sri Krishna; he would wear a big

garland of jasmine. It was the subtle smell of these flowers. If I want to get this smell, I have to get a jasmine flower. That is the physical image or vibration, but the subtle senses can sense things even without these external symbols or objects. There was one Army officer who it seems went to meditate in Sri Aurobindo's room and heard temple bells ringing.

Some part of his subtle being had heard the temple-bells.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

...they can present to the consciousness visual, auditory, tactual and other images and vibrations...

My understanding – I may be wrong – is that *pranayama* may take us towards the subtle physical by which our subtle senses develop. Sri Aurobindo said that after he started doing *pranayama* he developed a great flow of inspiration for poetry. The danger is that people often mistake the subliminal for the psychic. They may say, “The Mother has given me a great vision”, or “I heard bells, it is the Mother who came to me” etc. Let us not bring in the Mother with every small experience. You have had that vision, or heard that sound, because your subliminal was open. It is not necessarily that the Mother is showering upon you her blessings, her visions etc.

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We may see in dreams some images or beautiful lights, but let us be realistic and not claim these to be psychic experiences. I also used to have lots of visions of gods and goddesses and used to write to the Mother about all of them and she told me that I had those visions because at that point my subliminal was open but it has nothing to do with true spirituality. Let's not call ourselves spiritual because of these visions. They are mostly openings of the subliminal consciousness.

It is the subliminal in reality and not the outer mind that possesses the powers of telepathy, clairvoyance, second sight and other supernormal faculties whose occurrence in the surface consciousness is due to openings or rifts in the wall erected by the outer personality's unseeing labour of

individualization and interposed between itself and the inner domain of our being.

These experiences can come when there are rifts or openings in the wall separating us from the subliminal being. The little hair-cracks have become more open.

Then, as he says, we may get telepathy, clairvoyance, second sight or other supernormal faculties. But it has nothing to do with spirituality. These things are natural and normal to the subliminal. Let us not hype our own spiritual status. Because we have learnt a bit of Sri Aurobindo's terminology, we immediately convert these experiences into the Mother's grace or Sri Aurobindo's special blessings. May their blessings be on us, but let us not inflate our own ego. Let us be simple little children of the Mother. Here are Sri Aurobindo's own words about this:

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* It should be noted, however, that owing to this complexity the action of the subliminal sense can be confusing or misleading especially if it is interpreted by the outer mind to which the secret of its operations is unknown and its principles of sign-construction and symbolic figure-languages foreign...

We do not know anything about the subliminal so we start interpreting it by the outer mind – that is the danger.

He concludes: "...a greater inner power of intuition, tact, discrimination is needed to judge and interpret rightly its images and experiences".

Even, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have known such people who thought they had reached the overmind and Supermind. We must understand that these experiences are little lamps on the path, and the real Light is much higher.

Till now we have discussed about the subliminal. We have gone through a few of the characteristics and powers of the subliminal, and now we shall see a few more of these unique features. We have seen that the subliminal is

a source of our higher thoughts and feelings , that it is a source of our deeper energies, and that through it we can contact the occult worlds. Further, Sri Aurobindo says, But more important is the power of the subliminal to enter into a direct contact of consciousness with other consciousness or with objects, to act without other instrumentation, by an essential sense inherent in its own substance, by a direct mental vision, by a direct feeling of things, even by a close envelopment and intimate penetration and a return with the contents of what is enveloped or penetrated, by a direct intimation or impact on the substance of mind itself, not through

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outward signs or figures, —a revealing intimation or a self-communicating impact of thoughts, feelings, forces. It is by these means that the inner being achieves an immediate, intimate and accurate spontaneous knowledge of persons, of objects of the occult and to us intangible energies of world-Nature that surround us and impinge upon our own personality, physicality, mind-force and life-force.

We have seen that our knowledge through the instrumentation of the senses is very limited and incapacitated, but the subliminal has a direct contact with objects as well as with persons. This then helps us to understand the powers of telepathy and clairvoyance.

The subliminal has a great capacity to enter into contact of consciousness with other consciousnesses.

Mark the words he uses to describe this: "...by a direct feeling of things even by a close envelopment and intimate penetration and return with the contents of what is enveloped or penetrated..." This is something extraordinary about the subliminal. It seems to be similar to the supramental consciousness in a way that when it contacts an object, it does not just see it from the outside. The outside is what our senses perceive; our senses cannot see what is within an object. The subliminal consciousness is able to go within things and get the knowledge of their inner contents. It is not yet 'knowledge by identity' like in the supermind, but there is a directness of contact and that is of immense value. He says that "It is by these means that

the inner being achieves an immediate, intimate and accurate spontaneous knowledge of persons, of objects, of the occult and to us intangible energies...”

We may have seen this in the case of astrologers. There

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* are some capable ones to know what is in your mind, they can read them and spell them out even before we utter them. Or they may ask you to write down your questions on a piece of paper, put them in an envelope, and then they themselves tell you the questions you wrote down.

This is nothing spiritual. We should be very clear in our understanding that spirituality is far from all these things.

These are faculties of the subliminal consciousness. Just as I can see this hall, and I can see the garden, so there is an inner vision, an inner sight which, as Sri Aurobindo says so beautifully, returns with the contents of what is enveloped or penetrated. These faculties can be cultivated and they seem magical to us. But they are within the purview of human capacities, it is only that we normally do not cultivate this part of the inner consciousness that has these faculties.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

In our surface mentality we are sometimes aware of a consciousness that can feel or know the thoughts and inner reactions of others or become aware of objects or happenings without any observable sense-intervention or otherwise exercise powers supernormal to our ordinary capacity; but these capacities are occasional, rudimentary, vague. Their possession is proper to our concealed subliminal self and, when they emerge, it is by a coming to the surface of its powers or operations.

What is supernormal to us is absolutely normal to the subliminal. If we can break down or pierce this wall between this the outer mind and the inner consciousness then this inner knowledge of the subliminal would become

annexed to our total consciousness. With our normal human nature we cannot understand other people. We have no way of knowing what others are

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thinking or feeling, or what reactions or responses they will make. We can only acquire a general knowledge of the human mind by the habitual outer signs of its inner movements. When we observe a person a few times, we see the patterns of his responding, acting, and reacting and then we say, this person thinks and feels like this, purely by the external signs. But this, Sri Aurobindo says, are “summary judgement”, it is not really a true knowledge of the person. That’s why, Sri Aurobindo concludes, that –

Human beings therefore live as strangers to each other, at best tied by a very partial sympathy and mutual experience; we do not know enough, do not know as well as we know ourselves, —and that itself is little, —

even those nearest to us.

Leave alone knowing an object or an animal or a bird or a flower, we do not even know our fellow human beings who have the same structure, the same mind and same body etc. We hardly know each other and have only the little contact that we can gain or infer through our senses. It is very little compared to what we can do with the subliminal. Once we are open to the subliminal, we can contact the occult forces. Black magicians do this, they contact the occult forces and try to utilise them, but that, in fact, is the most dangerous game. They are somehow connected with their subliminal consciousness and can connect to the occult forces and use them to influence other human beings. That is a negative use of these forces, but on the positive side the subliminal consciousness can directly become aware of the thoughts and feelings of other people. Sri Aurobindo continues: But when we grow conscious in these subliminal parts, that brings consciousness also of all this interaction

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and subjective interchange and intermingling, with the result that we need no longer be involuntary subjects of their impact and consequence, but can accept or reject, defend ourselves and isolate. At the same time, our action on others need no longer be ignorant or involuntary and often unintentionally harmful; it can be a conscious help, a luminous interchange and a fruitful accommodation, and approach towards an inner understanding or union, not as now a separative association with only a limited intimacy or unity, restricted by much non-understanding and often burdened or endangered by a mass of misunderstanding, of mutual misinterpretation and error.

We live much on the superficial, outer level, but once we go a little deeper, just behind this veil of the outer consciousness, the region into which we enter is the subliminal. When we grow conscious of the subliminal, we become conscious of “all this interaction and subjective interchange and intermingling, with the result that we need no longer be involuntary subjects of their impact and consequence”. This is where we can gain control. Once we go into the subliminal, we are open to the other forces. As we are now, we do not know which forces are influencing us. We are living in our ‘ego self’

with our outer mind, vital and physical. We do not know what forces may be attacking us from behind. But if we can get into this subliminal, if we can become conscious of the subliminal, then we can control these forces and stop them from influencing us. These occult forces can be anything – influences of illness, an attack of anger, a great passion, or lust etc.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would tell us to ‘live within’. Deep ‘within’, as we have seen, is the ‘*chaitya*

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*purusha*’ or the psychic being. But if we cannot go that far within, which may not be very easy, perhaps we can take one step behind into the subliminal and live within there; already the world would change for us. We would become more conscious of other people. I could know your thoughts, know if you have an ill will for me. I will not have to fight with you; I will

see your motivation and quietly avoid you. As Sri Aurobindo says very distinctly,

“it has not only the impact and consequence, but can accept or reject, defend ourselves or isolate”. We can isolate these forces, stop them there itself, and we can allow the good forces to come in. We can get beautiful inspirations of poetry. Poetry and all great art come from the inner worlds. I can allow poetic lines to come in, but stop feelings of anger and lust and all that is negative to invade me. We have a choice to accept or not. If we lived in the subliminal our life would change so much.

This is the beginning of the spiritual life, because we are beginning to go within and not simply react to things.

The Mother would tell us, “do not react, respond”. To

‘respond’ we have to step back from the situation and consider it objectively. We have to go within, and if we go deep enough into the subliminal we can control the situation. There are great yogins who can within a split second go into the psychic being, but for us common people just to go within into the subliminal is already a great step. If we do so there would be a great advantage because, as he says, we can accept, reject, defend, isolate.

At the same time, our action on others need no longer be ignorant or involuntary and often unintentionally harmful. It is already a higher living. We can protect ourselves from others, because the world also is influencing us. We can protect ourselves from this world as well as from the occult worlds. A second advantage is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that we can avoid hurting others. I may not really wish to harm you, but because I have been attacked by an occult force I may become angry and in anger utter some things which hurts your feelings. This brings unnecessary disharmony, discord and violence because I am open to these wrong forces. If I can live in my subliminal consciousness, then these wrong forces can be avoided.

Our life would become more harmonious with others, we could consciously be a help to others, have a more

“luminous interchange and fruitful accommodation”, and move towards an inner understanding or union.

We often hear big talks about achieving world unity, human unity, but on the practical level, how do we do that? We have a great experiment going on in Auroville itself with its ideal of human unity. If we go about that just with our minds, feelings, and body, this ideal cannot be really fruitful, successful, or realisable. Sri Aurobindo uses a wonderful term here, there comes an ‘inner understanding or union’. We say that through love there can be union. But human love is usually very narrow and selfish, it always expects a return for its love. These are its normal limitations, but once we get into the subliminal, a truer understanding comes.

At the mental level, once we understand a person, our liking for the person increases. Liking has something to do with the clarity of the understanding of the person. If I understand why something wrong has happened, then I do not become angry any more. A poet has called it “the peace of understanding”. When there is no understanding, there is no peace, no love, but rather there is disturbance and violence of feeling. The subliminal brings us an understanding. I begin to know inwardly your thoughts, feel your emotions and intentions. I can see you did not

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mean to harm me. Your intentions were good. When I understand a person’s motivations, then my love for the person increases and the sense of unity grows. This is why Sri Aurobindo says, the subliminal brings “a luminous interchange and a fruitful accommodation”.

In the outer mental consciousness we have “a mass of misunderstanding, mutual misinterpretation”. We form clubs, associations, trusts and societies but it is only a thin outer envelope, it does not bring any sense of unity. In every association, every circle, every society, we see many problems. Why? Because our mental consciousness is a mass of “misunderstanding and mutual misinterpretation”. Sri Aurobindo tells us that this human endeavour

for unity does not lead us to true understanding because the mind itself disallows it.

He places a mirror in front of us to tell us, that what we are trying to do is a fallacy, almost a paradox. We want to unite, but we have no understanding. So what is the solution?

For any problems to be solved in any association, it is extremely important that we step within. That means, start your association with a good meditation, and don't do it only as a lip-service for three minutes. Allow some time to go deep within into the subliminal. Meditation could be of great help in every meeting. At least some of the people may try to dip down into the subliminal where the doors of understanding may open up. And, once these doors are opened the meeting could be useful.

Further, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Equally important would be the change in our dealings with the impersonal forces of the world that surround us. These we know only by their results, by the little that

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Among them, it is mostly the physical world-forces of which we have some knowledge, but we live constantly in the midst of a whirl of unseen mind-forces and life-forces of which we know nothing, we are not even aware of their existence. To all this unseen movement and action the subliminal inner consciousness can open our awareness, for it has a knowledge of it by direct contact, by inner vision, by a psychic sensitiveness; but at present it can only enlighten our obtuse superficiality and outwardness by unexplained warnings, premonitions, attractions and repulsions, ideas, suggestions, obscure intuitions, the little it can get through imperfectly to the surface.

Now he takes up how to deal with impersonal physical forces and occult forces. The physical world-forces we know, there are storms, earthquakes,

etc. When there is a calamity, people rush there with help and money and aids. Those things we can control to some extent because we know the consequences. When the Tsunami came, people died, property was lost. Knowing the consequences, we acted. The action is on the physical level; there are deaths which we can see which makes us feel sad. But Sri Aurobindo warns us about these mind-forces and life-forces of which we know nothing. For example, consider the life-forces or mind-forces behind Jihadis, terrorists. It is a tremendous vital-force which is killing people. If we recollect what happened after the recent London bombings or Mumbai blasts or September 11 incident, people were petrified. We no more feel that we can walk safely in the streets. We never know from where the next bomb is going to explode. Sri Aurobindo says that all these vital-forces that are coming into us,

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we have no control over them, we have no knowledge of them, we are not even aware of their existence.

To all this unseen movement and action the subliminal inner consciousness can open our awareness, for it has a knowledge of it by direct contact, by inner vision, by a psychic sensitiveness; but at present it can only enlighten...

If some of the police force which was sent to protect the people could be trained to enter into this subliminal consciousness, if some citizens had access to the subliminal, they could say “there is this kind of a danger that is approaching, we have to prepare for this terrorist activity on this level”. It is not merely a question of putting the army or the police in place, we have to fight these forces on a different level. If people could get into this consciousness, that would be the solution. But humanity is still not ready for non-physical solutions. We think all solutions are there on the physical level. Fortunately, the subliminal still guides us through premonitions, warnings, attractions, repulsions, ideas, suggestions, obscure intuitions. It can give us a sense that this person is not right. There is no logic why we feel uneasy after meeting a person. We feel that he is not the right person; we have a kind of a sixth-sense that tells us something is wrong and we withdraw. We may also have premonitions in a dream. If we are a little

careful and aware and alive, we can sense these suggestions and intuitions and a little of the subliminal knowledge can get through imperfectly to the surface. The subliminal is constantly trying to guide us, if only we would catch those suggestions and guidance! However, to dip into the subliminal we must remain as quiet as possible. Premonitions come to us in dreams because in sleep the outer mind is suspended and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the subliminal comes forward. It is from the subliminal that these premonitions come. They can tell us about our future, sometimes very generally – that there may be some unspecified danger, or sometimes specifically, such as whom one should avoid and why to avoid them.

There is indeed a soul-personality, representative of this entity, already built up within us, which puts forward a fine psychic element in our natural being: but this finer factor in our normal make-up is not yet dominant and has only a limited action. Our soul is not the overt guide and master of our thought and acts; it has to rely on the mental, vital, physical instruments for self-expression and is constantly overpowered by our mind and life-force: but if once it can succeed in remaining in constant communion with its own larger occult reality, —and this can only happen when we go deep into our subliminal parts, —

it is no longer dependent, it can become powerful and sovereign, armed with an intrinsic spiritual perception of the truth of things and a spontaneous discernment which separates that truth from the falsehood of the Ignorance and Inconscience, distinguishes the divine and the undivine in the manifestation and so can be the luminous leader of our other parts of nature.

It is indeed when this happens that there can be the turning-point towards an integral transformation and an integral knowledge.

We have been talking about how the subliminal can protect us, can foresee the future, can give us more creative and dynamic energy, etc. But all that

can also be done on the level of psychic being itself. So, this is what we said at the end—the psychic being. We have been

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emphasising on the contact with the subliminal, but we should emphasise on the contact with the psychic being.

If one is a great sadhak and a yogin and who has done sadhana intensely, no doubt, he/she can go straight to the psychic being, but we are not yogis. Sri Aurobindo explains that it is very difficult for the psychic being to express itself because the mental, vital, and physical parts of our nature are not open, they are resistant. However much we may be wanting to be spiritual, aspiring to do Integral Yoga, we have our heart's emotions, our mind's preferences and ambitions, our physical tamas and habits always interfering with the inner voice or psychic voice. Can we really conquer them all in one day? No.

Sri Aurobindo tells unfortunately, this soul has to rely on these instruments for its self-expression and it is constantly overpowered by our mind and life-force. We do not let our soul act in us.

If the psychic being says “do not do this, it is a wrong action, you are going on the wrong path”, the vital replies

“no, no, I am quite OK; I still have a lot of time in front of me, let me go on this path – go to Bangkok, go to London, go to America, stay there fifteen years and then I can always come back to the Ashram. What is the hurry?

The Ashram will be here, I am not lost to the Ashram”.

This kind of vital suggestion of ambition etc. overpowers the psychic being. This is one thing that was a great advantage when we had the Mother in the physical. But she is also here now, if only we can contact her. When she was there in the physical, this overpowering of the mental and vital nature could not be there. We got the guidance not from the psychic being which we never knew, but from the Mother of the psychic being. She told us exactly what our vital should do, what our mental should do.

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* She even took into consideration our vital and mental overpowering.

By going to the subliminal, we can come into closer contact with the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo writes:

...but if once it can succeed in remaining in constant communion with its own larger occult reality ...

it is no longer dependent, it can become powerful and sovereign, armed with an intrinsic spiritual perception...

If we live within in our subliminal being then the resistance of the outer being will not bother us, and the soul can act directly, and from here we can express ourselves in the physical, mental, vital. The direct expression of the psychic on the outer being is difficult, we can first come closer to the psychic by opening up our subtle physical, subtle vital, and subtle mental beings, then the psychic can guide us strongly, powerfully, clearly.

He says,

...our soul is not the overt guide ... but if once it can succeed in remaining in constant communion with its own larger occult reality...

If we can open up our subliminal and remain in contact with it, it will become powerful and sovereign and distinguish the divine and the undivine and become the luminous leader of the other parts of our nature.

It is indeed when this happens that there can be the turning-point towards an integral transformation and an integral knowledge.

We know the philosophic terms such as “yoga of transformation” and “Integral Yoga”, but now we know that to really carry out those things it is imperative to get into

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the subliminal. It is imperative because it is there that the soul is active and from there influences our outer nature.

Sri Aurobindo concludes – this can be “turning-point towards an integral transformation and an integral knowledge”.

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Normally, our mental, vital and physical instruments seem to be more powerful than the psychic being in the beginning. It is because these outer instruments belong to the outer nature they have a better monopoly in this world and they block the influence of the psychic being.

If we go into the subliminal which is subtler than the outer nature and closer to the psychic influence only then change life is possible. It is a meeting point between the psychic and the outer nature. That is why it is of immense importance to our life, even our day-to-day life.

We have access to the subliminal, but as we saw, it is through those little grooves in the walls, but I think, if we can enlarge those entry points, it would help us our spiritual growth.

In the next paragraph, there is a complete shift in the analysis:

These are the dynamic functionings and pragmatic values of the subliminal cognition; but what concerns us in our present inquiry is to learn from its way of action the exact character of this deeper and larger cognition and how it is related to true knowledge.

We have read of the wonderful capacities of the subliminal but how is it useful to our understanding of the nature of knowledge? The chapter is titled

‘Knowledge by Identity’, so what is the relation between the subliminal and ‘knowledge’? He answers:

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Its main character is a knowledge by the direct contact of consciousness with its object or of consciousness with other consciousness; but in the end we discover that this power is an outcome of a secret knowledge by identity, a translation of it into a separative awareness of things. For as in the direct contact proper to our normal consciousness and surface cognition it is the meeting or friction of the living being with the existence outside it that awakens the spark of conscious knowledge, so here it is some contact that sets in action a pre-existent secret knowledge and brings it to the surface. For consciousness is one in the subject and the object, and in the contact of existence with existence this identity brings to light or awakens in the self the dormant knowledge of this other self outside it. But while this pre-existent knowledge comes up in the surface mind as a knowledge acquired, it arises in the subliminal as a thing seen, caught from within, remembered as it were, or, when it is fully intuitive, self-evident to the inner awareness; ...

This is a completely different idea now, but it is very essential to understand the process of knowledge. Let me take up the first part: he says that the subliminal has the capacity to have a direct contact with the object because it is a consciousness connecting with the consciousness in the object. That is how we could know what others feel, what others think, etc. What is interesting is that, as he says, “but in the end we discover that this power is an outcome of a secret knowledge by identity, a translation of it into a separative awareness of things.” How is it that in the subliminal I could know the inner contents of something? It is because the subliminal has the capacity of a ‘knowledge by identity’, or rather “a translation of it

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into a separative awareness of things”. This is something very crucial. What I understand is that all these capacities we have been speaking about, the supramental capacity of ‘knowledge by identity’, is already there within all the human beings in a modified form. In fact, the Mother clarifies that the characteristics of the supramental consciousness, that can be seen in the aspiring human mind are intuition, foreknowledge, knowledge by identity, subtle healing etc. I can read your thoughts or feelings or have the premonition of things that you will do, It is because I have the faculty to

identify myself with you. This is a translation of Supermind's 'knowledge by identity' into a separative awareness. Then he says, For as in the indirect contact proper to our normal consciousness and surface cognition it is the meeting or friction of the living being with the existence outside it that awakens the spark of conscious knowledge, so here it is some contact that sets in action a pre-existent secret knowledge... For consciousness is one in the subject and the object...

Our ancients have told us that all knowledge is within, but we do not understand how every knowledge can come from within. Sri Aurobindo says, "it is the meeting or friction of the living being with the existence outside it that awakens..." When the five senses come in contact with the outer world it awakens the knowledge within.

This is a very subtle and important idea. How do we get knowledge of a thing? If I sit at home with closed eyes and ears completely isolated, I cannot get knowledge. But if my senses are open and I see the object, I contact the object then this contact between the subject and object gives knowledge. The contact through the sense is important.

Sri Aurobindo also gives it another word, a 'friction'.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Even if I touch a chair extremely softly and lightly, there is still a friction. Friction means there is a rubbing of my consciousness with the chair's consciousness. I do not have to rub it hard to say that there is a friction. On the consciousness level this slightest touch also creates a friction because, there is a vibration in that touch and this friction results in knowledge. Subliminal knowledge, or intellectual knowledge that is dependent on the senses, is a result of the contact or friction between subject and object. If the knowledge is there within, why is it that we have to read *The Life Divine*, Bhagavad Gita, or a book of mathematics? The need is for the contact and friction.

Without the contact, this knowledge within cannot come out. When I read *The Life Divine* or the Bhagavad Gita, it is an occasion to contact the book,

not physically by touching, but mentally by a contact of my consciousness with the ideas expressed in the book.

That is why in the chapter “The Four Aids” in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo writes that the Shastra is within. The Upanishads, the Gita, *The Life Divine*

– all that is good as a starting point, but as Sri Krishna said beautifully, “when there is a flood, what is the use of a well?” A well is useful when there are no rains, but, when the place is flooded where is the need? Similarly, when we realise the Atman, we are “flooded” with knowledge. There is no need of the Bhagavad Gita, *The Life Divine*, etc., because we are filled by the original divine knowledge. Sri Aurobindo says that we have the knowledge within, but nobody contacts it. It is a wonderful idea that is explained here.

To continue with the next part of the passage I just read out: “For consciousness is one in the subject and the object, and in the contact of existence with

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existence this identity brings to light or awakens in the self the dormant knowledge of this other self outside it.” This is the secret of secrets. He says that there is one consciousness: the consciousness within me and within this book is the same consciousness. This whole world is one single consciousness of Sachchidananda.

Therefore, when I touch this book, the consciousness in the book and the consciousness in this hand are one and the same, and being the same, they recognise each other. I know the book, because I am myself the book.

Of course, the contact need not be physical, it may be on any level – spiritual, vital, emotional or mental. The higher, the subtler the contact, the greater the knowledge, the greater the identification. The important phrase to remember is this: “in the end we discover that this power is an outcome of a secret knowledge by identity”. That is the fundamental thing to understand, that all knowledge is basically ‘knowledge by identity’.

At the end of this paragraph Sri Aurobindo writes: Thus all our mental knowing of things represents itself to us as objective, a truth imposed on us from outside; our knowledge is a reflection or responsive construction reproducing in us a figure or picture or a mental scheme of something that is not in our own being. In fact, it is a hidden deeper response to the contact, a response coming from within that throws up from there an inner knowledge of the object, the object being itself part of our larger self; but owing to the double veil, the veil between our inner self and our ignorant surface self and the veil between that surface self and the object contacted, it is only an imperfect figure or representation of the inner knowledge that is formed on the surface.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is the idea about which we were just speaking, that all our mental knowing of things represents itself to us as objective, “a truth imposed on us from outside”, detected through our physical senses, but actually the truth is, “the object [is] itself part of our larger self”. We can imagine that in a sink of water we throw in different empty glasses. The content of all the different glasses is the same pool of water. Similarly, we are like these empty glasses, each having a different external form, but the content is the same divine consciousness. We are actually one, except for the external form. Sri Aurobindo says that unfortunately, owing to the double veil, the veil separating us from our inner being and the veil separating us from external things, we get “only an imperfect figure or representation of the inner knowledge that is formed on the surface.”

Sri Aurobindo continues:

This affiliation, this concealed method of our knowledge, obscure and non-evident to our present mentality, becomes clear and evident when the subliminal inner being breaks its boundaries of individuality and, carrying our surface mind with it, enters into the cosmic consciousness. The subliminal is separated from the cosmic through a limitation by the subtler sheaths of our being, its mental, vital, subtle-physical sheaths, just as the surface nature is separated from universal Nature by the gross physical sheath, the body; but the circumscribing wall around it is more transparent,

is indeed less a wall than a fence. The subliminal has besides a formation of consciousness which projects itself beyond all these sheaths and forms a circumconscient, an enviroing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and

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can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter. The subliminal is able to widen indefinitely this circumconscient envelope and more and more enlarge its self-projection into the cosmic existence around it.

Here we have a completely new idea. The subliminal being is able to widen itself beyond the limits of the individual being into a circumconscient part of the consciousness, a sort of transitional layer between the individual and the outside world through which influences going in or out pass, and it can also widen this circumconscient layer indefinitely into the cosmic existence. The subliminal consciousness also has its own walls, sheaths, koshas, or subtle bodies, as they are variously called, but they are more permeable than for example the physical body. Sri Aurobindo says that these sheaths can enlarge themselves into the circumconscient.

It means that there is a possibility that our subtle physical body consciousness, the 'Annamaya Kosha', can enlarge itself infinitely.

Sri Aurobindo explains further:

A point comes where it can break through the separation altogether, unite, identify itself with cosmic being, feel itself universal, one with all existence. In this freedom of entry into cosmic self and cosmic nature there is a great liberation of the individual being; it puts on a cosmic consciousness, becomes the universal individual.

He uses the phrase 'universal individual'; what is its meaning? Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said that they experienced the suffering and sorrow of the second world war in their own bodies. In

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo's sonnet "In the Battle", he says, "I am full of wounds and the fight merciless". Is it just a poetic, romantic feeling? No, it is entirely his experience; for he confirmed that all that he wrote was out of his own experience. When we write a poem we begin with imagination, and maybe get a little bit of inspiration. But Sri Aurobindo writes directly from experience. As a philosopher, I want to understand this process. When the Mother says "my body is universal", are these just words?

Here he gives us a way to understand it. Otherwise it becomes just quotations, the Mother's body is universal, fine, ' *tres bien* '. But if somebody asks, "Sir, what do you mean that her body is universal?" Here we get an explanation. "The subliminal is able to widen indefinitely this circumconscient envelope... A point comes where it can break through the separation altogether" and becomes one with all existence. "In this freedom of entry into cosmic self ... it becomes the universal individual."

This circumconscient is around us, it can enlarge, each of the sheaths of the inner being can enlarge. Otherwise, they are normally limited. All our sheaths are limited to our own narrow individuality. But, by yoga, by sadhana, they can be enlarged. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo did not do yoga for their own sake – nor for the present generation; it is done for the future of humanity itself.

This is a possibility which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have shown for the earth consciousness, for you and me.

They are the pathfinders. They have dug new grooves in this evolution, grooves that did not exist in the evolutionary pattern of nature itself. Nature has followed for millions and millions of years one single groove of evolution – birth and life and death. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have changed the groove. They said birth and life and greater life and no more death. To

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change the tracks, it may take a long time. When we read Sri Aurobindo's sonnets we can understand why he writes about the wounds in his body. He

had extended his physical consciousness. I remember now what the Mother, to children, who were constantly fighting, she had written that each blow that they gave to each other, it came upon her body. There is also the story of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa who suddenly felt pain as if somebody was beating his back, and there was the mark of a whip on his back, because somebody nearby was beating on a bull. The whip lash came on his body! These are not merely stories, they are realities of spiritual life.

The Mother has become “the universal individual”; even now she is here. Today people everywhere, when they meditate, say the Mother is concretely present.

People feel “the friction” of her presence. Why? Because she is the universal individual Mother. There is no distance now – Pondicherry and Moscow and New York are one and the same for her. This is due to the extension of her being into the universal.

Further down in the same paragraph, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Another common result is an entire openness to the universal Energy so that it is felt acting through the mind and life and body and the sense of individual action ceases... A certain sense of unity of the individual with the cosmic, a perception of the world held within one’s consciousness as well as of one’s own intimate inclusion in the world consciousness can become frequent or constant in this opening; a greater feeling of unity with other beings is its natural consequence. It is then that the existence of the cosmic

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Being becomes a certitude and a reality and is no longer an ideative perception.

There is an entire openness to the universal energy. This extension into the universal is not just of consciousness, there is also an extension of ‘Tapas’. Where there is ‘Chit’, consciousness, there is ‘Tapas’, energy, power. Where there is the Mother’s universal body, there is also the universal energy. That means her action in New York or in Moscow or New Delhi or in China is

the same. It is not that only Pondicherry has got her consciousness and force. Her consciousness and energy much equally active everywhere in the world. This is the change that has been taking place since the 1960s. Earlier, it was different. And this is the change that has been developing since her departure in 1973. Now we say that the Mother is more universal than she was when she was in her own body.

Of course, even then in the 1960s, she was universal, but now even the little limitation of the physical body has also gone. She is universally like a sunlight, spread out everywhere: her Consciousness, Light, Energy, Force are available to all. People see her in dreams, people see her in crisis, in meditation! I mean, when I go abroad on my lecture tours, I see this so vibrantly. She is literally the universal! One may believe in her or not, but sunlight is there for everyone.

This is the evolution that has taken place in the Mother's own consciousness. Today and tomorrow and for all times to come she is there and more and more strongly so. This notion that only Pondicherry has the prerogative of the Mother's presence, I for one do not believe. This is a holy place, because the holy bodies of the Avatars are here and it is here that they lived. But from the point of view of action and consciousness, they

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are spread out into this whole world and all things are on their way towards a higher transformation.

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Let us take up the paragraph:

But the cosmic consciousness of things is founded upon knowledge by identity; for the universal Spirit knows itself as the Self of all, knows all as itself and in itself, knows all nature as part of its nature. It is one with all that it contains and knows it by that identity and by a containing nearness; for there is at the same time an identity and an exceeding, and, while from the point of view of the identification there is a oneness and complete knowledge, so from the point of view of the exceeding there is an inclusion

and a penetration, an enveloping cognition of each thing and all things, a penetrating sense and vision of each thing and all things.

In the previous paragraph, we have seen how the subliminal consciousness can extend and give us the sense of the universal individual. Now Sri Aurobindo is explaining what this cosmic consciousness is founded upon. It becomes easier to understand this paragraph if we can take the analogy of the sea and its waves. The vast ocean has waves. A wave is a kind of individual formation of the ocean, made of the same water. The ocean has come into the wave, which is an individual focus of the ocean. Similarly, the cosmic consciousness is one with all that it contains. It has become each of these forms in this universe, not only the human beings, but its consciousness has taken every form that is there in this universe or manifestation. In these forms, the cosmic consciousness knows itself. Just as the water of the ocean is there in the wave and it knows itself, so the cosmic consciousness which is within you and me and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the stone and the butterfly, knows all these completely. It knows them by “that identity and a containing nearness”.

It knows them because these are all itself, but at the same time since it exceeds them, it knows them by “a containing nearness”. He says, “...for there is at the same time an identity and an exceeding, and, while from the point of view of the identification there is a oneness and complete knowledge, so from the point of view of the exceeding there is an inclusion and a penetration...”

This is an interesting idea. The sea always exceeds all its millions of waves. It is not that if we gather its infinite number of waves we get the ocean. The ocean always exceeds its waves. Similarly, the cosmic consciousness is not a sum of its finite forms. The Divine always exceeds the creation and yet it is the same Divine who is there within each individuality. That is why Sri Aurobindo says that the cosmic consciousness knows not only by identity but also by “an inclusion and a penetration”; because it exceeds the individualities that are included in it, and at the same time it penetrates them. It includes all things just like my body includes all my organs. At the

same time, the substance of my body penetrates and pervades each organ in my body, my DNA, my blood.

Sri Aurobindo says elsewhere that he who realises the Divine is “He who sees all existences in the self”, “He who sees the self in all existences”, and “He in whom the Self has become all existences”. It means that the Divine is there in every form, every form is in the Divine, and the Divine exceeds all forms. This is the truth of the Vedanta.

Sri Aurobindo writes in one of the earlier chapters that we have to take this triple formula together. If we only believe that Divine is all this, that is insufficient. We have to believe that the Divine is in all this, and all this is

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in the Divine. The three Upanishadic formulas must be taken together, it is not sufficient to take any one of them independently.

Sri Aurobindo then takes up a new argument. He says This is on the side of consciousness; on the side of action, of the cosmic energies, it is seen that they move in masses, waves, currents constantly constituting and reconstituting beings and objects, movements and happenings, entering into them, passing through them, forming themselves in them, throwing themselves out from them on other beings and objects. Each natural individual is a receptacle of these cosmic forces and a dynamo for their propagation; there passes from each to each a constant stream of mental and vital energies, and these run too in cosmic waves and currents no less than the forces of physical Nature. All this action is veiled from our surface mind’s direct sense and knowledge, but it is known and felt by the inner being, though only through a direct contact; when the being enters into the cosmic consciousness, it is still more widely, inclusively, intimately aware of this play of cosmic forces.

Here Sri Aurobindo looks at the aspect of the energy, *tapas*, because we have seen that wherever there is *chit* or consciousness there must be *tapas*. The cosmic consciousness is aware of the universe as its own being, but at the same time there is a force which keeps it in motion, as he says, which

comes in “masses, waves, currents constituting and reconstituting beings and objects”. Mountains are being formed and oceans are being created – there is a tremendous dynamism of energy. There are forces of violence, of love, of anger, of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* creativity, of destruction. These are not just individual things, these are waves that come into individuals and pass on. Love is a universal force that comes into people and passes on. Once a person stops loving the other, it goes to another persons. That is why since the time of creation, love has never stopped manifesting. Love is not an individual person’s property, it is a universal force. It moves through individuals, expresses itself for a while, and then moves on to other people. This movement of energy entering into us, passing through us, forming itself in us, throwing itself out from us onto others is the dynamism of *chit-shakti*, consciousness-force. All this working of the universal forces can be known when we go a little deeper into our own being.

The aspect of *tapas* or force, energy is primary at the early stages of the evolution because the consciousness has not yet developed. But with the coming of the human being, there must be a reversal of the process, consciousness must come first and the dynamic energy must follow. That is why Sri Aurobindo insists on change of consciousness. We cannot just keep acting, keep doing things in the same way. Human beings have been acting for thousands of years, but nothing has fundamentally changed because with the coming of the human beings, nature wants to reverse the process and have the consciousness lead us.

Dynamic action has brought the evolution to the level of humanity, but to go beyond humanity, the process has to change and consciousness must become the leader of evolution. We keep on repeating actions, but if there is no consciousness behind this action, it has no relevance.

Even on the individual level, we may start doing this work or that, but unless the work and the action become

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a mode of changing our consciousness, they have no value except, of course, on the human level.

This is why Sri Aurobindo hammers on us this need to change our consciousness, because now the *tapas* will come according to the level of our consciousness. First the energy developed the form, and the development of consciousness followed. But in the human being, if I can change my consciousness, my energy becomes not only increased, it gains a different value, a different nature. It is no more the mental energy. Till now we have had the physical, the vital, the mental and some occult energies. We can have all these without changing our consciousness. We could be a great poet, a philosopher, a musician, an artist or an architect, but our consciousness remains the same. But the spiritual energy will not come until and unless we heighten our consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo explains:

But although the knowledge is then more complete, the dynamisation of this knowledge can only be partial; for while a fundamental or static unification with the cosmic self is possible, the active dynamic unification with cosmic Nature must be incomplete.

This is something I found very relevant to the work done by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo themselves. What is it? He continues:

On the level of mind and life, even with the loss of the sense of a separate self-existence, the energisms must be in their very nature a selection through individualisation; the action is that of the cosmic Energy, but the individual formation of it in the living dynamo remains the method of its working. For the very use of the dynamo of individuality is to select, to concentrate

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and formulate selected energies and throw them out in formed and canalized currents: the flow of a total energy would mean that this dynamo had no further use, could be abolished or put out of action;...

He says that this cosmic energy we have been speaking about comes in great currents, but when it gets into a form the dynamisation can only be partial. As an analogy, consider that we have a cloud formation. When this cloud bursts into rain, we have raindrops. Likewise, the cosmic consciousness manifests into many individual consciousnesses. The underlying consciousness may be the same, but by the very fact that it has become individualised, it has become limited. The consciousness can still be infinite, but what is limited is the energy. This is an interesting concept. An individual consciousness need not have any limits at all. A yogin remaining in this individual form can attain the *brahmic* consciousness, but his body cannot have infinite energy. There is a specific reason or purpose for which this cosmic consciousness has taken these individual forms – there is a definite purpose in each form. It is because there is this definite form and purpose, the energy becomes limited.

We have seen this in the case of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo themselves, their self-limitation in coming down in the names and forms of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. These individual forms had infinite consciousness. Sri Aurobindo writes in the book *The Mother* that the Mother is Aditi, the transcendental consciousness, and that consciousness is contained here in this very body. This limited body of the Mother contains the infinite consciousness of the supramental mahashakti, she is the “consciousness-force of the Supreme”. When it comes to the body, she said her body

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could not be transformed fully into the supramentally transformed body because it has its inconscient limitations. She has the cosmic consciousness, and on the cosmic level she is available to us; but as an individual body, she was there in a room on the third floor of the Ashram building. It is a limitation. One may have great energies, superhuman energies, but infinity applies only to the consciousness and not to the energy.

As Sri Aurobindo says, “...the action is that of the cosmic Energy, but the individual formation of it in the living dynamo remains the method of its working. For the very use of the dynamo of individuality is to select...”

(Ibid) The word ‘select’ means something specific, particular, even ‘definite’. I have taken birth to have one particular specific type of experience. Remember, it is not simply Mr. A or Mrs. Z and who is having the experience. It is Brahman, Sachchidananda, the Divine Consciousness who has become like you and me, because the Brahman wants to have this specific experience in this universe. That is the truth of life. We should not think that I am doing or becoming something great, it is He alone who wants through this form to get this experience.

Sri Aurobindo says that “...there is a use of dynamo of individuality to select, to concentrate and formulate selected energies and throw them out in formed and canalized currents...” And then, he says, “...the flow of a total energy would mean that this dynamo had no further use, could be abolished or put out of action...” (Ibid) Once the purpose of this form, this individualisation is over, the form is thrown out – that is what we call death.

It is easy to say, but from the philosophic point of view, it is like the ocean that throws up a wave, and then it drops and vanishes into the ocean, and another wave

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is born. Similarly, human beings are like waves – they come and go eternally. Our lives are brief, but the infinite consciousness remains. This total energy withdraws from the form, and takes another form.

Sri Aurobindo explains:

...instead of an activity of individual mind, life, body there would be only an individual but impersonal centre or channel through which the universal forces would flow unimpeded and unselective.

This is the purpose of this individual formation; now it is the channel of our ego, but through sadhana it becomes a channel for the universal forces to flow through. In one of Sri Aurobindo’s sonnets called ‘Surrender’ he says that his mind, emotions, vital and physical have become channels of the Divine Consciousness. He says here that instead of an activity of individual

mind, life and body these instruments would be only an impersonal centre or a channel through which the universal forces could flow.

Through sadhana, ego is replaced by the Divine Consciousness. This is the difference between a yogin and us. They are also acting in the world, but they are like a hollow flute through which when the Divine blows, we have a beautiful divine raga. Our flutes are all jammed up with ego, so the divine raga cannot be played; only noise comes out, there is no music.

In the paragraph which is last of this section on the subliminal, as is typical of Sri Aurobindo, after showing us the great powers of the subliminal, he draws back and says that this is not the highest, it has its limitations.

What are they?

In the subliminal, therefore, even enlarged into the cosmic consciousness, we get the greater knowledge

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but not the complete and original knowledge. To go farther and see what the knowledge by identity is in its purity and in what way and to what extent it originates, admits or uses the other powers of knowledge, we have to go beyond the inner mind and life and subtle physical to the two other ends of the subliminal, interrogate the subconscious and contact or enter into the superconscious.

This subliminal is still limited in spite of its great possibilities of occult knowledge because it is limited by its own instrumentation. It has a subtle physical, subtle vital and a subtle mind, but they are limited instruments.

He says that to find knowledge by identity we have to go into either the subconscious or the superconscious.

...But in the subconscious all is blind, an obscure universalism such as is seen in the mass consciousness, an obscure individualism either abnormal to us or ill-formed and instinctive: here, in the subconscious, a dark

knowledge by identity, such as we find already in the Inconscience, is the basis, but it does not reveal itself and its secret.

The subconscious may have knowledge by identity, but because of its darkness, it does not reveal the knowledge, whereas if we go into the superconscient, it reveals the knowledge. Sri Aurobindo now is going to take up in this last section of the chapter the superconscient.

He is bringing in this last section with the objective of explaining the same theme of the different levels of knowledge: ‘knowledge by identity’, ‘knowledge by direct contact’, ‘knowledge by indirect contact’, and ‘knowledge by separative knowledge’.

In the supreme timeless Existence, as far as we know

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* it by reflection in spiritual experience, existence and consciousness are one. We are accustomed to identify consciousness with certain operations of mentality and sense and, where these are absent or quiescent, we speak of that state of being as unconscious. But consciousness can exist where there are no overt operations, no signs revealing it, even where it is withdrawn from objects and absorbed in pure existence or involved in the appearance of non-existence. It is intrinsic in being, self-existent, not abolished by quiescence, by inaction, by veiling or covering, by inert absorption or involution; it is there in the being, even when its state seems to be dreamless sleep or a blind trance or an annulment of awareness or an absence...

In the superconscient, existence and consciousness are one. *Sat* and *Chit* are inseparably together. We may ask, “where is the consciousness in the stone?”

Our idea of consciousness is expression, is action, some kind of a movement. But even when you are unconscious, say you have fainted, it doesn’t mean that there is no consciousness; it has only withdrawn within.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that wherever there is existence, there is consciousness. Even when there is a kind of

“covering” or “inert absorption” or “involution” in matter, consciousness is there. He continues: In the supreme timeless status where consciousness is one with being and immobile, it is not a separate reality, but simply and purely the self-awareness inherent in existence. There is no need of knowledge nor is there any operation of knowledge...

In the superconscient, being is self-evident to itself, it does not need to look at itself in order to know itself

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or learn that it is. This is the main argument. Normally, we say a person is unconscious when he is not aware of himself. Awareness is linked with knowledge. To be aware is to have knowledge and Brahman is always aware of himself fully.

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We have discussed that consciousness and existence are one and that self-awareness is inherent in existence. As Sri Aurobindo says, “Being is self-evident to itself: it does not need to look at itself in order to know itself or learn that it is.” Similarly, beings have this ‘knowledge by identity’. I am aware of myself; I do not have to look at my body and say “oh, I am there”. I can close my eyes and know that I exist. This knowledge of our existence is inherent. Sri Aurobindo writes:

But if this is evidently true of pure existence, it is also true of the primal All- Existence; for just as spiritual Self-existence is intrinsically aware of its self, so it is intrinsically aware of all that is in its being; this is not by an act of knowledge formulated in a self-regard, a self-observation, but by the same inherent awareness; it is intrinsically all-conscious of all that is by the very fact that all is itself.

The first part was only the introduction to say that just as Sachchidananda is constantly self-aware of itself, it is aware of all that is within itself. An

example could be that I know that I exist, but I do not know all the contents of my existence: I do not know my soul, I do not know my subliminal, I do not know my organs. But the Supreme is constantly aware of all this universe which is part of his own body. That is the difference between the creature and the creator. When we went to the Mother, she knew what we were thinking or feeling or wanted. How is it that she

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* knew all that? It is not due to the contact with subliminal, it is not due to her ability to read our thoughts which some of the yogins and astrologers do. In one of her conversations she says, “I know you because I am you”.

That is it. Because in her consciousness, we individuals are part and parcels of her. Each one of us is like a cell in her body. She can guide us because she is ourselves.

In exactly the same sense, Brahman, Sachchidananda knows everything in this world, because he himself is all this. That is what Sri Aurobindo is saying here: “for just as spiritual Self-existence is intrinsically aware of its self, so it is intrinsically aware of all that is in its being; this is not by an act of knowledge formulated in a self-regard...”

For me, if I want to know what is within me, there is a process of obtaining this knowledge. If I want to know the condition of my heart, I get an ECG; if I want to know what is happening in my lungs, I get an X-ray. It will give me knowledge, but it is an objective knowledge because I have made my body into an object. This is why he adds immediately that “...this is not an act of knowledge formulated in a self-regard, a self-observation, but by the same inherent awareness; it is intrinsically all-conscious of all that is by the very fact that all is itself”.

Then he continues:

Thus conscious of its timeless, self-existence, the Spirit, the Being is aware in the same way, —intrinsically, absolutely, totally, without any need of a look or act of knowledge, because it is all, —of Time-Existence and of all

that is in time. This is the essential awareness by identity; if applied to cosmic existence, it would mean an essential self-evident automatic consciousness of universe by the Spirit because it is everything and everything is its being.

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Sri Aurobindo here establishes the metaphysical reality behind the concept of ‘knowledge by identity’.

As I said, the last section is going to take up those four types of knowledge once again, but on the ontological level, on the Brahman level. This is the first type. What do we mean by ‘knowledge by identity’ on the Brahman level? It is this, that everything is part and parcel of his own consciousness, so he is aware of it intrinsically. He does not have to ask what is this or what is that? This is

‘knowledge by identity’.

Next, Sri Aurobindo introduces a slight variation of this type:

But there is another status of spiritual awareness which seems to us to be a development from this state and power of pure self-consciousness, perhaps, even a first departure, but is in fact normal and intimate to it; for the awareness by identity is always the very stuff of all the Spirit’s self-knowledge, but it admits within itself, without changing or modifying its own eternal nature,...

...a subordinate and simultaneous awareness by inclusion and by indwelling. The being, the Self-existent sees all existences in its one existence; it contains them all and knows them as being of its being, consciousness of its consciousness, power of its power, bliss of its bliss;...

The “first departure” denotes that there is a slight departure into a multiplicity. He says, “The Spirit’s infinite self-experience moves between sheer identity...”

and a multiple identity... “Sheer identity” is the first level where Sat and Chit are intrinsically one. From there it goes into “a multiple identity”. This is the level of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* multiplicity; the One has become the many. But there are still multiple identities, identity has not been lost. There is not yet a separation between the One and Many. He calls it “a delight of intimately differentiated oneness and an absorbed self-rapture”. (Ibid)

Although both are the same Ananda, self-rapture means you are lost in the bliss of the one Self, whereas delight comes through contact with another, this is differentiated oneness. This level is the supramental consciousness where there is oneness and also a multiple identity.

Now, we come to the second level, ‘knowledge by intimate direct contact’:

But when the subject draws a little back from itself as object, then certain tertiary powers of spiritual knowledge, of knowledge by identity, take their first origin, which are the sources of our own normal modes of knowledge.

This is the second level. There is still ‘the knowledge by identity’ at its basis, but here there is also multiplicity and relation, a ‘knowledge by intimate direct contact’. This, if I am right in my guess, could be the overmental level where, as Sri Aurobindo says, “the subject draws a little back from itself as object”. So, there is a first separation, a little division between subject and object. It is no more the absolute One, there is a division between subject and object; but yet the

‘knowledge by identity’ remains fundamental. Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo says that on the overmental level there is still a dominant sense of oneness and it is as we come from the Overmind towards Mind that the sense of oneness disappears. We have here, as Sri Aurobindo describes, the spiritual intimate vision, spiritual perception, spiritual conception, spiritual emotion, spiritual sense, etc., which give us an intimate direct contact.

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In the next level down from the Overmind: A separative knowledge arises when the sense of differentiation overpowers the sense of identity; the self still cognizes its identity with the object but pushes to its extreme the play of intimate separateness. At first, there is not a sense of self and not-self, but only of self and other-self. A certain knowledge of identity and by identity is still there, but it tends to be first overstructured, then submerged, then so replaced by knowledge through interchange and contact that it figures as a secondary awareness, ...Finally, identity disappears behind the veil and there is the play of being with other beings, consciousness with other consciousness: an underlying identity is still there, but it is not experienced; its place is taken by a direct seizing and penetrating contact, intermingling interchange...

It is by this interaction that a more or less intimate knowledge, mutual awareness or awareness of the object remains possible.

This is the third level, 'knowledge by separative direct contact'. Here the sense of differentiation overpowers the sense of identity. In the second level, as we have seen, a division comes in but the sense of oneness is still pervasive; in this third level this sense of oneness is lost.

The subject and object are completely divided.

There is a gradual involution of consciousness in which the oneness is lost. At this level, he says, "At first there is not a sense of self and not-self, but only of self and other-self." Subject and object are divided, but there is no alienation; the object is experienced as an other-self, an extension or a part of itself. This level comes between Overmind and Mind.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This type of knowledge belongs to those intermediary levels of spiritual consciousness from below Overmind to Mind – Intuition, Illumined Mind and Higher mind. When there is involution of consciousness, one of the main things that happens is that the sense of separation between the self and the not-self becomes harder and denser and more intractable. At the highest consciousness there is complete self-rapture, then there is delight, then there is a sense of pervasive oneness,

then as we come down, progressively oneness is lost. The essence of involution is that the sense of oneness is lost.

Another thing that happens is that as oneness decreases, limitations increase. The complete oneness when it reaches the level of matter becomes atomic division and Inconscience.

Evolution is basically an evolution of the consciousness of oneness. We may talk about evolution of many things, but philosophically, in our individual evolution, the more we gain consciousness of oneness, the higher and more evolved we are. The more we are caught up in our family problems, or political party divisions, or social divisions, that is, the more we are involved in a divisive consciousness, the less we are evolved. Whoever implants the sense of division has, *per se*, a lower consciousness. If we want to see how high is our evolution we should look at our sense of oneness with the society, with India, with other nations of the world, with the world as a whole, with the Divine! That is why Sri Aurobindo always speaks about the individual, humanity and the Divine.

About the last level of knowledge, Sri Aurobindo writes:

Ignorance becomes complete with the entire separation of being from being: the direct contact

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of consciousness with consciousness is then entirely veiled or heavily overlaid, even though it still goes on within our subliminal parts, just as there is also, though wholly concealed and not directly operative, the underlying secret identity and oneness. There is on the surface a complete separateness, a division into self and not-self; there is the necessity of dealing with the not-self, but no direct means of knowing it or mastering it. Nature then creates indirect means, a contact by physical organs of sense, a penetration of outside impacts through the nerve currents, a reaction of mind and its co-ordinations acting as an aid and supplement to the activity of the physical organs, —

all of them methods of an indirect knowledge; for the consciousness is forced to rely on these instruments and cannot act directly on the object.

Here we have come to a ‘complete separative knowledge by indirect contact’. This is at the level of the mind where there is a complete separation between the subject and the object. In the previous level he said there is the ‘other-self’, not yet the ‘not-self’, but here in this fourth type of knowledge there is only “self and not-self”, a complete separation from others. In order to connect the subject and object – because we cannot live in the world completely isolated, there must be some contact with the world – Nature has created the senses. Now we understand that the senses are a bridge between the subject and the object. And, there are not only the senses, he also mentions “a penetration of outside impacts through the nerve currents”. The world penetrates us through the nerves and there is also “a reaction of mind and its co-ordinations acting as an aid and supplement to the activity of the physical organs”. When we talk to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* each other, respond to each other, react to each other this is again a kind of contact with the ‘not-self’. The senses, the reason, the emotions are contact points between the subject and the object. They are all methods of ‘indirect knowledge’, and the consciousness is forced to rely on these instruments because it has no direct contact between subject and the object. This is the last stage and because the division is complete, Nature built a bridge –

first it brought the senses, then it brought the emotions and then it brought the reason.

Beyond this, there is no other use of these instruments.

If you want to withdraw from the object into the subject, you do not need reason, you do not need emotion, you do not need senses; it is a simple logic. If you want to connect with the object, you need all this. That is perhaps why our yogins went into the Himalayas. They said, “I will withdraw from objects, from society, from wife, from children, from people

– everything’. They kept this relation or bridge to the minimum. When they felt hunger, perhaps, they had some connection with the objective world.

In the next paragraph, Sri Aurobindo writes: The Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity.

The Mother also would explain that there is hardly any difference between the Inconscient and the Superconscient – one is in an involved trance, the other is in an absolute awakened state. Otherwise, the Inconscient also has the same characteristics of oneness, unity,

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dynamism, consciousness – because, the whole of the Superconscient has reversed itself into the Inconscient.

The Inconscient is not without Sachchidananda.

Sachchidananda is also present in the inconscient. And we recollect, perhaps, the Mother’s own experience: when she went into the Inconscient, she saw a luminous Being lying, sleeping at the bottom of the Inconscience. This Being had a kind of a silver light and the being above has golden light. Otherwise, they are the same. He says, Instead of a luminous absorption in self-existence there is a tenebrous involution in it, the darkness veiled within the darkness of the Rig Veda ... which makes it look like Non-Existence; instead of a luminous inherent self-awareness there is a consciousness plunged into an abyss of self-oblivion...

He uses these two contrasting words ‘self-awareness’

and ‘self-oblivion’. Otherwise, it is the same consciousness.

Yet is this involved consciousness still a concealed knowledge by identity; it carries in it the awareness of all the truths of existence hidden in its dark infinite and, when it acts and creates ... everything is arranged with the precision and perfection of an intrinsic knowledge.

In one of the most important sentences to which I have referred earlier, he says: “but it acts first as Energy and not as Consciousness.” Evolution, we said, is a drive towards the consciousness of unity. But this evolution began first with Energy. A dynamic energy starts moving, and in this movement, apparently there is no direction –

but only apparently, not in truth. Evolution appears like a big chaotic movement in Nature, but all the time there is a growing consciousness coming in more complex forms

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and ultimately after billions of years of experimentations it brought about a creature called the human being.

Nature apparently wanted to say, “At last I have brought out a being who can now take over consciously what I have been doing unconsciously for these billions of years”. Unfortunately, this human being has taken millennia even to realize that now he also has to evolve.

Until now, we have been a part of Nature’s plan, but with the coming of Sri Aurobindo, we have been given a new responsibility, for he has said that we are not creatures of the Inconscient, we are supposed to be the leaders of evolution. We are not to just let ourselves be a part of this evolutionary process of Nature, we should not spend our lives unconsciously and then we are old, decide to become spiritual. The Mother tells us to become spiritual when we are young. It is best if the sense of this evolution of consciousness comes when we are young. Evolution begins with energy and not consciousness, but at this human stage consciousness must take the lead, we must consciously and deliberately evolve our consciousness.

Next, Sri Aurobindo writes:

If, as has been affirmed, a material object receives and retains the impression of the contacts of things around it and energies emanate from it, so that an occult knowledge can become aware of its past, can make us conscious of these emanating influences, the intrinsic unorganized

Awareness pervading the form but not yet enlightening it must be the cause of this receptivity and these capacities.

The main idea here is that, if we as individuals are able to absorb the impressions of our contact with things around us, it is because there is a divine awareness or

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consciousness within us that uses our senses to contact the objective material world. Otherwise, without the soul, without the central consciousness, the body and mind *per se* do not have the capacity of receiving or communicating.

Let us read to the last paragraph of this chapter which sums up the whole argument.

We see then all the powers inherent in the original self-existent spiritual Awareness slowly brought out and manifested in this growing separative consciousness; they are activities suppressed but native to the secret and involved knowledge by identity and they now emerge by degrees in a form strangely diminished and tentative.

First, there emerges a crude or veiled sense which develops into precise sensations aided by a vital instinct or concealed intuition; then a life-mind perception manifests and at its back an obscure consciousness-sight and feeling of things; emotion vibrates out and seeks an interchange with others; last arises to the surface conception, thought, reason comprehending and apprehending the object, combining its data of knowledge. But all are incomplete, still maimed by the separative ignorance and the first obscuring inconstancy; all are dependent on the outward means, not empowered to act in their own right... Only when the subliminal is able to force upon the frontal mind and sense some of its secret activities pure and untranslated into the ordinary forms of mental intelligence, does a rudimentary action of the deeper methods lift itself to the surface... It is only by an opening to our inner being or an entry into it that a direct intimate awareness can be added to the outer indirect awareness. It is only by our

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* awakening to our inmost soul or superconscient self that there can be a beginning of the spiritual knowledge with identity as its basis, its constituent power, its intrinsic substance.

You may have caught the idea here that evolution has brought the sense-mind, the vital perception, the emotions, the reason, which are beautifully developed to contact the outer objective world. Now there is a necessity of contacting the inner being, of going inside into the subliminal and the psychic being and upward to the superconscient in order to attain a spiritual knowledge of identity with the world and the divine Reality.

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**Lecture Notes**

# Four Methods of Cognition

There are four methods of cognition of our self, of our inner movements and the world outside us: a) A knowledge by identity

b) A knowledge by intimate direct contact c) A knowledge by separative direct contact d) A wholly separative knowledge by indirect contact I. **A Knowledge by Identity**

Normally, it is through the instrumentation of the senses that we acquire knowledge of the not-self.

But the surface mind knows its essential existence by a direct awareness. It is the instance of the knower knowing itself: the subject and the object of knowledge are merged in identity. At such a moment we say, for example, 'I am' or 'I exist'.

**II. A Knowledge by Intimate Direct Contact** When by an inner detachment we can analyse a particular state of the mind and assume the position of

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the witness, knower and ruler, we have the knowledge by intimate direct contact. For example, 'I am happy'.

**III. A Knowledge by Separative Direct Contact** The relation between our mind and body are of a double nature: separation and direct contact. We feel the body and what it is doing intimately part of us, but the mind is separate from it and can exercise a detached control over its movements. This gives to our normal knowledge of our subjective being a certain intimacy, immediacy and directness.

**IV. A wholly Separative Knowledge by Indirect Contact** The process of getting knowledge of the external world is an entirely separative basis — it is of the nature of an indirect perception. It is indirect because in this

process we use the sense-instrumentation, which supplies the image of the object or a vibration or a nerve message of it in ourselves.

By themselves these images or vibrations would not have brought in any meaning had it not been for the intervention of (a) the sense-mind intuition; (b) the vital intuition, (c) intuition of the perceptive mind and (d) the reason or the understanding intelligence.

**V. The Double Wall of Self-imprisonment** a) Our knowledge of ourselves and the world is limited and imperfect because of the fundamental ignorance

— ignorance of our true self.

The basic reason for this ignorance is the double wall. One is the wall created by our externalising consciousness, “so that it can pursue its activity of ego-centric individualisation of the mind, life and body uninvaded by the deeper and wider truth of our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* larger existence”. Through this wall we can look into our inner self only through crevices. The second wall is against the cosmic infinite: it builds up a wall of division here also and shuts out all that is not centred around its ego, excludes it as the not-self. However, the body provides our consciousness both the gates of the senses through which it can establish the necessary communication with the world.

**VI. The Subliminal or the Inner Being** a) Behind the first inner wall is the larger mental, vital and subtle-physical being, or the subliminal, or the inner being, which is the real source of thoughts and feelings and action.

b) The powers of the subliminal being are varied: i. An awareness by direct contact.

ii. Contact with the supra-physical planes of existence.

- iii. Not only has it the capacity to be aware of the past but it has also the capacity of knowing the future.
- iv. It has the capacity to obtain direct and intimate knowledge of others without the intermediary of any external instrumentation.
- v. Normally, we are much influenced by our environmental consciousness, but by becoming aware of the subliminal, we could gain control over these external influences.
- vi. The subliminal can forecast the actions of the invisible impersonal forces.
- vii. While knowledge comes up in the surface-mind as a knowledge acquired, it arises in the subliminal as a thing seen, caught from within, remembered as it were.

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viii. Subliminal knowledge, though more direct and intimate is still an admixture of knowledge and ignorance for it is not based on oneness and identity as it suffers from the limitations of separative knowledge.

### **VII. Process of Separation**

a) In the supreme timeless status, consciousness is one with being and there “there is no need of knowledge nor is there any operation of knowledge. Being is self-evident to itself: it does not need to look at itself in order to know itself or learn that it is.”

“The being is aware in the same way — intrinsically, absolutely, totally, without any need of a look or act of knowledge, because it is all — of Time-Existence and of all that is in Time. This is the essential awareness by identity.”

In the next level, a regard of consciousness manifests bringing in another status of the supreme spiritual consciousness, a status in which knowledge

as we know it begins. The spirit regards itself, it becomes the knower and the known, but it is the status where subject-object is one — there is no beginning of the separative knowledge.

In the tertiary level, the subject draws a little back from itself as object and there is a spiritual intimate vision, spiritual perception, spiritual conception, spiritual emotion, spiritual sense: there is a joy of intimate separateness in identity. The spirit's infinite self-experience moves between sheer identity and a multiple identity, a delight of intimately differentiated oneness and an absorbed self- rapture.

Next, identity disappears behind the veil and there is the play of being with other beings. Here the knower knows

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the self and external world by direct contact. This method of knowing is the instrument of the subliminal self or being.

Finally, ignorance becomes complete with the entire separation of being from being. There is on the surface a complete separateness, a division into self and not-self. Nature then creates indirect means, a contact by physical organs of sense and one is forced to rely on these instruments which are obviously insufficient and inefficient.

Ultimately, the Inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience — instead of a luminous inherent self-awareness, there is a consciousness plunged into an abyss of self-oblivion, yet in this involved consciousness still there is a concealed knowledge by identity. It is this involved Consciousness-Force of the Divine that is now waking up from its stupor and struggling to manifest the different levels of consciousness.

# Document Outline

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