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Deliberations on

The Life Divine

(Chapterwise Summary Talks)

Volume Eleven

Book – II

The Knowledge and the Ignorance–

the Spiritual Evolution

Part – II

The Knowledge and the Spiritual Evolution Chapters: XVIII & XIX

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Dedicated to

Sri Aurobindo

on

His 150th Birth Anniversary

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Acknowledgements

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I offer this volume to Sri Aurobindo on his 150th birth anniversary.

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 – XVIII

The Evolutionary Process:

Ascent and Integration

We have formed a sufficiently clear idea of the significance of the evolutionary manifestation in earth nature, and the final turn it is taking or is destined to take. We now turn our attention to the principles of the process by which it has arrived at its present level and by which its final development will move from our still dominant mental ignorance to a supramental consciousness. That is the main objective of this chapter.

Sri Aurobindo will apply the same logical process that he finds in the evolutionary movement from the past till now to the development from the present level to the supramental level. This chapter is therefore important in linking the present to the coming of the superman. Once we see how the process has unfolded, we may conclude that if this is what has happened in the past, it ought to continue in the future also. Sri Aurobindo follows the same logic.

We must now understand, in a deeper way, the principles of the process of evolution. Sri Aurobindo is not simply predicting what the future will bring, he will show us the impeccable logic of nature's process itself. This is what science also does, once it understands the logical processes of combustion and movement, it applies that knowledge to send a rocket to the moon. Sri Aurobindo examines how we have developed from Matter to Mind, and having understood that, he says let us now use these principles to move from Mind to Supermind.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* He writes,

For we find that cosmic Nature is constant in its general law of action, since that depends on a Truth of things which is invariable in principle although in detail of application abundantly variable.

The main principles are mentioned in the title of the chapter itself, 'Ascent' and 'Integration'. These are the two principles that Nature has followed

quite consistently.

Although there is much variation in the details, the fundamental principles are invariable, they don't change.

He further writes,

At the outset, we can easily see that, since this is an evolution out of a material Inconscience into spiritual consciousness, an evolutionary self-building of Spirit on a base of Matter, there must be in the process a development of a triple character. An evolution of forms of Matter more and more subtly and intricately organised so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organisation of consciousness is the indispensable physical foundation. An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe.

A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective.

He says that there is an evolution of forms from simple gross Matter to “more and more subtly and intricately

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organised” material forms. The matter is the basis of this evolution, but out of this matter have come forms, not just any kind of forms, but as he says, “forms that are more and more subtly and intricately organised so as to admit the action of a growing, a more and more complex and subtle and capable organisation of consciousness”. This means life forms. The simplest life form that Science has observed is the amoeba, a single-cell organism. That was just the beginning, and this simple form evolved to become “more and more complex and subtle”, and the other phrase he uses which is important here, is that it would admit the action of a “capable

organisation of consciousness”. This evolution ultimately ended in the form of human beings.

Thus, the first principle is that in the course of evolution new forms emerge which are capable of supporting a greater consciousness.

For example, we had the gigantic dinosaurs, but why did they vanish from earth? It seems, they were here for millions of years and were a kind of settled species. But they were not capable of holding a greater consciousness, so Nature withdrew those forms. There are now only signs of their existence in the skeletons left behind but there is not a single dinosaur on the earth now. They are a kind of failed species. In that way, Nature can be pretty ruthless.

When the consciousness wants to evolve further and the form resists or is incapable, then Nature moves on and finds a new form.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that if mankind also resists the new consciousness, then nature will find a new species to embody it. That is why complexity and subtlety are good, that give the possibility of adaptation to higher consciousness. Only the human body could support

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the development of mental consciousness in its higher possibilities.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

An upward evolutionary progress of the consciousness itself from grade to higher grade, an ascent, is the evident spiral line or emerging curve that, on this foundation, the evolution must describe.

A taking up of what has already been evolved into each higher grade as it is reached and a transformation more or less complete so as to admit of a total changed working of the whole being and nature, an integration, must be also part of the process, if the evolution is to be effective.

Evolution never moves in a single line; its development takes a spiral form. Why is it that evolution always moves ahead in a spiral? Logic would suggest that if it went in a straight line it would be faster. What is the advantage of a spiral form? In one sentence I would say, it favors an integral development. If it went straight in a line, it would develop in humanity the mind and would not bother if the human being was further developing the psychic being or the emotions or the physical. Now it goes on integrating the emotional being, the vital being, and the physical being with the mind. All this must be consolidated, otherwise, human beings would develop only the mind and the neglected body would fall and die. A spiral evolution is a logical necessity for integral development. This is not only for the individual but for the development of society which also evolves in a spiral movement.

For example, when an army invades a new territory, at the front there may be a small company, a handful of people, who scout the territory, see where they

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can advance, see where there are obstacles or greater resistance, and only then they give the signal for the rest of the army to advance. They occupy some new territory, consolidate their position, and then gradually expand it and push further forward. Integration and stabilisation are required. All that is at the back must be brought forward.

That is what happens for an army, but what happens in the evolution of consciousness? These are three main principles:

1. The forms of matter must evolve from the simple to the complex to the subtle.
2. In this evolution there has got to be a spiral movement of consciousness.
3. As we move higher, the lower must be consolidated with the higher, and not only consolidated but the lower must be penetrated and transformed by the higher.

For example, when life came into matter, when plants started coming upon this earth, the matter from which they were made was transformed; it became much more sensitive and responsive, it even almost communicates, whereas a stone does not have that same sensitivity. When the mind evolved it transformed matter also. The mind consciousness has permeated into the physical and made it not only more sensitive, but capable of receiving a higher consciousness in the physical. Similarly, when the Supermind comes into the body, that also will penetrate the body matter, make it luminous, and take out all its tamas and disease. Each higher level of consciousness acts on the lower levels; that is called integration.

In the next paragraph, Sri Aurobindo says, An evolution in the Inconscience is the beginning, an

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* evolution in the Ignorance is the middle, but the end is the liberation of the spirit into its true consciousness and an evolution in the Knowledge.

Evolution starts with Inconscience. “Ignorance is middle”, and that is where we are now in the evolutionary process. We have a mixture of knowledge and ignorance, and slowly the percentage of knowledge needs to increase.

It is for this reason that the divine and the devil exist together in us causing all the problems. On one side we go to temples, and perform rituals and on the other side, in the name of the same God, we blast other people with a bomb! The Divine and the devil are equally pulling us apart; such is the middle stage. The end, of course, is the liberation of the spirit into true consciousness and evolution in the Knowledge.

What is the difference between an evolution in Ignorance and an evolution in Knowledge? The evolution in the ignorance is from Matter to Life, from Life to Mind, and then from Mind to Supermind. The last stage of this part of the evolution is a kind of transitional stage in which the effects of ignorance gradually fade away as one approaches the Supermind. The evolution in the Knowledge is at the level of Supermind and beyond. The main difference between these two processes of evolution is that in

ignorance there is a groping towards knowledge and it is never really attained. It proceeds by a kind of trial and error and there are different possibilities and opposites that are tried out and then some adjustments and improvements come in but there is never a certitude or sure knowledge. There are always gaps in the knowledge and what is missed in the gaps may overturn the results of what has been found. Once we come into the evolution in

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the Knowledge there is no groping at all as in the present stage of ignorance. Knowledge is assured and perfect.

Then where is the need for more knowledge? We have to be careful while using the word 'perfect'. Perfection is there on every level. Perfection itself is an evolutionary thing. There is no end to knowledge. There are layers and layers of perfection and perfect knowledge. So, when we say 'perfect' we should not think it is the end. In Sri Aurobindo's book *The Mother*, he speaks of a "perfect perfection" that the goddess Mahasaraswati aims at, but only she can have that perfect perfection, below that level it is a progressive perfection. So, perfection is never-ending. Perfection is like the horizon which is visible to us from our present level of consciousness, when we go higher, the vastness of the horizon increases.

Next, he writes,

An evolutionary process must be by the very terms of the problem to be solved a development, in some first established basic principle of being or substance, of something that that basic principle holds involved in itself or else admits from outside itself and modifies by the admission; for it must necessarily modify by its own law of nature all that enters into it and is not already part of its own nature. This must be so even if it is a creative evolution in the sense of manifesting always new powers of existence...

This evolutionary process must have some "basic principle that it holds involved in itself" and gradually reveals or it must accept from outside itself this principle.

In accepting it, it must modify to conform with its own nature. Matter is the first step of the evolutionary process, and the second step is Life. How did life come about? There

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* are two possibilities, one that it has come into Matter from outside and two, it has come from within. There have been arguments in philosophy for each of these and actually, Sri Aurobindo suggests that it happens through a combination of both processes.

The important point Sri Aurobindo makes here is that in either case, if the higher principle is admitted from outside or it emerges from within, it must be modified by the lower principle. Take for example a tree, it is a combination of life and matter; and we can see that matter holds a grip on this life form, it does not let life have full freedom. It is literally rooted in the earth, and it has the earth qualities of tamas; it cannot freely move about.

This is exactly what Sri Aurobindo says, whatever enters into the lower principle gets modified. On the third level when the Mind comes into the picture, we have the same phenomenon. Now, we have mind + life + matter, but we see that the mental consciousness is still much limited and modified by the life principle and the material principle.

When the Supermind comes there will be Supermind +

mind + life + matter, but then the proportion will change.

Till now the law of Matter has had a strong influence on the various life forms, but Supermind will annul this limiting law and take over the control. That means the Supermind will completely fuse itself into mind, life and body and remake all these in its own nature. This is different from the body of the superman. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have talked about an intermediate stage between the human and the supramental being called the superman. This superman is of a new consciousness and it will have an awakened body, life and mind, but the body

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would not be completely transformed into a supramental substance. It will happen in the next stage.

Sri Aurobindo says,

...the new principle or power of existence that has to be evolved, then, when it appears, it will still have to accept modification by the nature and law of the basic substance: but also it will modify that substance by its own power, its own law of nature.

Even if the new principle is involved and emerges from within, it will be modified in that emergence, but at the same time, “it will modify that substance by its own power, its own law of nature”. The influence is from both sides. Then he says,

If, further, it is aided by a descent of its own principle already established in its own full force above the field of evolution and pressing down into that field to possess it, then the new power may even establish itself as a dominant element and considerably or radically change the consciousness and action of the world in which it emerges or into which it enters. But its force to modify or change or to revolutionise the law and working of the original substance chosen as the evolutionary matrix will depend upon its own essential potency. It is not likely that it will be able to bring about an entire transformation if it is not itself the original Principle of Existence, if it is only derivative, an instrumental power and not the first puissance.

We have discussed that the evolution of a new principle, when it comes forth, gets modified and at the same time influences the substance from which it emerges. Then we discussed about the superman and supramentalised being.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* To clarify their difference, I would first say that starting from the level of the mental human being, the next to evolve is the spiritual being, then the superman and at the top level is the

supramental being. What would be the nature of the superman? He would have the consciousness of Supermind, though modified by his body and life, and he would be born in the same way that humans are born, through the same process, from the womb of a woman.

He would have developed a higher consciousness and his body would be modified by his consciousness and will be less subject to tamas and disease, but it would not yet be immortal. The supramental being would have a completely transformed mind, life and body; they would be supramentalised, completely transformed by the supramental force. The body would be luminous and would not be subject to physical death, though it could leave the body if it chooses to. The supramentalised body has substance but not matter as we know it, because it will have transformed matter. That is the difference we should understand. The substance would be so plastic that it will have no resistance. That will take a long time to establish in the evolution, but the process has already begun.

It is the descent of consciousness that was needed first. Once the supramental consciousness came down, the physical automatically would begin to change, automatically in a way – we still have to make an effort to realise it in ourselves – but gradually it will work and transform matter. The physical will automatically rise to the level needed so that it can become a perfect container for the supramental consciousness. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo brought the supramental consciousness into the earth nature. It is now a part of the earth

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consciousness, but it has not to every individual. The Mother said that the supramental consciousness and force sank into the Nature and Nature has accepted it. When the Vedic rishis spoke about the supramental consciousness, perhaps at that time Nature was not yet ready to accept this new consciousness. It has taken all these aeons to consolidate all the work done by Nature when it could become ready to accept a new consciousness. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have now come as harbingers of the new consciousness and they have brought it down, and the Mother experimented with its effects on her own body.

From 1956 until 1973 her aim was to see how the new consciousness works in the human body. She raised the body's capacity to its maximum and beyond which the old body would have broken. It could not have borne the new consciousness any more. There must be stages in which gradually the body gets attuned to the new consciousness and new faculties may come into the body.

There could come new ways of birth itself.

Sri Aurobindo says, there is the possibility that birth from woman's womb may not be necessary. There could be occult methods of birth, but Sri Aurobindo leaves it to the womb of Nature. He did not want to specify every detail about how things would develop under the supramental influence. The principle of Supermind is invariable, but the details of how it will work things out is variable.

Nothing can be predicted to the last detail, there has to be some choice left to Nature. It also requires a conscious collaboration of humanity towards this new creation.

Next, he says,

If, further, it is aided by a descent of its own principle already established in its own full force above the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* field of evolution and pressing down into that field to possess it, then the new power may even establish itself as a dominant element and considerably or radically change the consciousness and action of the world in which it emerges or into which it enters. But its force to modify or change or to revolutionise the law and working of the original substance chosen as the evolutionary matrix will depend upon its own essential potency.

In the process of involution, there are different levels: Supermind, Overmind, different levels of Mind, then the vital or Life element, and then Matter. Involution is the descent of the consciousness of Sachchidananda, the original consciousness, level by level right down into the inconscience. Evolution starts with the Inconscient and then there is the ascent of consciousness back to Sachchidananda. In this return journey, there is one thing that happens. Many people trying to understand Sri Aurobindo miss out on this point. They think that there is an evolution that takes place automatically, there is Life and then Mind and it goes on. But it is not so. There is a kind of double process that takes place. One is that, Matter has to mature first like the woman's womb has to mature so that it can give birth to a child. If the womb is not mature life cannot be produced in the woman's womb.

Similarly, matter's womb has to be mature enough. Over millions of years, it matures, becomes complex, and then only it is ready to move up to the new principle of life.

We know that Life is already embedded in Matter. The matter is the matrix for the entire consciousness on all levels, everything is there in Matter. From Matter, things come out in the reverse order. The first principle to come out is Life. Matter matures until it is ready to give birth to

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Life, but at that point it awaits the descent of the principle of life. It is only with the simultaneous descent of life principle together with the ascent of the life principle that there is a birth of life. This descent of the higher principle is like the 'sperm', the new seed of life which touches Matter's womb and then it gives birth to Life. Similarly, life must prepare itself, the womb of life must mature and become ready to give birth to the new consciousness of Mind, but the seed of Mind must come down from the involutionary principle and only then there is the birth of Mind.

This double principle of ascent and descent gets translated into the concept of Avatar. The Avatar is not just a human imagination, it is a part of the

evolutionary process. That is why in India we have Dashavatar, the ten Avatars. For example, there are the Matsya Avatar, the Kurma Avatar, the Varaha Avatar, and the Narasimha Avatar, respectively the Fish, the Tortoise, the Boar, and the Half-man-half-lion Avatars. Now, we can say that Matsya Avatar represents the evolution of life in water and the Kurma Avatar, the evolution of life in its transition from life in water to life on land: the amphibian. It is an Avatar who makes a leap in evolution possible. The Avatar is nothing but the descent, an incarnation of the Divine who has given a fillip to a new birth, a new stage in the evolution. In the same manner we may say the coming of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has given a fillip to the evolution from the level of Mind to Supermind.

This is the process by which evolution moves; there is a descent of a new principle and once that comes in then it can become a dominant element and considerably or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* radically change the consciousness. When Mind came, Life and Matter were changed, but Sri Aurobindo adds an important qualification here, he says, “its force to modify or change or revolutionise the law and working of the original substance chosen as the evolutionary matrix will depend upon its own essential potential.” When mind came it could not fully transform or change matter because mind does not have the sufficient power to be able to transform it. It has a limited force whereas the Supermind has an absolute force and consciousness, so it has the possibility of completely transforming matter.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Mind and Life are evolved in Matter, but they are limited and modified in their action by the obligation to use its substance for their instrumentation and by their subjection to the law of material Nature even while they modify what they undergo and use. For they do transform its substance, first into living substance and then into conscious substance; they succeed in changing its inertia, immobility and inconscience into a movement of consciousness, feeling and life. But they do not succeed in transforming it altogether; they cannot make it altogether alive or altogether conscious:

life-nature evolving is bound to death; mind evolving is materialised as well as vitalised; it finds itself rooted in inconscience, limited by ignorance; it is moved by uncontrolled life-forces which drive and use it, it is mechanised by the physical forces on which it has to depend for its own self-expression.

Sri Aurobindo says that when life evolves, it is bound to die. Life is not immortal; for example, a tree or a tiger

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are not immortal. The principle of death comes with the life plane itself; all life forms end up in death. Such is the limitation, the influence of matter. It will not let life live immortally because it has its own character of inertia and resistance to anything higher. Even when mind comes, it is full of ignorance and is rooted in inconscience, and because of this we have false thoughts sullied by the life element in which there is ego, ambition and desire. It gets influenced by life and is moved by uncontrolled life forces and emotions. It is also limited by the physical forces on which it has to depend. For example, even if the mind says

“I want to walk 10 kilometres for exercise”, the body, after two kilometres, may say, “I can’t walk anymore”.

He writes,

This is a sign that neither Mind nor Life is the original creative Power; they, like Matter, are intermediaries, successive and seried instruments of the evolutionary process.

Sri Aurobindo tries to establish here that like matter is limited, life and mind are also limited and therefore none of them can be the supreme Power or Creator, because the Creator must be limitless, it cannot be bound like the body, life and mind to weakness and limitation. He says, There must be, therefore, since Mind and Life also are not that, a secret Consciousness greater than Life Consciousness or Mind Consciousness, an Energy more essential than the material Energy. Since it is greater than Mind, it must be a supramental Consciousness-Force; since it is a power of essential substance

other than Matter, it must be the power of that which is the supreme essence and substance of all things, a power of the Spirit.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Then he says,

If there is to be an entire transformation, it can only be by the full emergence of the law of the spirit; its power of supermind or gnosis must have entered into Matter and it must evolve in Matter. It must change the mental into the supramental being, make the inconscient in us conscious, spiritualise our material substance, erect its law of gnostic consciousness in our whole evolutionary being and nature.

We see the logic of the idea. Mind, Life and Matter are not the Creator because they are themselves restricted by limitations, there must be a higher consciousness beyond life and mind which is the real creator of all these also.

To this higher consciousness, Sri Aurobindo gives the name supramental consciousness. It is this supramental consciousness which has the power and consciousness to develop and transform Matter. He further adds, This must be the culminating emergence or, at least, that stage in the emergence which first decisively changes the nature of the evolution by transforming its action of Ignorance and its basis of Inconscience.

Here we come to a sort of conclusion that this supramental consciousness which comes down from above must also be hidden in Matter because we base ourselves on this principle. All that evolves must be pre-involved.

That is the basic theory of this evolution. When we say that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have brought down the Supermind from above, it implies that Supermind was already there in Matter. However, since this is the original Power, it will not be pulled down by mind, life or matter; it will have the power to pull them up. Supermind is the only force and consciousness which does not get pulled

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down by the lower forces. It alone has the power to pull them up into its own nature and transform. Therefore, he says that it is the “culminating emergence”, that stage of the “emergence which decisively changes the nature of the evolution and transforms its action of Ignorance and its basis of Inconscience”.

What happens ultimately? Our mind gets transformed into Supermind, the Inconscient becomes consciousness and our material substance itself gets spiritualised. Such is the evolutionary process. The basic principle is more or less the same as we have been discussing; there is ascent and integration. Sri Aurobindo gives us further details of this process.

This movement of evolution, of a progressive self-manifestation of the Spirit in a material universe, has to make its account at every step with the fact of the involution of consciousness and force in the form and activity of material substance. For it proceeds by an awakening of the involved consciousness and force and its ascent from principle to principle, from grade to grade, from power to power of the secret Spirit, but this is not a free transference to a higher status.

The law of action, the force of action of each grade or power in its emergence is determined, not by its own free, full and pure law of nature or vim of energy, but partly by the material organisation provided for it and partly by its own status, achieved degree, accomplished fact of consciousness which it has been able to impose upon Matter. Its effectivity is in some sort made up of a balance between the actual extent of this evolutionary emergence and the countervailing extent to which the emergent power is still enveloped,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* penetrated, diminished by the domination and continuing grip of the Inconscience.

Whatever may be the mind’s capacity to transform the lower, there has to be a kind of compromise. Sri Aurobindo calls it a balance between what exists already and what is emerging. Although we have a divinity within us called the soul, this divine element also cannot over-rule what has been already

established in nature by the evolutionary process; it does not have the capacity.

This points to the significance of the Mother's statement that when the Supermind came she asked Nature to collaborate and Nature agreed to do so. It has agreed to undergo the necessary changes. This is important, otherwise the change would not take place even if the Supermind had descended. There has got to be the consent of the lower principle also.

Sri Aurobindo concludes this paragraph thus, All depends upon the more or less involved or more or less evolved condition of consciousness, – quite involved in inconscient matter, hesitating on the verge between involution and conscious evolution in the first or non-animal forms of life in matter, consciously evolving but greatly limited and hampered in mind housed in a living body, destined to be fully evolved by the awakening of the supermind in the embodied mental being and nature.

Now we come to another idea, the secret impulsion of evolution. He says,

To each grade in this series achieved by the evolving Consciousness belongs its appropriate class of existences, – one by one there appear material forms

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and forces, vegetable life, animals and half-animal man, developed human beings, imperfectly evolved or more evolved spiritual beings: but because of the continuity of the evolutionary process there is no rigid separation between them; each new advance or formation takes up what was before.

There is a continuity of the evolutionary process and Sri Aurobindo will compare this with the scientific attitude. It is a continuous process, but this continuity can be maintained whether going slowly or quickly. For example, I can walk from this hall to the gate in small steps or I can take big leaps. It is like a relay race in which one person runs and then gives the baton to the next runner and after a distance that runner gives the baton to the next. The baton establishes the link that each runner is in the same team. Similarly, when the tree evolved, it did not abandon matter. It was not just

life-energy. The life-energy takes the baton from Matter and continues the evolution from Matter. The life energy takes up the inanimate matter in the form of a plant and then in the form of an animal and then passes the baton to the mind.

When a human being evolves, he doesn't have only the mental consciousness, without life or body. He takes up life energy and a body. Continuity means that in every new principle of evolution the previous principles are also involved.

That is the meaning of continuity of the evolutionary process. This continuity is necessary because without it there cannot be any integration or transformation. If Supermind has no connection with mind, life and body then what would happen? Human beings would continue to suffer and have the same problems of violence and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* disease and death. Then why should the new element come at all? For what purpose? It is already there on its own level, and the only reason for it to come down here is to transfer already established principles. We are aspiring for the new race and a new consciousness so that humanity in general gets the benefit of this new consciousness. All of us will not become supermen but definitely all of us will have the benefit of the supramental consciousness.

The continuity is extremely important because the higher will transform the lower, and that lower will transform the still lower. That is the beauty of continuity, and that gives meaning to the descent of the Supermind for all. That is why Sri Aurobindo and the Mother struggled so much to bring down the supramental consciousness. They saw that this is the only way, not only to save humankind, but to bring peace and prosperity which has always been talked about and dreamt about by religious masters, poets, thinkers and prophets. It has never happened because the supramental consciousness had not manifested till 1956.

Humanity has always felt that there must be something –

a higher peace, a greater joy, a greater power – but it has only dreamt of it, none of the poets or the prophets or religious masters knew how to bring it to humanity. Now Sri Aurobindo opens the door. Supermind is that Force which will fulfil all our dreams.

Thus has come about the present status of the evolution of which man is the now apparent culmination but not the real ultimate summit; for he is himself a transitional being and stands at the turning-point of the whole movement. Evolution, being thus continuous, must have at any given moment a past with its fundamental results still in evidence, a present

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in which the results it is labouring over are in process of becoming, a future in which still unevolved powers and forms of being must appear till there is the full and perfect manifestation. The past has been the history of a slow and difficult subconscious working with effects on the surface,—it has been an unconscious evolution; the present is a middle stage, an uncertain spiral in which the human intelligence is used by the secret evolutionary Force of being and participates in its action without being fully taken into confidence,—it is an evolution slowly becoming conscious of itself; the future must be a more and more conscious evolution of the spiritual being until it is fully delivered into a self-aware action by the emergent gnostic principle.

This is the conclusion. There is a continuity of evolution, and because of its continuity, obviously there is a past, present and future. The past we know, the present we are experiencing, and applying the same logic of the past evolution we can surmise the future evolution. The past evolution has been subconscious, because mental consciousness was not yet evolved. Since the coming of humanity, evolution has been more conscious but not yet fully conscious, it is gradually becoming more conscious and mankind can now participate in its action.

We are asked to consciously participate and hasten the evolutionary process. The past subconscious evolution which culminated in mankind took billions of years; as it proceeded it accelerated. Sri Aurobindo says that the time gap between mind and Supermind would be much shorter than

when evolution was proceeding subconsciously. Do not think that the supermind will come only after another million years. The process will hasten, and it would be even faster if mankind consciously collaborates.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Next, Sri Aurobindo says, there are two ways of looking at evolution, the inner way and the outer way. The outer way means looking at the physical forms and this has been studied by Science. However, this has shed very little light on the development of consciousness. Whatever little Science has discovered is on the physical basis and instrumentation rather than on the progressing operations of consciousness. Due to changes in consciousness, progress in evolution has been more a “metamorphosis”

than a gradual “predictable development”. Focusing on the development of the physical forms would lead to predictable changes in those forms but would not foresee sudden leaps in consciousness. Looking at an ape’s body structure perhaps it could have been predicted that after fifty thousand years it should have a better jaw, a shorter tail, and stronger arms. But that kind of predictable development did not happen because there was a sudden leap in consciousness. Sri Aurobindo says that the steps in the evolution of new forms has been “a miracle of metamorphosis rather than a natural predictable development or quiet passing from one state of being to another with its well-marked steps arranged in an easy sequence”

He says,

These gulfs appear deeper, but less wide, as we rise higher in the scale of Nature. If there are rudiments of life-reaction in the metal, as has been recently contended, it may be identical with life-reaction in the plant in its essence, but what might be called the vital-physical difference is so considerable that one seems to us inanimate, the other, though not apparently conscious, might be called a living creature. Between

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the highest plant life and lowest animal the gulf is visibly deeper, for it is the difference between mind and the entire absence of any apparent or even rudimentary movement of mind: in the one the stuff of mental consciousness is unawakened though there is a life of vital reactions, a suppressed or subconscious or perhaps only submental sense vibration which seems to be intensely active; in the other, though the life is at first less automatic and secure in the subconscious way of living and in its own new way of overt consciousness imperfectly determined, still mind is awakened, – there is a conscious life, a profound transition has been made.

The idea here seems to be a little complicated. The main idea is that the gulfs between successive forms in Nature

“appear deeper, but less wide, as we rise higher in the scale of Nature”. It was J.C. Bose who proved that the plants also has impulsions or what could be called life-reactions. He also proved that plants respond to emotions and to touch.

I remember reading some time back that two plants were kept in a room and a known criminal was brought there, immediately there was a reaction in the plants—they started drooping and had a disturbed vibration. When a supposedly good and healthy man went into the room, the vibrations were completely different, there was more relaxation and ease. Finally, Sri Aurobindo concludes that: It has become evident that a secretly conscious or an inconscient Energy of creation has effected the transition by swift or slow degrees, by whatever means, devices, biological, physical or psychological machinery,—perhaps, having made it, did not care to preserve as distinct forms what were only stepping-

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* stones and had no longer any function nor served any purpose in evolutionary Nature. But this explanation of the gaps is little more than a hypothesis which as yet we cannot sufficiently substantiate. It is probable at any rate that the reason for these radical differences is to be found in the working of the inner Force and not in the outer process of the evolutionary transition...

He says that if we look not at the outer or physical aspects, but at the psychological side of the question and enquire, in what precisely lies the difference, we shall see that it consists in the rise of consciousness to another principle of being. Some people may say what's the great difference between apes and human beings? Some scientists have experimented with apes to see if they can learn languages or not, and how much they can communicate. But even after years of training, they may not be able to make some simple communications, but a small child will learn such communications spontaneously much faster and in far greater scope. There remains a great difference psychologically and in consciousness between the ape and a human being. However similar we may be in physical form, the consciousness is vastly different. There may be some intelligence in animals, and the animal has been the first laboratory of intelligence, but in humans Nature brings about a fullness of the intelligence and the mental consciousness that was only started at the rudimentary level in the animal. Sri Aurobindo says, The metal is fixed in the inconscient and inanimate principle of matter; even if we can suppose that it has some reactions suggestive of life in it or at least of rudimentary vibrations that in the plant developed into life, still it is not at all characteristically a form of

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life; it is characteristically a form of matter. The plant is fixed in a subconscious action of the principle of life, — not that it is not subject to matter or devoid of reactions that find their full meaning only in mind, for it seems to have submental reactions that in us are the foundation of pleasure and pain or of attraction and repulsion; but still it is a form of life, not of mere matter, nor is it, so far as we know, at all a mind-conscious being.

Sri Aurobindo writes,

In fact, life, mind, supermind are present in the atom, are at work there, but invisible, occult, latent in a subconscious or apparently unconscious action of the Energy; there is an informing Spirit, but the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the

physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotyped self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing. The electron and atom are in this view eternal somnambulists; each material object contains an outer or form consciousness involved, absorbed in the form, asleep, seeming to be an unconsciousness driven by an unknown and unfelt inner Existence, —he who is awake in the sleeper, the universal Inhabitant of the Upanishads, —an outer absorbed form-consciousness which, unlike that of the human somnambulist, has never been awake and is not always or ever on the point of waking.

Sri Aurobindo takes a new angle of looking at the whole process of evolution. Basically it is the same idea,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* but he is describing it in a different way. He emphasises that evolution is an awakening of consciousness. We have described the process of evolution as an improvement in the instrumentation of self-expression, but here he takes the view that it is a gradual awakening of consciousness.

In the beginning, even in the atom, there are present all these higher levels of Life, Mind and Supermind, but they are subconscious or an apparently unconscious action of Energy. What we have to understand is that there is in its centre the consciousness of the Divine, or let us say, of Supermind. This whirling movement of the protons, neutrons and electrons in the atom is “the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence”. This form of existence becomes so focused that the ‘informing Spirit’ is forgotten; it is like somebody in deep sleep. The spirit is there asleep in the form, and the form has forgotten or is not aware of its own deeper soul.

In the beginning, the matter is like that; it is absorbed in its own form, there is a stupendous creation of forms in the matter, an exclusivity of focus on the outer form.

Therefore, and thereby the inner truth, the ‘informing Spirit’, or as he quotes from the Upanishads, the

‘Inhabitant’, or we could say the Supermind, within it is completely forgotten. He says that “the electron and atom are ... eternal somnambulists.” A somnambulist is someone who walks in their sleep and does not know where they are going or what they are doing. The matter is making different forms but it does not know the purpose of its doing so or its aim or end result. It is furiously creating forms while forgetting all the while the ‘Inhabitant’ within, the inner spiritual consciousness.

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Matter is the “eternal somnambulist”, and at the next level of evolution, Sri Aurobindo says, In the plant this outer form-consciousness is still in the state of sleep, but a sleep full of nervous dreams, always on the point of waking, but never waking.

Plants are also in a state of sleep, but not as much as matter; there are “nervous dreams”, meaning nervous sensations and responses. It is the beginning of the awakening of the consciousness. The form is still very important on the plant level but there are the first vibrations of consciousness which indicates of a further evolution. Sri Aurobindo says,

Life has appeared; in other words, force of concealed conscious being has been so much intensified, has raised itself to such a height of power as to develop or become capable of a new principle of action, that which we see as vitality, life-force. It has become vitally responsive to existence, though not mentally aware, and has put forth a new grade of activities of a higher and subtler value than any purely physical action. At the same time, it is capable of receiving and turning into these new life-values, into motions and phenomena of a vibration of vitality, life-contacts and physical contacts from other forms than its own and from universal Nature.

When life comes in, not only does it bring these

“nervous dreams” but it also has the capacity “of receiving and turning into these new life values”. It is an interesting statement that plant life starts new life values. Previously, we mentioned that a plant can understand what is harmful or dangerous to it and what is good or beneficial, it starts responding to values of good and bad, not in a

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* moral sense, but to that which is harmful or helpful to its existence. He says it turns these values “into motions and phenomena of a vibration of vitality, life-contacts and physical contacts from other forms than its own”.

We see in plants something responding to “other forms than its own”. A stone doesn’t respond to other forms but the plant does. These are small hints but this can take us very far in evolution. Human beings also respond to other forms, and especially to other persons, but this process begins on the plant level. I am emphasising this point because it stresses the continuity of evolution.

Sri Aurobindo shows in different ways that all that we think we are, our life sensations, our responses to outsiders, our value systems, our intelligence, our love, and our desires, all exist on the level of plants or animals; in the human beings, we find them in an intense form.

We should not think that we are the only ones with these responses. These values exist in seed forms much earlier than the coming of human beings.

We have life values which we turn into morality and ethics and religion, but in plants, there are simple life values of what is harmful and what is not harmful. In one of the chapters called ‘The Delight of Existence’, Sri Aurobindo would analyse what exactly is at the root of morality. We find that it is the sense of good and bad, at its base or it is the instinctual sense of what is harmful or what is helpful in plants, animals and human beings! This is the reason why moral values change over time and from country to country, person to person. For example, in a particular period in India ladies were made to cover their heads at all times. Only in the company of the women of their own age could they remove it. However, today

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very few communities follow this rule. Earlier, it was a moral obligation for all, now it has changed. This is why we cannot find common moral standards in all cultures.

These days, especially all the moralities are breaking up because this is a time to break up the old that hampers growth.

Coming back to the text, the important point is that these values begin in plants. Sri Aurobindo adds, This is a thing which forms of mere matter cannot do; they cannot turn contacts into life-values or any kind of value, partly because their power of reception,

—although it exists, if occult evidence is to be trusted,

—is not sufficiently awake to do anything but dumbly receive and imperceptibly react, partly because the energies transmitted by the contacts are too subtle to be utilised by the crude inorganic density of formed Matter.

He says that matter may receive some vibrations from outside but they are not strong enough to break through the crude outer form to respond in values. Research with Kirlian photography, however, suggests that if we hold a stone and meditate, and then photograph it after ten minutes the colours, the patterns, everything is full of light; but if somebody with a dark desire holds the stone, after ten minutes the photograph is darker, crude, ugly. This suggests that the stone is also, to some degree, receptive and responsive.

Next, Sri Aurobindo says,

The transition to the mind and sense that appear in the animal being, that which we call conscious life, is operated in the same manner. The force of being is so

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* much intensified, rises to such a height as to admit or develop a new principle of existence, — apparently new at least in the world of Matter,—mentality.

Animal being is mentally aware of existence, its own and others, puts forth a higher and subtler grade of activities, receives a wider range of contacts, mental, vital, physical, from forms other than its own, takes up the physical

and vital existence and turns all it can get from them into sense values and vital-mind values. It senses body, it senses life, but it senses also mind; for it has not only blind nervous reactions, but conscious sensations, memories, impulses, volitions, emotions, mental associations, the stuff of feeling and thought and will.

We have here a long description of the consciousness of the animal. There is here the beginning of the mind, and we see what it can do: emotions, mental associations, volitions, memories. Today, the studies on animals as shown on various T.V. channels give us much insight into the feelings, sensations and value systems of animals.

They give plenty of examples of practical intelligence founded on memory, associations, stimulating needs and observation. Some animals even use devices to trap their food. We are mental beings and have devices and instrumentation to protect ourselves, produce food, to make shelter and so on, but similar devices are there in the animal world also. About ten days ago I saw a little bird nest in one of the plants here in our institution which was extraordinary. I saw it very closely. It was a little longish nest with a beautiful entrance and at the top of the entrance there was a little hood, so that the rain drops do not go inside the nest. Inside the nest there was all cotton padding that it must have pulled from seeds so that the

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little birdies may have a soft cushion. Imagine! We with our ten fingers wouldn't be able to make what the bird had done with just its beak. It was a marvellous creation!

“National Geographic” channel has shown how spiders weave their webs but I haven't seen caught on film how a bird weaves its own nest. After a couple of weeks, I was showing it to some guests and suddenly I saw there were two little babies inside, well-padded and well protected.

We humans think, we can build the Taj Mahal, but that little nest was no less comfortable than the Taj itself.

The animal world is capable of cunning strategy and planning. We see how tigers hunt their prey, there is a strategy involved in it. First of all, they have to attack the victim against the wind, because if they go with the wind the victim will get their smell and run away. They also have to hide by crouching down as long as possible.

They select their target, the most vulnerable one. I have learnt a lot from what is shown on TV. It always makes me wonder at this creator, and how beautifully things are harmoniously woven! Of this animal intelligence, Sri Aurobindo says,

...it can invent, adapt to some extent its inventions, meet in this or that detail the demand of new circumstance. All is not in it a half-conscious instinct; the animal prepares human intelligence.

We read previously about the continuity of evolution.

What is a response to things in plant life becoming more mature in the animal, and what is there as a rudimentary mental intelligence in the animal becomes fully mature in the human being. There always are improvements in the faculties from the previous stage of evolution. This is the reason why Sri Aurobindo says, “the animal prepares

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* human intelligence.” Now human intelligence has expanded to its maximum, and unfortunately, because of our intermediary stage, we have developed the mind to such an extent that it has become destructive. The animal had developed this intelligence but not to risk its own existence. Mankind has developed the mind to the point that it is risking its own existence. Therefore, there is an urgent necessity of bringing forth the balancing factor of the inner being.

In the next paragraph, we come to mankind. Now we see the whole thing becoming conscious. What was inconscient in the stone, semi-conscious in the plants and animals, now becomes fully conscious in man:

...the world, which he epitomises, begins in him to reveal to itself its own nature. The higher animal is not the somnambulist, — as the very lowest animal forms still mainly or almost are, — but it has only a limited waking mind, capable of just what is necessary for its vital existence: in man the conscious mentality enlarges its wakefulness and, though not at first fully self-conscious, though still conscious only on the surface, can open more and more to his inner and integral being. As in the two lower ascents, there is a heightening of the force of conscious existence to a new power and a new range of subtle activities; there is a transition from vital mind to reflecting and thinking mind, there is developed a higher power of observation and invention, taking up and connecting data, conscious of process and result, a force of imagination and aesthetic creation, a higher more plastic sensibility, the co-ordinating and interpreting reason, the values no longer of a reflex or reactive

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but of a mastering, understanding, self-detaching intelligence.

A whole list of attributes is there but what we want to understand is that what was there as a first intelligence in the animal, has now developed into its highest possibilities in human beings. There is a heightening and widening. The main difference that comes in between the animal and the human being is that we have a reflective and thinking mind; the animals do not have the capacity of self-reflection. The animal does not sit and recollect its memory and wonder what just happened, why did it happen, who is that person etc. There is no self-reflection and there is no questioning of who am I, why am I sad, what am I supposed to do in this life! Sri Aurobindo further says,

...there is a transition from vital mind to reflecting and thinking mind, there is developed a higher power of observation and invention, taking up and connecting data, conscious of process and result, a force of imagination and aesthetic creation, a higher more plastic sensibility, the co-ordinating and interpreting reason, the values no longer of a reflex or reactive but of a mastering, understanding, self-detaching intelligence.

These are of course mental qualities that are now seen amply in the human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo continues:

As in the lower ascents, so here there is also a widening of the range of consciousness; man is able to take in more of the world and of himself as well as to give to this knowledge higher and completer figures of conscious experience. So, too, there is here also the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* third constant element of the ascension; mind takes up the lower grades and gives to their action and reaction intelligent values. Man has not only like the animal the sense of his body and life, but an intelligent sense and idea of life and a conscious and observant perception of body. He takes up too the mental life of the animal, as well as the material and bodily; although he loses something in the process, he gives to what he retains a higher value.

Please mark the line, “although he loses something in the process, he gives to what he retains a higher value”. Of course, we all know this because we have all acquired a wider range of consciousness and greater capacities than the animal, but in the process we have lost many capacities that the animal had. The simple sense of hearing in human beings is not as acute as in a dog. Horses can sense danger from miles away. It has been observed that when elephants in a herd, are searching for water in an acute drought, and there is none visible in the area, the leader of the elephants, who is the eldest, brings into his visual memory, the spot where he has seen water previously, that pond or lake. He has a kind of visual memory that he has gained over long years of experience, and which he has captured photographically in his mind. He brings back those photographs and remembers that there is a lake in a certain place. It is not a conscious thing, it is done instinctively, but the photographic memory comes and therefore the leader can lead the whole herd towards the water pond.

Another interesting thing is that they can communicate with different herds which may be ten miles away – not

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through trumpeting, but by their feet. Their feet have certain sensitive cells that can detect vibrations in the ground from about ten miles. Due to that ability, mating can take place, they can know that there is another herd nearby where they can find a mate. These are the faculties that Nature gave to the animals but we have lost them almost entirely. We have very little such sensitivity in our senses. We lost these capacities because when we gained the mind, we focused on the use of the mind only.

“The animal too thinks, but in an instinctive way based mainly on the mechanical series of memories and mental associations”. The animal acts mechanically with the help of these abilities. It accepts the suggestions of Nature and though it has some crude beginnings of practical reason,

“it does not have a formal ideative and reflective faculty”.

The major difference apart from the capacity of intelligence between humans and animals is this capacity for ideative and reflective faculty. The animal cannot be ideative, it cannot bring in principles or ideals of morality, religion, or anything at the thought level. It doesn't construct ideas. Sri Aurobindo says, For the animal too thinks, but in an automatic way based mainly on a mechanical series of memories and mental associations, accepting quickly or slowly the suggestions of Nature and only awakened to a more conscious personal action when there is need of close observation and device; it has some first crude stuff of practical reason, but not the formed ideative and reflective faculty. The awaking consciousness in the animal is the unskilled primitive artisan of mind, in man it is the skilled craftsman and can become,—but

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* this he does not attempt sufficiently,—not only the artist, but master and adept.

We see again the same continuity of evolution; at each grade of evolution when a new level is reached the faculties of the lower levels are further developed, but when it comes to the full blossoming of the mind in human

beings, the faculties developed by the animal are lessened, and some of them are lost. The mind itself has great capacities of ideas, ideals and self-reflection. Self-reflection is of great importance because with it I can ask,

“who am I?” And “why am I upon this earth?” That is the prerogative of humankind, an animal will never ask such questions. And the person who does not ask himself these questions is as good as an animal from the angle of spirituality. If we think that we are here to live, get married, produce children, earn a living and then leave this earth, we are almost in the animal stage in evolution.

The Mother would say that yoga begins when you first ask yourself the question “who am I?” “Why am I here?”,

“What is the purpose of my birth?” When we start asking ourselves these questions, we begin to open to yoga. Till then, we are perhaps only ideative and reflective animals.

Now we come to a different argument. Sri Aurobindo writes,

But here we have to observe two particularities of this human and at present highest development, which bring us to the heart of the matter. First, this taking up of the lower parts of life reveals itself as a turning downward of the master eye of the secret evolving spirit or of the universal Being in the individual from the height to which he has reached on all that now lies below him, a gazing down with the double

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or twin power of the being’s consciousness-force,—

the power of will, the power of knowledge,—so as to understand from this new, different and wider range of consciousness and perception and nature the lower life and its possibilities and to raise it up, it also, to a higher level, to give it higher values, to bring out of it higher potentialities.

The first particularity is the gazing down of the mind on the two lower elements, the vital and below that the physical. The mind looks at them with

the twin eyes of consciousness and force, chit and tapas, knowledge and will. Why does it do that? It is in order to raise them up, to bring out their higher potentialities. This is the second particularity. For example, in physical education, all human beings have bodies, but how many of us are really looking at the potentialities of our bodies as an athlete might? An athlete brings out its hidden potential rationally, analytically, by training it in a specific manner.

In that way, the potentials of the body are brought out, thanks to the knowledge aspect of the human mind.

Similarly, we can develop and train our vital beings to see how much creativity we can bring out. We can study music, sculpture, and architecture and undergo specific training. It is the mind that does this; the animal cannot do it. It cannot gaze down like this at its body and vital from the standpoint of the mind. It knows it has a body, it knows it has vital capacity, for example, that it can outrun a certain animal and catch it, but it doesn't concentrate on it and develop it. The tiger does not train itself so that it can run faster. It lives with the same speed and when it becomes older it goes slower, doesn't get its prey, and dies off. Human beings, in contrast, develop the body and when it is not well thinks about how it can make it better.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo continues,

And this he does because evidently he does not intend to kill or destroy it, but, delight of existence being his eternal business and a harmony of various strains, not a sweet but monotonous melody the method of his music, he wishes to include the lower notes also and, by surcharging them with a deeper and finer significance, get more delight out of them than was possible in the cruder formulation.

That is a beautiful idea. The reason he gazes down on his vital and physical being is to bring out their potential, to bring them to higher level of self-expression. But why does he want to improve them? In parenthesis we may first say that not everyone tries to develop their lower being, most human

beings don't do that. They accept their body and vital and mind as they are given, and do whatever they can with their existing abilities. But those who have some competitive spirit or perhaps some yogic spirit, do try to improve their being. Why? Sri Aurobindo says it is because the "delight of existence [is] his eternal business" and making "a harmony of various strains". This idea goes back to the Upanishadic idea that man is here to express divine delight. It is sheer joy for him to expand and extend his own potential.

Even a common person would like to see that his body is healthy, he wants to live a good life because we live by delight and in delight. Maybe delight is too big a word, let us say we live for happiness and in happiness.

And one of the necessities of happiness is to be healthy, to have a good life with some monetary support and so on. This is the basic thrust in human life. The delight of existence is our eternal business. The rest are incentives,

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parameters, circumstances, and environment. In the second part of the sentence he says, "a harmony of various strains, not a sweet but monotonous melody the method of his music, he wishes to include the lower notes also...".

I have observed that musicians playing the main string of the sitar also include the lower strings which support the higher notes of the music. Then it becomes a melody, otherwise, if there are no lower strings, it becomes like an *ektara*, a one-stringed instrument that makes music that is sweet sometimes, but is vastly different from a sitar in the complexity of the melodies it can produce. Our life is also like that. If we can include the music of the vital and the physical and the subliminal into our mental

"raga" then our life becomes much richer, melodious and harmonious. This is the general aim of human life of which a person may or may not be aware. But everyone is given this instinct.

In the second half of this paragraph, Sri Aurobindo gives a very interesting analysis of what mankind does with his powers of knowledge and will. We

have seen that he wants to bring about a harmony of the various strains of his being – the mind, the vital and the physical. Then he says,

...he lays on them as a condition for his continued acceptance their consent to admit the higher values and, until they do consent, he can deal harshly enough with them even to trampling them under foot when he is bent on perfection and they are rebellious. And that indeed is the true inmost aim and meaning of ethics, discipline and askesis, to lesson and tame, purify and prepare to be fit instruments the vital and physical and lower mental life so that they may be transformed

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* into notes of the higher mental and eventually the supramental harmony, but not to mutilate and destroy them. Ascent is the first necessity, but an integration is an accompanying intention of the spirit in Nature.

When trying to uplift the other levels of our being we need to bring discipline into them, for example, the vital emotions of lust and greed need to be controlled and ordered. The mind tries to bring discipline to the vital and restrains it from acting impulsively. If we want to attain a higher harmony and a higher life, we need to be disciplined. If we don't put will power upon our own weaknesses and try to discipline them, and uplift them, then we are living an undisciplined and ordinary life.

We are then not conscious of what we want to do, we are not conscious of a higher life. But the moment we apply discipline on the vital, it revolts. It does not want to obey.

It behaves like a child who says – “who are you to put this discipline upon me? Let me enjoy my food, and my play”.

It is because of this revolt, this unbridled vital, one may take an extreme step of becoming an ascetic. We may go away from society and family and go to a monastery or an ashram or the forest. One of the reasons why people choose asceticism is because of this rebellious nature of the vital and the physical. Going away would at least satisfy the need of the human mind.

Asceticism came because there was no other avenue open; people wanted to be sattwic, wanted to be noble, but the vital would be out of control. The only way for the mind was to suppress the vital and leave this world and go to an ashram or a monastery. It is the mind trying to discipline and tame and purify the body and the vital nature and prepare them to be fit instruments and transform them

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into notes of the higher mental life. And religion of course supported asceticism, gave shelter to these ascetics with the good intention to purify the vital and to uplift it.

However, the real situation is that nothing in our being can be suppressed, it has to be transformed and purified.

Religion practiced and promoted suppression of the lower being rather than its transformation.

With the coming of the Supermind, the grip of religion has been loosened, it can no longer suppress the vital.

Once the Supermind burst open the lid of morality, ethics and religion, thousands of years of the suppressed human vital is now bursting forth. Therefore, we have waves of terrorism, violence and immorality. Let us not think that we the present generation are to be blamed. What our forefathers did, what their society did, all that is coming to us. We are only the physical instruments of a suppressed force. For aeons together it was under the carpet and now we are in a stage of transition and suffering but also it is a stage of purification. No doubt, purification is taking place. Ultimately, we do not want to mutilate or destroy our vital but we want to transform it because integration is an intention of the spirit in Nature. That is the process that is now taking place.

Sri Aurobindo says,

This downward eye of knowledge and will with a view to an all-round heightening, deepening and subtler, finer and richer intensification is the

secret Spirit's way from the beginning.

Sri Aurobindo is enlarging the scope of this downward eye. It is not only mankind looking to integrate, this has been the process of Nature itself. He continues,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* The plant soul takes, as we may say, a nervous-material view of its whole physical existence so as to get out of it all the vital-physical intensity possible; for it seems to have some intense excitations of a mute life-vibration in it, —perhaps, though that is difficult for us to imagine, more intense relatively to its lower rudimentary scale than the animal mind and body in its higher and more powerful scale could tolerate.

The animal being takes a mentalised sense-view of its vital and physical existence so as to get out of it all the sense value possible, much acuter in many respects than man's as mere sensation or sense-emotion or satisfaction of vital desire and pleasure.

Here the principle of integration and ascent has been taken up by Sri Aurobindo from a different perspective. He is observing it from a different angle. First is of looking down on the lower levels of the being from a particular summit that has been reached. Here he says that the "plant-soul takes" "a nervous material view of his whole physical existence".

The plant brings forth its nervous energies and responses in order to get out of its physical being with all the "vital-physical intensity possible". The stone could not do this, it could not detect this nervous-vital vibration present at a very subtle level. Then the animal takes a mentalised sense-view of its vital and physical existence. It is not the animal itself doing this consciously but it is Nature.

It looks down at the vital energies to get out of it all the sense value possible. This, he adds, is much more acute in many respects than man's sensation or satisfaction of vital desire. In spirituality or in yogic life it is

sometimes said that we experience animal instincts, animal pleasures or animal behaviours. What does it mean? It means that our

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human vital is behaving like the vital of an animal. For the animal it is not wrong. It is not immoral that the lion kills a small deer or a lamb because he is not doing it for greed but for a need. But what happens with us? I am supposed to be a mental being looking down upon my vital, having control over my greed and lust. So, when it goes beyond our needs, we say, we are acting like animals.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Man, looking downward from the plane of will and intelligence, abandons these lower intensities, but in order to get out of mind and life and sense a higher intensity in other values, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, spiritual, mentally dynamic or practical — as he terms it; by these higher elements he enlarges, subtilises and elevates his use of life-values. He does not abandon the animal reactions and enjoyments, but more lucidly, finely and sensitively mentalises them. This he does even on his normal and his lower levels, but, as he develops, he puts his lower being to a severer test, begins to demand from it on pain of rejection something like a transformation: that is the mind's way of preparing for a spiritual life still beyond it.

Although we may lose some of the faculties of the animals and plants, we make amends for these losses with our intellectual, aesthetic, moral and spiritual values and capacities. We do not abandon the animal reactions and enjoyments, but we mentalise them. That's a beautiful thing. For example, in Indian morality, we don't allow any kind of physical intimacy between lovers in public, whereas in western countries it is quite accepted unless it goes too far. But in India, we say physical affection between a man and a woman should not be displayed in

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* public. We have not abandoned the animal reactions or enjoyments, but have only mentalised them and brought in a

social law or dharma. It is morality which controls and monitors our behaviour. And as we develop in mind, we put on the lower being a much severe test, and begin to demand from it something like a transformation; that is the mind's way of preparing for spiritual life.

The Mother tells us that the coming of Supermind will break all the lids that we have kept for ages together.

Sri Aurobindo writes that, the lower nature is sensitively mentalised. In fact, as we grew up, we have seen the world bring up many such issues or problems which were always hidden from the public eye. Whether they were issues related to women, underprivileged, psychological issues or personal issues – all have suddenly come to the forefront.

Whatever was hidden under the carpet has been exposed, whatever was suppressed has burst forth. For instance the kind of dances which I had never seen in India was brought in by people like Michael Jackson. Earlier we did not appreciate it and found it vulgar. But it became a wave and everyone accepted it. I always wondered why and how is this happening. I got its answer in the Mother's conversations. She told us not to be surprised as all this is one of the doings of the Supermind itself.

Sri Aurobindo wrote about it a hundred years back, that the first thing the Supermind will do is to purify all that has been suppressed. Since 1956 the Supermind has taken away all these lids from all the levels of consciousness such that there was a burst of waves of the suppressed vital forces. When a disciple asked him, in the thirties or maybe forties, as to what are the signs of the coming of the Supermind, Sri Aurobindo said, one of the signs

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would be that the vital world will descend upon earth. It is a hundred years later and we can see that the vital world has completely descended. Any one person cannot be blamed to have brought the change. Some people become instruments of those vital beings who wanted to come down and once it came down it spread wide.

We have to accept this as a transition period, and as the Mother once said, those who know how to duck under these waves of the vital forces will be saved. For those who know how to swim in the sea may know that the only way to save ourselves from a huge wave is to duck under it.

We don't confront the wave, for then we will be crushed.

We quietly duck under the wave and let it pass and when we come up again, we will see the wave has gone away.

Maybe another wave comes, but we know that if each time we duck we can save ourselves. Similarly, we can save ourselves from this wave of the vital which is coming upon this world. Otherwise, we may be swept off by the wave and become a part of it. 'Ducking under' means to dip into our own inner being. It is a very simple truth.

The next point Sri Aurobindo makes is that not only is there a downward gaze of the mind on all that is below, there is also an upward gaze and an inward gaze. Our mind has three peculiarities – that is look downward, upward and inward. It is beautiful way of remembering its abilities. Sri Aurobindo says,

But man not only turns his gaze downward and around him when he has reached his higher level, but upward towards what is above him and inward towards what is occult within him. In him not only the downward gaze of the universal being in the evolution has become conscious, but its conscious upward

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and inward gaze also develops. The animal lives as if satisfied with what Nature has done for it. If there is any upward gaze of the secret spirit within its animal being, it has nothing consciously to do with it, that is still Nature's business. It is man who first makes this upward gaze consciously his own business.

When Sri Aurobindo says 'man', perhaps he means man in general and the spiritual man in particular. That is why he says that man is the most

dissatisfied creature on this earth. And this has two sides: he is never satisfied with his desires, and he is never satisfied with his progress.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

For already by his possession of intelligent will, deformed ray of the gnosis though it be, he begins to put on the double nature of Sachchidananda; he is no longer, like the animal, an undeveloped conscious being entirely driven by Prakriti, a slave of the executive Force, played with by the mechanical energies of Nature, but has begun to be a developing conscious soul or Purusha interfering with what was her sole affair, wishing to have a say in it and eventually to be the master.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that man is taking up nature in a similar manner as Sachchidananda does. The nature of Sachchidananda is that he is Purusha and Prakriti together but it is the Purusha who dominates, guides, and gives consent to Nature's action but is not dominated by Nature.

In contrast, the animal has accepted Nature hundred percent. Whatever Nature gives – food or drought or sun or rain – it accepts, adapts itself and lives by it. But a person says, “it's too cold, I must have a house over me and protect myself. It's too hot so I will invent an AC for

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myself”. We go beyond what Nature has provided because we have the means to have a greater control over Nature.

Humanity does not accept to be completely victimized by Nature. Human beings take charge of their own existence and progress, and begin interfering with what was Nature's sole affair. Sri Aurobindo says, He cannot do it yet, he is too much in her meshes, too much involved in her established mechanism: but he feels,—though as yet too vaguely and uncertainly,—

that the spirit within him wishes to rise to yet higher heights, to widen its bounds; something within, something occult, knows that it is not the

intention of the deeper conscious Soul-Nature, the Purusha-Prakriti, to be satisfied with his present lowness and limitations.

Of course, the reality is that we are not yet fully the masters of Nature, on the contrary we are disturbing and destroying Nature. Still, there is an urge, something occult, something within that is not satisfied with this present lowness. Nature has of course given us this idea and this urge to go beyond.

The definition of 'beyond' may differ for different people. For one person, 'beyond' may mean greater money, greater success, more property. There is always a possible step going to the next horizon. For a spiritual man, the next horizon may be a higher consciousness, a higher level of intellect, a higher plane of existence beyond the mind. For an artist, it may be a different expression, a higher level of expression. This sense of the beyond is there because of the innate Purusha in us and its aspiration to unite with the Jivatman. That is the centre of our aspiration, which gets converted into all

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* different kinds of ambitions to move forward in this line or that line. But really the fire of the aspiration is the soul's aspiration to come back to the Divine.

Everybody wants to move forward because of this innate fire within us. As soon as we have made a place for ourselves in the physical and vital world of the earth and have a little leisure to consider our further possibilities, the urge to rise higher and take control of our lower nature comes in.

I think Sri Aurobindo has given too lenient a scope for man. He says,

To climb to higher altitudes, to get a greater scope, to transform his lower nature, this is always a natural impulse of man as soon as he has made his place for himself in the physical and vital world of earth and has a little leisure to consider his farther possibilities.

We have discussed this before in the same sequence that we as the individual, or a collective or a human race, first establish ourselves

physically. We have already given this long explanation of how the human race first found itself shelter, not only in the cave and the trees, but everywhere.

Even today, the first thing every individual wants, when he grows up, is to find his own shelter, his own home, be it through marriage or through a job or in a university

– some form of physical shelter is required. Then he seeks vital stability, that means having a life partner, children, an income, a well-settled life. Then naturally, he could come to the higher level, but I am afraid that 90 or 95 percent of human beings don't think of further possibilities. They only think of further possibilities on the vital and the mental level, but not of coming towards the spiritual life. I suppose that is why we had

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these four *ashramas* in ancient India – Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa. Once we fulfil the Brahmacharya and the Grihastha ashrams, we could turn towards further possibilities of spiritual development. If we are constantly attached to our family, friends, social circles and institutions then we cannot proceed. We must detach ourselves from these things.

We must get liberated from our personal interests and then from the larger ego of humanity in the stage of *vanaprastha*. Finally, we can go to the last stage of

'sannyasa' where we think of God alone and nothing else.

This is the meaning of 'further possibilities' which was put in good sequence in Indian 'social dharma'. The yogis knew that mankind will not leave behind these stages by themselves, so they made certain rules and possibly an age limit for each stage. But I am afraid it is not been possible for most people.

Sri Aurobindo says of this urge in mankind to go higher, It must be so not because of any false and pitiful imaginative illusion in him, but, first, because he is the imperfect, still developing mental being and must strive for more development, for perfection, and still more because he is capable, unlike other terrestrial creatures, of becoming aware of what is deeper than mind, of the soul within him, and of what is above the mind, of supermind, of spirit, capable of opening to it, admitting it, rising towards it, taking hold of it. It is in his human nature, in all human nature, to exceed itself by conscious evolution, to climb beyond what he is.

Human beings could make this philosophy of the four

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Ashramas because we have a soul and an innate capacity within us. We do not have to be like animal, living and eating and producing all our life. We have to stop this kind of human-animal life at a point and turn exclusively towards our higher capacity. We were given time to satisfy *kama*, desire, but then there is the Divine, the inner being, and at some point we must go in search of that inner being. We are privileged to have this psychic being. As the Mother would say, only humans in this entire creation have the psychic being; also do not have it. Still, we reject that diamond and do not even look at it. Our ancient rishis envisaged a systematic life for us in order that we may realise our soul or psychic being. But it is only very few who have pursued it, otherwise, Indian society would not be what it is today. Only a few have been able to turn to the Vanaprastha and Sannyasa ashramas; the majority of people have gone on with the second stage of life and never proceeded further.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Not individuals only, but in time the race also, in a general rule of being and living if not in all its members, can have the hope, if it develops a sufficient will, to rise beyond the imperfections of our present very undivine nature and to ascend at least to a superior humanity, to rise nearer, even if it cannot absolutely reach, to a divine manhood or supermanhood. At any rate, it is the compulsion of evolutionary Nature in him to strive to develop upward, to erect the ideal, to make the endeavour.

This nature of the human being – his downward gaze, his upward gaze, his inner gaze – is not left to the choice of man, it is the compulsion of Nature in him. Not all human

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beings do this at the same level of intensity, but small or big, less or more, all human beings will strive towards this.

Having discussed the upward gaze of mankind, now Sri Aurobindo is going to take us into what he means by the inward gaze and what happens in the inward gaze, what are the different levels in the inner consciousness, and after that, he will conclude by describing where we now are at present, the status of mankind at present. He has told us that man is reaching beyond the mental consciousness into the higher levels up to the supramental, and he said that there is a compulsion of evolutionary Nature to go to these higher levels. The fact of humanity's wanting to progress is not due to his apparent mental ambitions or vital desires which are but an outer expression of what is deep within him, an aspiration to go beyond himself to higher levels. This aspiration is there in every human being and only varies in how much he or she gives it expression.

Now we come to the inward gaze. When we look within, what do we find in our inner being? Sri Aurobindo gives us a classification of four levels: physical-mental, the vital-mental, the mind-plane and the subliminal mind. These are basically the four inner sub-planes. He says, In mind itself there are grades of the series and each grade again is a series in itself; there are successive elevations which we may conveniently call planes and sub-planes of the mental consciousness and the mental being. The development of our mental self is largely an ascent of this stair; we can take our stand on any one of them, while yet maintaining a dependence on the lower stages and a power of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* occasional ascension to higher levels or of a response to influences from our being's superior strata.

In the process of evolution mankind has gone from the physical mind to the vital mind and has now reached the mental mind. This is largely the ascent that we have followed. There are other levels beyond mental mind which we have already discussed: the Higher mind, the Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, and the Overmind. He says,

At present we still normally take our first secure stand on the lowest sub-plane of the intelligence, which we may call the physical-mental, because it depends for its evidence of fact and sense of reality on the physical brain, the physical sense-mind, the physical sense-organs; there we are the physical man who attaches most importance to objective things and to his outer life, has little intensity of the subjective or inner existence and subordinates whatever he has of it to the greater claims of exterior reality.

We understand this very well because most of humanity lives on this level of the physical mind. What we call materialistic consciousness is nothing but this stage of the physical mind, which in reality is the lowest level of human mental consciousness. There are still lower levels

– the vital, the subconscious, but among the categories of the mind the lowest is the physical mind. The physical mind depends on the physical brain and the physical sense organs for its knowledge. It attaches most importance to objective things and to outer life. That is what the common person does. He has nothing to do with the subjective or inner existence, only what he sees or hears is true, and what the senses have given him as evidence and

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fact is valid. He doesn't bother about the inner subliminal being or the psychic or the Atman.

The person centred in the physical mind also has a vital mind and mental mind, but they take a subordinate role and are largely subject to the dominance of the physical mind. Sri Aurobindo says,

The physical man has a vital part, but it is mainly made up of the smaller instinctive and impulsive formations of life-consciousness emerging from

the subconscious, along with a customary crowd or round of sensations, desires, hopes, feelings, satisfactions which are dependent on external things and external contacts and concerned with the practical, the immediately realisable and possible, the habitual, the common and average. He has a mental part, but this too is customary, traditional, practical, objective, and respects what belongs to the domain of mind mostly for its utility for the support, comfort, use, satisfaction and entertainment of his physical and sensational existence.

This means that the person who lives in the physical mind also is looking for satisfactions, feelings, happiness and pleasure but he seeks them in outer, external objects.

He is “concerned with the practical, the immediately realisable, and possible”. Sometimes we hear people say that this spirituality is not possible, not pragmatic, not practical. They go according to the external possibilities that are available immediately around them. They go by their practical senses and are attracted to external things that give immediate physical pleasure. This type of person also “has a mental part but this too is customary, traditional, practical, objective”; he respects mental

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* knowledge mostly for its utility, for his physical existence.

We can understand that a majority of human beings are like this.

At the end of the paragraph, Sri Aurobindo provides, as he does for almost everything, the utility and purpose of this physical mind type of person. He explains, It is inevitable that the human being should thus take his first stand on Matter and give the external fact and external existence its due importance; for this is Nature’s first provision for our existence, on which she insists greatly: the physical man is emphasised in us and is multiplied abundantly in the world by her as her force for conservation of the secure, if somewhat inert, material basis on which she can maintain herself while she attempts her higher human developments; but in this mental formation there is no power for progress or only for a material progress. It is our first

mental status, but the mental being cannot remain always at this lowest rung of the human evolutionary ladder.

Nature produces such people in great numbers for two reasons: one is that these people conserve what Nature has achieved in society, they are the preservers of the tradition, the custom, the progress that has already been made.

They themselves will not make a leap of new progress.

They will say, “we are happy with what we are, we have a fine family, a fine tradition, lovely religious functions and festivals, and we enjoy that. We will maintain that in the name of our religion but we do not want to change.”

The progress that they make is on the material level, not on the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic or moral levels. Sri Aurobindo says, Nature needs them as a base, they are the

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foundation on which she can attempt her higher human developments. It is a pyramidal structure, and the first rung is the dominance of the physical mind. It is a very good base for Nature to build the higher levels.

Next comes the vital mind. Sri Aurobindo describes: Above physical mind and deeper within than physical sensation, there is what we may call an intelligence of the life-mind, dynamic, vital, nervous, more open, though still obscurely, to the psychic, capable of a first soul-formation, though only of an obscurer life-soul,—not the psychic being, but a frontal formation of the vital Purusha. This life-soul concretely senses and contacts the things of the life-world, and tries to realise them here; it attaches immense importance to the satisfaction and fulfilment of the life-being, the life-force, and the vital nature: it looks on physical existence as a field for the life impulses self-fulfilment, for the play of ambition, power, strong character, love, passion, adventure, for the individual, the collective, the general human seeking and hazard and venture, for all kinds of life-experiment and

new life-experience, and but for this saving element, this greater power, interest, significance, the physical existence would have for it no value.

In a way, we could describe the first type of person as tamasic, and the person with a predominant vital mind as rajasic. The rajasic *guna* is very beautifully described here with its display of ambition, the play of power and strong character. There are also plenty of people in society like this, – who are driven by ambition, desire for power, and enjoyment of love and passion. They have a tremendous dynamic push, they want to achieve new things, it can be

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* in art, music, philosophy, culture, architecture, business, technology or anything else. These are the leaders of society in every field, not just in external politics and economics, but in every field, they are the path breakers.

The former type, the tamasic, conserves, it doesn't take the risk of adventure, whereas the vital person is daring and adventurous. He may fail, he may fall on his nose, he continues to take chances. He is not happy with the past and he is often the breaker of icons, the symbols of the past.

Further,

This life mentality is supported by our secret subliminal vital being and is in veiled contact with a life-world to which it can easily open and so feel the unseen dynamic forces and realities behind the material universe. There is an inner life-mind which does not need for its perceptions the evidence of the physical senses, is not limited by them; for on this level our inner life and the inner life of the world become real to us independent of the body and of the symbols of the physical world which alone we call natural phenomena, as if Nature had no greater phenomena and no greater realities than those of gross Matter. The vital man, moulded consciously or unconsciously by these influences, is the man of desire and sensation, the man of force and action, the man of passion and emotion, the kinetic individual: he may and does lay great stress on the material existence, but he gives it, even when most preoccupied with its present actualities, a push

for life-experience, for force of realisation, for life-extension, for life-power, for

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life-affirmation and life-expansion which is Nature's first impetus towards enlargement of the being.

For the vital person, the physical only has value for supplying the objects for its realisation of vital aims.

Sri Aurobindo has brought in another category here, the inner vital. We have not only an outer vital mind, but there is also an inner vital mind which connects us to the occult world. There are dynamic rajasic people who drive towards the realisation of aims and in doing so are in connection with other worlds, other forces that are independent of the body and the symbols of the physical world. They go beyond the physical world and are in touch with these forces. That can be dangerous because they contact vital forces which can use them. There are good vital energies which can help them to fulfil their ambitions but there are also bad and dangerous vital energies.

For the vital person, whatever has been conceived has to come to the physical life-experience. This is also important in Yoga. This book we are reading is called *The Life Divine*; it is not "The Mind Divine", "The Physical Divine", or "The Spiritual Divine". Sri Aurobindo calls it "*The Life Divine*" because life is the centre, the field which manifests everything. Everything has to be kind of checked out on the life level. Otherwise, a philosopher, poet or thinker may think of many things in his fantastic world of imagination. An architect can draw fantastic new buildings on his drawing table but when it comes to the life plane he has to understand the difficulties of implementing it.

To realise on the life plane means also to materialise.

If I want to make a garden at our institution, I first put it

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* on the drawing board and say this is what it should look like. Then on the life-plane, I contact the architect and the contractor and the labour and the material suppliers.

I have to interact with these people, but then out of these interactions something must come about on the ground level, that is the realisation or another word for it is materialisation. For us too, the definition of realisation is different. Realisation is not just the inner contact with the Divine, in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga realisation is materialisation. For us realisation of the Divine on the non-material plane is not enough, it has to be on the material level and include transformation.

Speaking about the occult level, I remember that somebody had asked the Mother that when we do some evil action, how does it affect our psychic being? Doing an evil action means you are intentionally trying to harm somebody or something, you are doing something to cause destruction and calamity. Does the psychic being get affected? Does it become sad and depressed? The Mother said the psychic being is not affected by our evil actions. She explained that after a certain limit is reached, the psychic being slowly starts withdrawing. Withdrawing does not mean leaving the body, but normally, the psychic being is constantly trying to guide and influence our mind, feelings and body. But in those people who continue to do evil things, the psychic withdraws to such an extent that the outer being is completely occupied by the vital or evil forces. That is the punishment for the person. There are many evil-doers in the world who are well-off and seem to be doing well. We have seen the examples of Hitler and Stalin who caused millions of deaths and for a long time nobody could conquer them;

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that was because they had been vehicles, instruments of the Asuric forces. Of course, with Hitler it was the Lord of Nations himself. But even amongst common people when the psychic being withdraws, we become instruments and a point of habitation for these evil forces. That is the danger, she says, it is not that the psychic gets depressed but that the psychic withdraws. And then what happens is that our life becomes a calamity. We are no more striving for perfection with God at the centre, acting with the evil hostile

forces at the centre. That is the punishment given to the person – the so-called punishment.

Next, is the inner life-mind which can contact the vital worlds, and then there is vital mental man who is still enslaved to the vital force and its desires and passions which he seeks to satisfy through the mind. He may do all kinds of wrong things and the mind will justify it. But when this vital mental man interests himself strongly in mental things, he can become the mental adventurer, and open the way to new mind-formations, or become a fighter for an idea. The vital mind is kinetic and therefore a great force in the working of evolutionary nature.

Sri Aurobindo describes this type of person as a “dynamic poet of life”, the “champion of a cause”.

Sri Aurobindo then describes the person situated on the mind-plane:

Above this level of vital mentality and yet more inly extended, is a mind-plane of pure thought and intelligence to which the things of the mental world are the most important realities; those who are under its influence, the philosopher, thinker, scientist, intellectual creator, the man of the idea, the man of the written or spoken word, the idealist and dreamer

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* are the present mental being at his highest attained summit. This mental man has his life-part, his life of passions and desires and ambitions and life-hopes of all kinds and his lower sensational and physical existence, and this lower part can often equilibrate or weigh down his nobler mental element so that, although it is the highest portion of him, it does not become dominant and formative in his whole nature: but this is not typical of him in his greatest development, for there the vital and physical are controlled and subjected by the thinking will and intelligence.

In the mind-plane of pure thought and intelligence the things of the mind are the most important realities.

This type of person lives in a world of ideas which may or may not be pragmatic; he doesn't bother how realisable the ideas are, how much they can be materialised, and he is taken by the thrill of the idea. Sometimes when I read *The Life Divine*, I feel that thrill of the idea, as if the mind starts bursting with joy. The mind stops and says, what a wonderful idea! What a beautiful explanation! The mental man also has his vital part but the emphasis is different.

He has his life of passions and desires and ambitions and hopes of all kinds, and he has his lower sensational and physical existence, and this lower part can often weigh down his noble, mental side so that, although it is the highest portion of him, it does not dominate over his whole nature. But in his higher development, the vital and physical can be controlled by his will and intelligence.

We rarely see a human being in whom the mind, vital and physical are all in perfect harmony. We all have these aspects in various combinations, so we should not judge

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people by seeing only one aspect. The others are also there and sometimes raise their head. For example, one may be devoted to reading the Bhagavad Gita. He might also give lectures on it. He might enjoy being in this mental consciousness. However, he may be equally a slave eating meat or lusting after money. So, we cannot generalise and fix someone's nature by an outer action. Someone may be intellectually brilliant, but vitally undisciplined. This is the common thinking – that somebody who is a philosopher, thinker, writer, or poet must be living on fruits and vegetables. It is not so because he has a lower sensational and physical existence and this lower part can often weigh down the nobler mental element. Most of us are like that.

Unless and until one takes to sadhana seriously and start disciplining and purifying the vital habits, desires and attachments, these things will remain.

In fact, to be attached to non-attachment is also attachment. Even this attachment should not be there. It is not the external action we must renounce, renunciation must be from within. Sri Aurobindo says, it is the

inner renunciation that is important. Sri Aurobindo himself used to take fish until later in his life at the Ashram. But the day the Mother said stop, he didn't grumble over it.

That is the true attitude of detachment: having equality within oneself whether one has something or not.

The mental man cannot transform his nature, but he can control and harmonise it and lay on it the law of a mental ideal, impose a balance or a sublimating and refining influence, and give a high consistency to the multipersonal confusion and conflict or the summary patchwork of our divided and half-constructed being.

He can be the observer and governor of his own mind

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and life, can consciously develop them and become to that extent a self-creator.

This type of person will not be able to transform his vital and physical, but he will give his life a kind of harmony.

He will not be excessively vital, nor excessively physical.

Within a limited set of standards, he tries to balance his life, but he cannot transform his life, that comes only much later.

Next, Sri Aurobindo speaks of the subliminal mind: This mind of pure intelligence has behind it our inner or subliminal mind which senses directly all the things of the mind plane, is open to the action of a world of mental forces, and can feel the ideative and other imponderable influences which act upon the material world and the life-plane but which at present we can only infer and cannot directly experience: these intangibles and imponderables are to the mental man real and patent and he regards them as truths demanding to be realised in our or the earth's nature.

On the inner plane mind and mind-soul independent of the body can become to us an entire reality, and we can consciously live in them as much as in the body.

Thus to live in mind and the things of the mind, to be an intelligence rather than a life and a body, is our highest position, short of spirituality, in the degrees of Nature.

The subliminal mind senses directly the things of the mind plane and is open to the action of the world of mental forces. It “can feel their ideative and other imponderable influences” and it regards them as truths.

These various degrees of mentality are clearly distinct

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in themselves but most often they are mixed in our composition. To our ordinary intelligence they are only psychological types that may be developed to a greater or lesser extent. The perfected mental man is the rarest and highest of our normal human creatures. To go farther nature has to make active in the mind, life and body the spiritual principle. This has been a kind of description of the ascent of consciousness.

The definition of a spiritual person is new, but we have seen that everything that is to come in the future has already been experimented on in the previous level.

That is the rhythm of integration and progress. The new type of spiritual man has already been tried out on the mental level, and we have many yogis and saints and *sadhus* who have achieved a spiritual realisation, but these are all individual achievements. Humanity has not been spiritualised in spite of the ten Avatars, Swami Vivekananda and other yogis because these are all individual experimentations of Nature. There have been innumerable spiritualists, but in the coming age that will be the enlarged hope of the common person.

The percentage of the spiritual people will increase but the entire humanity will not be spiritualised, just as entire humanity is not mentalised. All of us are not fully mentalised, some of us are dominated by the vital mind, and some of us belong to the physical mind. I would even say that the majority of mankind belongs to the physical-mind. And because the world at present is in the grip of materialism perhaps at least 80 percent of people are predominantly situated in the physical mind. In the future

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* as materialism withdraws and more spiritualism comes in, this percentage will decrease.

The spiritual man is the next step in evolution and that's what Sri Aurobindo has described in detail in *The Human Cycle*. There he writes about the coming of spiritual man, in the sense that evolution is moving in that direction.

At present we know the spiritual man as an individual achievement, but tomorrow there will be a collective race of beings. Then there will come superman, who again is already there as an individual achievement in none other than the Mother herself. She has been the first fulfilment of the ideal of superman with its new consciousness and with the transformation of the body, etc. Always the Avatar starts the work here along with all of us and manifests the next new principle in evolution. She has shown us what mankind has to do to reach the superman consciousness.

Only then perhaps we will understand who the Mother is and what the Mother did for the earth. Now, we can only have a kind of superficial understanding.

It is the same with regard to understanding *Savitri*.

The Mother has said that it is the new race which will understand *Savitri*. Can we imagine what Sri Aurobindo has written, an epic that will be truly understood only after hundreds of years by the elite of human beings!

Obviously, it is not meant to be understood by today's humanity. Unless we have that consciousness we cannot understand it. It is not the mind that understands *Savitri*, it is the consciousness that absorbs those mantric lines.

When the Mother said that *Savitri* is to be understood by the future man of the new race, she means that the fullness of understanding will not come to us now.

Whatever may be the standard or status of our scholarship,

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this fullness of understanding cannot come to us because our consciousness is not equipped to absorb the heights and depths of its vision. The fullness of *Savitri* can only be absorbed by the overmental and the supramental consciousness because it is written from those levels and it can reveal itself fully only on that level of consciousness.

When we read *Savitri* some people may experience tears of joy and flashes of intuitive understanding. At those moments it is not the mind which understands but a deeper part of our being, the psychic being which captures the delight of *Savitri* and this gets translated in our emotional being as tears of joy. Sometimes after reading we may close the book and just go into meditation because that contact is so deep and intense that our mind and our emotions just shut off; they cannot think any more, they cannot feel any more, and we are immersed in silence. All this is because there are layers in our being which respond to *Savitri*. Today we may get a brief contact, but with the superman there will be a constancy of contact.

This doesn't mean that we should not read *Savitri* just because we can't understand it. There are hidden levels of our being which start tuning themselves and vibrating with *Savitri*. After reading it several times we may get a clearer picture of the thought structure, because in *Savitri* too there is a thought structure, but there is a vision too.

It brings delight which we cannot get with our mind.

For the inner being, the subliminal, the psychic, those mantric lines are like nectar. By reading *Savitri* we are supplying food for our soul and its growth. Beyond that we cannot claim anything more. There may be flashes of revelation which are beautiful but let us be quiet about

“understanding” *Savitri*; at the same time let us also be

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* assured that by reading it we are supplying *amrita* to our souls.

Continuing now with the text, Sri Aurobindo says, For these are her evolutionary figures built out of the surface mentality; to do more she has to use more amply the unseen material hidden below our surface, to dive inwards and bring out the secret soul, the psyche, or to ascend above our normal mental level into planes of intuitive consciousness dense with light derived from the spiritual gnosis, ascending planes of pure spiritual mind in which we are in direct contact with the infinite, in touch with the self and highest reality of things, Sachchidananda. In ourselves, behind our surface natural being, there is a soul, an inner mind, an inner life-part which can open to these heights as well as to the occult spirit within us, and this double opening is the secret of a new evolution...

This is what I would like to focus upon. After describing the three levels of mind he now says that in order to prepare ourselves for the next levels we need a new instrumentation. Until now the instrument of our progress has been the mind, but to go beyond the mind, the new instrument required is the soul, the psychic being. It is this soul which can open to the occult spirit within us and to the heights beyond the mind, the planes of intuitive consciousness, etc. We must open to our inner being where the psychic being is seated and then to the higher planes of consciousness above the mind. This is what Sri Aurobindo calls the double opening which is the secret of a new evolution. This is the evolution of the race of superman. For this what is required is that we bring forth the psychic being just as the earlier evolution

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brought for the mind with its different strata. The new evolution will stand on the basis of the soul. That is why we see in Integral Yoga the urgent necessity of the psychic realisation! Realisation of the psychic being is not to bring us salvation or mukti or liberation. It is the fundamental instrument of moving into the new stage of evolution.

In the preparatory stage, the psychic being comes forward, and governs the mind and life and body and external activities. This will enable the coming of the spiritual man who is a kind of preparation for the superman. This is how evolution will evolve stage by stage. If Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are repeating this idea – to go towards the psychic realisation – it is not only to make us a better human being but because we will become a candidate for superman. That is the necessity of evolution itself. It is not that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo are trying to formulate a new philosophy or a new Yoga; they are showing the way to those who want to go to the next level of evolution. It is possible to be in meditation or experience the joy of devotion for sometime and come back to the outer normal consciousness. But, to evolve further, one has to follow the path laid down by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. The journey begins with realisation of the psychic being.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

...by that breaking of lids and walls and boundaries the consciousness rises to a greater ascent and a larger integration which, as the evolution of mind has mentalised, so will by this new evolution spiritualise all the powers of our nature.

He says that just as mind has mentalised everything up to this present level of evolution – by mentalised he means

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that our entire life has been organised and influenced by the mind through morality, ethics, religion, science, art, and so on – similarly in the spiritual age the consciousness will spiritualise all our activities. All our outer activities will be guided by the psychic being. Sri Aurobindo says, For the mental man has not been Nature's last effort or

highest reach, — though he has been, in general, more fully evolved in his own nature than those who have achieved themselves below or aspired above him; she has pointed man to a yet higher and more difficult level, inspired him with the ideal of a spiritual living, begun the evolution in him of a spiritual being.

The spiritual man is her supreme supernormal effort of human creation; for, having evolved the mental creator, thinker, sage, prophet of an ideal, the self-controlled, self-disciplined, harmonised mental being, she has tried to go higher and deeper within and call out into the front the soul and inner mind and heart, call down from above the forces of the spiritual mind and higher mind and overmind and create under their light and by their influence the spiritual sage, seer, prophet, God-lover, Yogin, gnostic, Sufi, mystic.

In the future, there will be a new spiritual race. For that Sri Aurobindo beautifully explains that we must not only “call out into the front the soul and the inner mind and heart” but also “call down from above the forces of the spiritual mind and... overmind”. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done that. We can understand now that they have not only taken birth to bring down the new supramental consciousness, but they have also prepared mankind for this advance. They are not just Avatars who have come to Pondicherry and made an

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Ashram here and then started Auroville and a few more centres across the world and left the earth. They are Avatars who have prepared for the spiritual age. This is a very distinct difference. They have called to the front of the soul of humanity by all the time telling us about the psychic being and its importance which they themselves had realised. Sri Aurobindo brought down the higher spiritual mind and the Overmind into the physical on the 24th of November 1926. It became possible because of their intense tapasya. What we tend to forget, when we call them Avatars, is their tapasya. I insist that this is of equal importance. For Sri Aurobindo and the Mother all through it has been a tremendous struggle, suffering, tapasya, pain. We have to always see the Mother as the Tapaswin, Sri Aurobindo as the Yogin, because without that the earth itself would not have been

prepared. That is why we say they are the goal and they are the path; they have given us superman as the goal and they have prepared the path themselves. In one of her conversations with a disciple, she says, “My child, I have taken away all the thorns of the path.” In fact, it has become a kind of a rose-bedded path now for her children to walk, if only we decide to walk that path.

Sri Aurobindo says,

This is man’s only way of true self-exceeding... The vital man, the mental man have had an immense effect upon the earth-life, they have carried humanity forward from the mere human animal to what it is now. But it is only within the bounds of the already established evolutionary formula of the human being that they can act; they can enlarge the human circle but not change or transform the principle of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* consciousness or its characteristic operation. Any attempt to heighten inordinately the mental or exaggerate inordinately the vital man, – a Nietzschean supermanhood, for example, – can only colossalise the human creature, it cannot transform or divinise him.

A different possibility opens if we can live within in the inner being and make it the direct ruler of life or station ourselves on the spiritual and intuitive planes of being and from there and by their power transmute our nature.

This is a warning, we don’t want to be super intellectuals or super vital beings. A frog even if it expands enormously cannot become a cow, it will still be a frog. Similarly, if a human being develops super intelligence and super energy, he may have a super ego and he will still be a human being.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

The spiritual man is the sign of this new evolution, this new and higher endeavour of Nature. But this evolution differs from the past process of the

evolutionary Energy in two respects: it is conducted by a conscious effort of the human mind, and it is not confined to a conscious progression of the surface nature, but is accompanied by an attempt to break the walls of the Ignorance and extend ourselves inward into the secret principle of our present being and outward into cosmic being as well as upward towards a higher principle. Up till now what Nature had achieved was an enlarging of the bounds of our surface Knowledge-Ignorance; what is attempted in the spiritual endeavour is to abolish the Ignorance, to go inwards and discover the soul and to become

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united in consciousness with God and with all existence. This is the final aim of the mental stage of evolutionary Nature in man; it is the initial step towards a radical transmutation of the Ignorance into the Knowledge.

Today, it is not required to become bhaktas of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, play their music, sing their songs and meditate in the morning. That does not work anymore.

That was the past when people started small ashrams around the gurus. Now the demand for spirituality has become much wider because of the integral philosophy of life. Now the spiritual man is an integral person, not the unidimensional person who has realised only the psychic being. That is a great step, no doubt, we are not discounting that, but now the demand is to be integral.

Continuing, Sri Aurobindo says,

The spiritual change begins by an influence of the inner being and the higher spiritual mind, an action felt and accepted on the surface; but this by itself can lead only to an illumined mental idealism or to the growth of a religious mind, a religious temperament and some devotion in the heart and piety in the conduct; it is a first approach of mind to spirit, but it cannot make a radical change: more has to be done, we have to live deeper within, we have to exceed our present consciousness and surpass our present status of Nature.

The old ideal was to discover the soul, and we called a person who had achieved that, a great spiritual being, but at least we who have read Sri Aurobindo's definition of spiritual man should not call such a person a great spiritual being. He may be a higher human being, higher

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* than you and me, but we will have to use some other terminology now. We should not get into the trap of calling every *sadhu* a spiritual being any more, because obviously, they are far from being spiritual from the point of view of integral realisation.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

It is evident that if we can live thus deeper within and put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instrumentation or raise ourselves to dwell on higher and wider levels and bring their powers to bear on physical existence, not merely receive influences descending from them, which is all we can now do, there could begin a heightening of our force of conscious being so as to create a new principle of consciousness, a new range of activities, new values for all things, a widening of our consciousness and life, a taking up and transformation of the lower grades of our existence, — in brief, the whole evolutionary process by which the Spirit in Nature creates a higher type of being.

This is a wonderful conclusion: that we must live deeper within and “put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instrumentation” of mind, life and body. We have to attend to not only the inner, the upper, but also the outer aspect of our being. The old yogas went only into the inner soul and from there to the transcendental Brahman. Nobody went down into the subconscious levels, which the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done as a joint effort. But now, he says that we have to work on the outer level also. That is what he is insisting on here — “to put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instrumentation”. It means that we have to find new forms of expression. All forms

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of expression till now have been based on the mind and emotions and sometimes on intuition. We have had some great art based on intuition, and great ideas have come out of intuition, but otherwise, all our industry, all our commerce, and all our social forms of morality and ethics have been mind-born. Now, he says we must find new forms of expression based on a psychic consciousness that will create a higher type of being.

How will the new race live? They also have to have their activities in the world. They are not just going to sit in meditation all the while under a tree. They will have their own businesses, their own art, their own music, their own architecture, but all this will be based on a psychic consciousness. That is why in *The Ideal of Human Unity* Sri Aurobindo says that new forms have to be brought forth and experimented with.

No doubt our old forms of art have great importance and great beauty. The Ajanta-Ellora caves and temples are among the most magnificent examples in sculpture. I doubt if the Kailash Temple can be surpassed. It is not just a great work of architecture. The temple was carved from the top to the bottom. Normally, buildings are built from the bottom upwards, but the Kailash temple was sculpted from the top to the bottom from a monolith. Today, we have the various wonders of the world, but few people realise the uniqueness of this structure. It is impeccable, with not one single mistake. Imagine what a work of art it is! There were hundreds of artisans who created this magnificent masterpiece. Yet Sri Aurobindo would say these belong to the past and that the future forms will be even greater, more beautiful, more aesthetic, and more delightful. It is only Sri Aurobindo who could say that.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Others are too much in love with our past architecture and sculpture and paintings. But he envisages new forms which are bound to come. He is encouraging us to put out steadily the inner forces into the outer instruments, to raise ourselves to dwell on higher and wider levels so that we become part of a creation of a higher type.

Sri Aurobindo is a great idealist, he painted the future possibilities, but he doesn't take his feet off the earth. He says,

But the human race is still weighted by a certain gravitation towards the physical, it obeys still the pull of our yet unconquered earth-matter; it is dominated by the brain-mind, the physical intelligence: thus held back by many ties, it hesitates before the indication or falls back before the too tense demand of the spiritual effort. It has, too, still a great capacity for sceptical folly, an immense indolence, an enormous intellectual and spiritual timidity and conservatism when called out of the grooves of habit: even the constant evidence of life itself that where it chooses to conquer it can conquer, – witness the miracles of that quite inferior power, physical Science, – does not prevent it from doubting; it repels the new call and leaves the response to a few individuals.

In reality, we are full of doubt and scepticism. We treat all spiritual talk as imagination. We even do not hesitate to dismiss the predictions of Science. That is why perhaps Sri Aurobindo wrote in *Savitri*: “God shall grow up while the wise men talk and sleep”. He knew that God will keep growing steadily, silently while we debate and doubt. And then he added, “...belief shall be not, till the work is done”.

That is the state of the human mind.

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It is not sufficient for the humankind that the higher spiritual heights are realised on the individual level or even by some small groups here and there. Spirituality has to spread wide so that it becomes part of the subconscious memory of the human race. It doesn't mean that all of us will become spiritual, but there must be a sufficient number of people, as we say, there must be ‘the hundredth monkey’ to call them a group. It is said that when hundred monkeys attain a new ability, then it becomes an ability that is part of the subconscious memory for the whole species.

Sri Aurobindo says,

For then, even if there is a lapse of Nature, a fall in her effort, the Spirit within, employing a secret memory, – sometimes represented on the lower side, that of downward gravitation, as an atavistic force in the race, but

really the force of a persistent memory in Nature which can pull us either upward or downward,

– will call it upward again and the next ascent will be both easier and more lasting, because of the past endeavour; for that endeavour and its impulse and its result cannot but remain stored in the subconscious mind of humanity.

The Mother speaks of a previous creation in humanity when the spiritual attainment was highly developed.

Of course, she also says that this present creation is not going to be destroyed, that there will not be another *pralaya* or total destruction, though she said there would be a destruction of all that will not belong to the future.

Previously, everything was destroyed, the good and the bad, but now the forward moving forces – the people, energies, ideas, things – will be kept but all that is resistant

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* or tamasic, will be removed. In this context we can say that if religion does not move towards the future it is bound to be wiped off; it applies to any and every religion without any exception.

Sri Aurobindo writes,

It is not indeed necessary or possible that the whole race should transform itself from mental into spiritual beings, but a general admission of the ideal, a widespread endeavour, a conscious concentration are needed to carry the stream of tendency to its definitive achievement.

This is what I always emphasise in my talks in India and abroad – that the whole of humanity cannot be, and need not be spiritualised. He is only saying that there must be an admission of the ideal and a widespread endeavour.

We see the mushrooming of so many spiritual centres across the world, it shows that there is some kind of forward progress. What do the centers around the world do? They don't transform people, it is not possible, but they are spreading this ideal so that people hear of it.

Some may be convinced, some may reject it, while some may admit it. The purpose of these centers is to spread the message on the mental level, beyond that no center can do anything. We are spreading or disseminating Sri Aurobindo's thought and message. It is up to the people to deny or accept it. He is saying very clearly that what is needed is a "conscious concentration" and "admission of the ideal", a general "widespread endeavour".

The last paragraph as usual is a summary of the chapter and a link to the next.

The principle of the process of evolution is a

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foundation... The first foundation is Matter; the ascent is that of Nature; the integration is an at first unconscious or half-conscious automatic change of Nature by Nature. But as soon as a more completely conscious participation of the being has begun in these workings of Nature, a change in the functioning of the process is inevitable. The physical foundation of Matter remains, but Matter can no longer be the foundation of the consciousness, the foundation of the developing existence will be the new spiritual status above or the unveiled soul status within us; it is a flow of light and knowledge and will from above and a reception from within that will determine the reactions of the being to cosmic experience.

We have discussed the foundation of matter and how it will evolve, but here he says, the foundations of the new creation will be a "spiritual status above or the unveiled soul status within", in other words, the psychic being.

Continuing, he says,

The whole concentration of the being will be shifted from below upwards and from without inwards; our higher and inner being now unknown to us will become ourselves, and the outer or surface being which we now take for ourselves will be only an open front or an annexe through which the true being meets the universe.

The higher and inner will become our normal self, and the higher spiritual consciousness and psychic being will be the basis of living. Further, The outer world itself will become inward to the spiritual awareness, a part of itself, intimately embraced in a knowledge and feeling of unity and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* identity, penetrated by an intuitive regard of the mind, responded to by the direct contact of consciousness with consciousness, taken into an achieved integrality.

These are the characteristics, we may say, of a spiritual person. The difference between the inner and the outer becomes less and less, there will be a greater sense of identity and unity. And then finally he writes, The old inconscient foundation itself will be made conscious in us by the inflow of light and awareness from above and its depths annexed to the heights of the spirit. An integral consciousness will become the basis of an entire harmonisation of life through the total transformation, unification, and integration of the being and nature.

As usual, Sri Aurobindo, has given us at the end of the chapter a summary along with a couple of new ideas which will be taken up in the next chapter.

Lecture Notes

I. The triple character of evolution a) i. An evolution of forms of Matter more & more subtle and intricate.

ii. An upward evolutionary curve.

iii. A taking up of what has already been involved.

b) i. An evolution in the Inconscience is the beginning.

ii. An evolution in the Ignorance is the middle.

iii. An evolution in the Knowledge is the end.

II. The basic principle of evolution a) There is already involved, in the first foundation, all the principles that are to evolve.

b) The new principle that evolves is bound to be

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modified by the basic substance; at the same time it will modify the substance by its own law of nature.

III. The original substance of evolution & the evolutionary movement

a) The foundation of the evolutionary process is the first emergent principle — Matter.

b) Life & Mind are the next emergent principles in Matter which modify Matter and simultaneously get limited by the laws of Matter.

c) Since Life & Mind are intermediaries, there must be a secret consciousness greater than Life & Mind; an Energy greater than that of Matter: that Consciousness & Force is that of Supramental Consciousness-Force.

d) The movement of evolution from principle to principle takes place by the awakening of the involved consciousness and force but also determined by the material organisation provided for it & partly by its own status.

IV. The secret impulsion in evolution a) Evolution from one grade to another takes place by some bound or crisis or by some descent of an influence from higher planes of Nature.

b) By this process, man is now the apparent culmination yet he is not the ultimate summit. As evolution is continuous, man will give place to the conscious spiritual man who in turn will deliver the gnostic being.

V. The study of the process of evolution a) Science has studied the outer or the form-building of evolution. But it lands up in many missing links that remain always missing.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* b) If we scrutinise the actual difference between highest animal and lowest man or the highest plant life and the lowest animal life, there is a deep gulf that separates the two which science cannot explain.

c) But if we look at these differences from the angle of the working of an inner force, these transitions could be easily explained.

VI. The study of the inner process of evolution a) The answer lies in the rise of Consciousness to another principle of being.

b) The plant is fixed in a subconscient action of the principle of life; the animal is fixed in vital-mind & mind-sense; man is taken up by the intellect which is but a degradation of Supermind. Thus each of these forms of existence is fixed in a different principle of the universal being.

c) But this ascent to higher grades of consciousness does not carry with it the abandonment of the lower grades. It cannot do so because rudiments of the higher are always present in the lower creation.

VII. The stages of self-awakening a) Life, mind & Supermind are present in the atom but apparently in an unconscious action of Energy. The electron & atom are thus eternal somnambulists!

b) The plant is still in a state of sleep but full of nervous dreams ... it develops the principle of vitality, the life-force.

c) The animal develops the principle of mentality —

which is a stage of preparation for the coming of man.

d) In man there is a transition from the vital-mind to reflecting and thinking-mind; there is a widening of the range of consciousness. Unlike in the animal,

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man's consciousness can become a master of circumstances.

VIII. Two particularities of the human consciousness a) A gazing down on life & matter with the twin power of the being's consciousness-force — the power of will, the power of knowledge.

b) By the power of knowledge, he brings out the higher potentialities of life & matter because the delight of existence is his eternal business.

c) By the power of will, he enforces himself on the lower principles so that they are raised to the higher values

— and this the meaning of ethics!

d) The plant-soul, for example, gets out of its physical existence" all the vital-physical intensity.

e) The animal takes a mentalised sense-view of its vital

& physical existence.

f) Man gets from life & mind a higher intensity of values such as intellectual, aesthetic, moral & spiritual values.

g) Upward & inward gaze of man h) While the animal is satisfied with what Nature has done for it, it is man who looks beyond his present status.

i) Man is not a slave of Prakriti: he has begun to develop the Purusha within him.

j) Man, being imperfect, strives for perfection; secondly, in all creation he is the only capable creature to realise his soul.

k) Even on the collective level, he has the compulsion of Nature to make this upward endeavour.

IX. Planes & sub-planes of the mental consciousness a) The *Physical-mental*: the lowest sub-plane of human

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* intelligence. It takes its stand on matter & material world, on the body & the bodily-life.

b) The *Vital-mental* or vital man who attaches importance to the satisfaction of life-force & vital nature. He is the man of desire and sensation, the man of passion & emotion, etc.

c) The *Mind-plane* is of pure thought & intelligence such as the philosopher, the thinker, scientist, etc. His vital

& physical parts are controlled by his thinking will.

He cannot transform his nature but he can control and harmonise it; he can consciously develop them and become to that extent a self-creator.

d) The *subliminal mind* is behind the mind of pure intelligence and it is open to the action of a world of mental forces and other influences that act upon the material world.

e) The mental man, the man of self-dominating mind and will, the high intellect, the sage are the three degrees of mentality that have developed so far in evolution.

X. The powers behind our surface natural being a) Man has before him the ideal of a spiritual living and for that he has to inwardly bring out the secret soul, the inner mind, the inner life-part.

b) Any attempt to heighten inordinately the mental or the vital man may colossalise the human creature. An inner living is the only way to transmute our nature and become the sage, seer, prophet, God-lover or yogin.

c) This evolution into the spiritual man differs from the past evolution in Nature because it is conducted by a conscious effort of the human mind. Secondly it is

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an effort to break the walls of ignorance and to enter into contact not only with the secret inner principle but the cosmic being as well.

d) By a greater inner and spiritual living, there could be the creation of a new principle of consciousness that could take up the transformation of the lower grades of existence ending in the creation of a higher type of being.

XI. The present state of man

a) Man is at present still bound to the physical intelligence and to 'skeptical folly'.

b) Humanity as a race must advance so that the victories of the spirit can be secured.

c) It is not necessary that the whole race should be spiritualised; it would be enough if there is a general admission of the idea.

d) If this too is not possible, then a few human beings will initiate a new order of things and humanity may in general decline as an unfit species for higher evolution.

e) In the process of a forward evolutionary movement, the first foundation of matter will change; the whole concentration of the being will be shifted from below upward and from without inwards. An integral consciousness will become the basis of an entire harmonisation of life through the total transformation and integration of the being & the nature.

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Chapter – XIX

Out of the Sevenfold Ignorance towards the Sevenfold Knowledge This chapter is a revision of what was said earlier and we may recognise many common points and feel that we have read this before. Let us begin with the opening quotation from the Mahopanishad which says: “Seven steps have the ground of the Ignorance, seven steps have the ground of the Knowledge”. It is very interesting to see that the Upanishads, already gave us hints of the different layers and levels of Ignorance. It was for Sri Aurobindo to explain them at a length.

Normally, when we speak of Ignorance, which is called Avidya, people think of Adi Shankaracharya's explanation of Avidya which perceives the world as an illusion. This explanation is incomplete. The idea of the sevenfold Ignorance seems to be Aurobindonian, and those who have not read the Upanishads would probably think that it is Sri Aurobindo's discovery, but it is not so. The very first quote tells us that Upanishads had long ago discussed the sevenfold Knowledge and the sevenfold Ignorance.

It is important to understand this sevenfold Ignorance because it gives us a chance to tackle it. Otherwise, when we say Avidya, it is a blanket concept. We are all in Ignorance, and it is difficult to see how we can come out of it, we don't know where to start from. Religion advocates going to the temple or Church to get out of Ignorance.

Some rituals, rites or ceremonies are prescribed for us by the religions so that we could come out of this ignorance

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and go to heaven. Ignorance becomes the centre or underlying support for accepting religious beliefs and rituals, but when we find out its seven layers, then we get a rational understanding. It becomes a philosophical and metaphysical problem, and that means it gives us a chance to come out of it rationally through the processes of yoga.

Sri Aurobindo gives an analysis of Ignorance. Once we are able to come to grips with the problem itself then half the issue is solved. Most of our problems come from the fact that we are not able to focus on the problem.

The Mother tells us that the closer we go to a problem, the closer we come to the solution. She said something to this effect: when you plan things, be it the architectural design of a house or writing an essay or anything, plan it in complete detail. The greater you get into the details, she says, the closer you are to manifesting it. We have to sit with the architect and see all the details. When we plan in perfect detail, she says, we are closer to its manifestation.

She has given us a kind of occult truth which can be applied to anything in our life. If a thing is vague in our mind, obviously it means the solution is also far from us.

When we plan in detail, there is an occult pulling of the answer to the mind that brings its realisation.

Therefore, what Sri Aurobindo has given here about the details of ignorance is extremely important, because then we can begin to tackle the problem and find the necessary answers. Having said that, let's begin with the text of the chapter. He begins by saying,

All evolution is in essence a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* unmanifest, from matter into life, from life into mind, from the mind into the spirit.

This is the first time we see Sri Aurobindo describing evolution in this manner, that it “is in essence a heightening of the force of consciousness”. We have seen the ‘heightening of consciousnesses”, that goes from mind to higher mind, Intuitive mind, Overmind and Supermind. But here he has added that it is a ‘heightening of the force of consciousness. The word ‘force’ really catches our attention, it denotes a lot. How does the human being elevate his consciousness? We know there are higher levels of superior consciousness, but to elevate one’s consciousness what is needed is force. That means Chit-Tapas. Chit can be raised only by Tapas, or we can say, by Tapasya. This gets us into Yoga. If we want to raise our consciousness, we need Tapas, we have to do Tapasya or Yoga. The statement is simple and straightforward.

He says that evolution is “a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being so that it may be raised into the greater intensity of what is still unmanifest”. What is still unmanifest are the higher levels of consciousness, and we can only rise to those levels by tapasya. He continues:

It is this that must be the method of our growth from a mental into a spiritual and supramental manifestation, out of a still half-animal humanity into a divine being and a divine living. There must be achieved a new spiritual height, wideness, depth, subtlety, intensity of our consciousness, of its substance, its force, its sensibility, an elevation, expansion, plasticity, integral capacity of our being,

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and an assumption of mind and all that is below mind into that larger existence.

It is really magnificent to read Sri Aurobindo, because he gives us in such great detail all the nuances of the word ‘heightening’. We normally think that higher consciousness means to sit down in meditation and go into the rapturous Spirit. That is just one way of self-transcendence but what he notes here is that there are many sides to this heightening: we must increase in wideness, depth, subtlety, intensity, sensibility, elevation, and expansion.

He has given these not just as adjectives which are interchangeable; we must grow in all these directions.

In Sri Aurobindo's terminology, the transformation of nature would include, these three key words: heightening, widening and deepening. These three movements must be there not only on the mental but also on the vital and physical levels. We can imagine the vastness, of the integration of this entire movement. We have all thought of transformation as going to higher consciousness. It meant heightening alone. Heightening of consciousness and realising the transcendent is only one of the movements. What about widening? Widening means we have to embrace not only our kith and kin, our class, our tribe, our state, our nation, but all of humanity and Nature.

Sri Aurobindo does not stop even there. It is not only a transcendental movement, not even that united with a universal movement but there must also be a deepening.

Deepening begins perhaps with the psychic being. Then it goes into our own subconscious and inconscient. It doesn't stop with the psychic realisation, but it needs to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* go into the inconscient itself. This is the meaning of this Integral Yoga.

The last part of the sentence is just as rich and important. He says, there must be "an assumption of mind and all that is below mind into that larger existence".

What is the meaning of this assumption? 'Assumption' in Christian terminology means the physical rising of Mary into heaven, and this was supposed to have taken place on the 15th day of August and is celebrated every year. This is related to the idea of physical transformation which was represented by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. It was the Mother who gives it an occult significance. So the 15th of August is not just known for the independence of India or Sri Aurobindo's birthday. It has a long spiritual

and occult history and one of the things is the celebration of the rising of Mary, Christ's Mother, into heaven.

Sri Aurobindo uses the same term "assumption of mind and all that is below mind into that larger existence"; it means the vital, the physical, the subconscious, etc., are taken – into that larger Integral Being which has this expansion, elevation, depth, etc. It is not only the mind's expansion but also all that is below the mind, the vital and the physical must also be included in it.

Sri Aurobindo says,

In a future transformation the character of the evolution, the principle of evolutionary process, although modified, will not fundamentally change but, on a vaster scale and in a liberated movement, royally continue. A change into a higher consciousness or state of being is not only the whole aim and process of religion, of all higher askesis, of Yoga, but it is also the

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very trend of our life itself, the secret purpose found in the sum of its labour.

Sri Aurobindo has given expression to Nature's yoga.

In a way, we can say that he has only given voice to 'the eternal yoga of nature'. As he says here, "a change into a higher consciousness or state of being is not only the whole aim and process of religion or Yoga, but the very trend of our life itself, the secret purpose found in the sum of its labour". Thus, all nature, all yoga, and all religion is basically moving towards a higher consciousness, towards a change into a higher being. And Sri Aurobindo says that this process would not really change even in a much later evolution. If we expand this sentence it would mean even when Supermind comes it would not be the end of evolution. For us Superman is such a large, wonderful divine being, but Superman will also evolve in the same way in expansion, subtlety, depth, and so on. He says this will "royally continue", because it is the very essence of the process of yoga.

This process will never change, with the animal, with mankind, or with Superman.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

The principle of life in us seeks constantly to confirm and perfect itself on the planes of mind, vitality and body which it already possesses; but it is self-driven also to go beyond and transform these gains into means for the conscious spirit to unfold in Nature.

If it is merely some part of ourselves, intellect, heart, will or vital desire-self, which, dissatisfied with its own imperfection and with the world, strives to get away from it to a greater height of existence, content to leave the rest of the nature to take care of itself or to perish,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* then such a result of total transformation would not eventuate,—or, at least, would not eventuate here.

When the process of evolution comes to the level of mind it doesn't stop there, it goes further in order to manifest the Spirit further. Maybe we could call it the Divine if it is easier for us to understand. It goes further to manifest 'the Divine' in nature, to achieve the fullness of the Divine manifestation. He continues: But this is not the integral trend of our existence; there is a labour of Nature in us to ascend with all ourself into a higher principle of being than it has yet evolved here, but it is not her whole will in this ascension to destroy herself in order that that higher principle may be exclusively affirmed by the rejection and extinction of Nature. To heighten the force of consciousness until it passes from a mental, vital and physical instrumentation into the essence and power of the spirit is the indispensable thing, but that is not the sole object or all the thing to be done.

He says, in this evolution, there is always an integral trend, "to ascend with all ourself". Ascension is never a linear process. I cannot ascend only in my mental development nor is it just individual development. Nature sees to it that the entire human, animal, and plant life, all move upwards. But in this movement, especially among human beings, there is a kind of a process,

which is not linear. Sometimes we see destruction, and sometimes there is a tremendous progression, such as during the Renaissance in Europe, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the Indian Freedom Movement.

Through all these movements nature in the human being

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is moving upwards in all its parts. Nature is not partial only to the mind.

The Mother had once commented that it was now time for humanity to take up new advances in art and literature beyond the mental level. Humanity has evolved on the level of mind in creativity, technology, science and all that, but she says that now humanity should venture into different levels. She said that she had saved humanity and taken it through the world wars and that now the world can venture out into greater expression and search of the Spirit. She saved it for the future.

Sri Aurobindo too suggests the same that nature sees to it that the human personality develops on all its levels simultaneously. Nature has not allowed religion to dominate us. Religion has taken mankind to a certain level and then it brought Science which almost nullified Religion because it emphasised on one aspect of the human being and did not develop other aspects.

Therefore, nature brought Science and Technology with a purpose to develop what was not developed by Religion.

Like that there are simultaneous movements taking place in human evolution.

Although it is very important that we go into the spirit by an ascent of consciousness, it is as much needed that the other parts of the human being are also elevated; that is the integral trend of our evolution. Sri Aurobindo tells us clearly that it is not Nature's will that the lower levels are destroyed

in order that the higher principle may be exclusively affirmed. It means that if we want to go to the supramental level we are not to discard the mental, vital,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and physical beings. There has to be a transcendence, but integration is just as important.

We have had ample examples of this in the evolution.

When mankind came upon earth, animals and plants and micro-organisms were not destroyed. Although many species may have been destroyed, we can still say that plants, animals and human beings co-exist. Similarly, when Superman comes, man, animals and plants will continue to co-exist; they are not going to be destroyed.

In the next paragraph Sri Aurobindo writes, Our call must be to live on a new height in all our being: we have not, in order to reach that height, to drop back our dynamic parts into the indeterminate stuff of Nature and abide by this liberating loss in a blissful quiescence of the Spirit; that can always be done and it brings a great repose and freedom, but what Nature herself attends from us is that the whole of what we are should rise into the spiritual consciousness and become a manifest and manifold power of the spirit. An integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature; this is the inherent sense of her universal urge of self-transcendence.

In order to reach the heights of the spirit what normally yogis have been doing till now is to leave behind our dynamic parts, which means they have rejected life and its dynamism of living. They would withdraw into a quiet corner to meditate or a forest or into a cave and enjoy a blissful quiescence of the spirit. Sri Aurobindo says, it is a “liberating loss”, which is a beautiful phrase to describe it. It liberates but we lose earth and life. Sri Aurobindo asks us what nature herself expects from us. Nature is not looking forward to this liberating loss but to manifest the

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manifold power of the spirit. As he puts it very beautifully in the next sentence: “an integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature”.

He tells us that this entire nature is moving towards an integral transformation. It was suggested long back that we should have a history of the evolution of human consciousness, or we could say, a history of the manifestation of the manifold power of the spirit. That is to say, right from the earliest times of recorded history we can see that nature has been developing various parts of the human being, one specific part or another part, in various times and places. We may not find a place where the whole of humanity’s spiritual, mental, vital or physical possibilities were developed, but different aspects have been developed in different places and times. Now, a kind of synthesis is taking place. That is what we understand by this integral development of human nature and it has been the innate attempt of nature herself. That is why looking at history from the angle of the development of consciousness is very interesting. It is history viewed as the development of the manifold power of the spirit.

If we develop this kind of view, only then we will see the significance of the coming of Sri Aurobindo.

If one went back a century before Sri Aurobindo was born and we read such a history of the development of consciousness, we would have almost concluded that there will now come a consciousness embodied in one person who will synthesise these different elements of the human consciousness because nature had prepared the ingredients. For example, we see the development of occultism in Egypt and Tibet, spirituality in India, the development of the mind in France, and the development

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of various aspects of material culture in England. That is why Sri Aurobindo says that each nation is a nation-soul having particular characteristics! All this has been developed through the ages and Sri Aurobindo has only synthesised in one magnificent consciousness all these experiments and developments of nature. He was in England getting the best of western education and consciousness and its

practical organization; he was able to imbibe the great Greek and Latin cultures and their development in French culture. He was not there to pass the ICS exam; he was there to absorb the highest peaks of the western consciousness and when he came back to India he absorbed the highest peaks of Indian spirituality.

His consciousness was a consciousness of synthesis. If somebody really studied history from this angle prior to the coming of Sri Aurobindo I think he would have intuitively predicted his coming. This is the trend of evolution itself; it always puts forward a single individual who becomes the spirit of the age.

We have another example in Leonardo da Vinci.

The best of western Art and Science got synthesised and flowered in him. There were other great artists contemporary to him, but he represented the spirit of the age. And the whole renaissance was born out of him and then a whole new Europe was born. Now Sri Aurobindo is a greater synthesis, not only between western art and science but between eastern and western cultures and their spiritual attainments. *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *The Life Divine* are pure reflections of his own consciousness.

His life was so ordained that he would synthesise the East and the West. In the Mother, we have a similar example of

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a synthesis of the East and West coming from France to India via Japan.

Sri Aurobindo first unified the world within himself, then alone could he talk of the unification of mankind as he had a living experience with it. It is not an exercise to learn several languages, but it was a question of consciousness. About human unity the Mother once said, you must first find the unity within yourself before you speak of the unity of mankind. We can apply this to Sri Aurobindo who had found this entire synthesis within himself before he started writing the *Arya* in 1914. He was the right person and perhaps the only person who could speak of this because he had achieved it in his own consciousness.

There is always an individual who imbibes the spirit of the age and then afterwards there are other individuals, groups, communities and societies who embrace it. That is the rhythm of nature. It doesn't bring in the new with a mass of people, it brings it first with one or two individuals, and then from there, it expands into a collectivity. Today we have the Sri Aurobindo Society, the Sri Aurobindo Centres, and Sri Aurobindo schools, all of these are trying to extend his consciousness through various activities.

How much they are able to do is a different matter, it may take centuries before we can manifest his spirit, but this is surely the way. The same movement of expansion is taking place and slowly the spirit of unity will expand.

Sri Aurobindo's spirit has been caught by many European thinkers. What we see in Europe today with the European Union has come because one man was born who dreamt to synthesise humanity within himself and now the world is manifesting that unity.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Let us come back to the line that we were reading: "An integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature". Sri Aurobindo further writes, It is for this reason that the process of Nature is not confined to a heightening of herself into a new principle; the new height is not a narrow intense pinnacle, it brings with it a widening and establishes a larger field of life in which the power of the new principle may have sufficient play and room for its emergence.

Nature grows not to a narrow, intense pinnacle, but brings with it a widening and larger field of life. We see that Sri Aurobindo did this very consciously by making an Ashram here at Pondicherry. He would work out his yoga through youngsters who could imbibe his ideals and spread widely. There is always the importance of the Sangha. In Buddhism also we have the *sangha*, and a scripture. We need three things for teaching to establish itself. We had the Buddha, at that time the center of the new consciousness, we had the scripture of the *Dhammapada* or the *Tripitaka*, and then we had the Buddhist Sangha. That is why Buddhism is one of the most successful religions, as these three were organised together extremely well. Even Adi

Sankaracharya, later on established the Peethas & Mathas. Swami Vivekananda established Sri Ramakrishna Mathas across the country.

Swami Vivekananda Mathas. Swami Vivekananda in one of his letters wrote to a disciple after returning to India after his tour of the USA and Europe that he was at crossroads. If he established a Sri Ramakrishna Math it would become a religion, but if he did not then his guru's teachings would be forgotten in due course of

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time. All great spiritual leaders know the need for a Sangha. Similarly, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo too were not doing their yoga in isolation; they had gathered around them as spiritual aspirants. Thinking of a new Sangha started the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and the Sri Aurobindo's Centres. Behind them is the same principle of an expansion, "a widening and the establishment of a larger field of life in which the power of the new principle may have sufficient play and room for its emergence". This is a perfect description of the Ashram, a place where the new principle may have sufficient play in a larger field of life.

Every Sangha has put forth specific rules and regulations. The Buddhist Sangha in the beginning didn't allow women, and the Sri Ramakrishna Math also does not permit them. But Sri Aurobindo's Ashram embraced both men and women. Of course, previous masters delimited their field of life by not allowing men and women to be together in the same ashram. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother dared to take up this experiment because they say that all life is yoga and all have to participate in it. I believe they have taken this adventure not only because of their philosophy of integration but because of the new supramental power that they have brought in. They also came for the first time as dual Avatars, but they brought the supramental power, so they could be confident in having an Ashram with both genders.

Sri Aurobindo writes,

This action of elevation and expansion is not confined to an utmost possible largeness in the essential play of the new principle itself; it includes a taking up of that which is lower into the higher values:

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the divine or spiritual life will not only assume into itself the mental, vital, physical life transformed and spiritualised, but it will give them a much wider and fuller play than was open to them so long as they were living on their own level.

The Ashram itself is the perfect place where we can see that “this action of elevation and expansion is not confined to an utmost possible largeness in the essential play of the new principle itself”. When Sri Aurobindo was bringing down the new principle of the Supermind it was not confined to only those people who were at the supramental level, it was being integrated and had come down to the level of the mind, vital and physical. We have seen that all kinds of disciples and devotees came to the Ashram and Sri Aurobindo and the Mother took them up because a process of integration of all these different elements was going on. The Mother had chosen people not only because of their capacities but also because of their weaknesses. Each one of us represents not just a capacity but also an incapacity. The aim was to transform nature. Our failures, when transformed into successes are the Mother’s victories. If I come as an artist and become a better artist, or if I come as a musician and become a better musician, where is the victory over human nature? We can’t really think of any other ashram which takes people for their weaknesses. The Mother was not concerned about the qualifications of the individuals. She could scan us in a moment when she looked at us or even at our photograph. There was a great yogi from the south who had come to meditate with the Mother in the Playground.

After the meditation he said that he was really surprised to see that the level of the ashramites was so low, so ordinary, and the Mother said it is precisely because of that they

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are here. It is the ordinary person who can be moulded.

If somebody thinks too much of himself, he will not be ready to change and the Mother wanted people who could change.

All this is only to explain how in this yoga the mental, the vital the physical life are to be integrated, spiritualised and transformed. This will give them a much wider and fuller play than is open to them so long as they remain at their own level. This is the brilliant thing about the Ashram and the various centres. Outside we may have an opening in dance, music, literature, business or whatever and we will have a specific scope of development in that field. But if this is brought under the new light of the supramental principle then that development will have a much wider scope. In the ordinary world, one might become a successful Bharatanatyam dancer or a Carnatic singer, but with the supramental it can be raised to a greater level. One's achievements and talents can go far beyond what was possible in the limits of the mind and the vital and the society outside. Our talents can develop manifold and to greater heights than we could have ever imagined. At the same time, if a talent gets magnified, so also do the weaknesses; our golden spots become very big but the black spots also increase. There is this elevation, expansion, and extension of both our capacities and weaknesses under the new light. Outside our capacities grow only to a certain limit, but our weaknesses are also controlled by society. Sri Aurobindo further explains, Our mental, physical, vital existence need not be destroyed by our self-exceeding, nor are they lessened and impaired by being spiritualised; they can and do become much richer, greater, more powerful and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* more perfect: in their divine change they break into possibilities which in their unspiritualised condition could not be practicable or imaginable.

He says that by “their divine change they break into possibilities which in their unspiritualised condition”

would be unimaginable. I have been comparing the possibilities of development within the Ashram and the outside world, but I think I should expand them to mean not a geographical distinction but one of an inner versus an outer consciousness. Inner here means within the heart.

We have been focusing on the sentence “an integral transformation is the integral aim of the Being in Nature”

and we have said that Sri Aurobindo is emphasising Nature’s own endeavour. Sri Aurobindo is not building a new yoga by selecting a few items as is the trend of modern yogis, acharyas and gurus. They select a few practices, and with that selection, they find some effective techniques for healing or healthy living. The modern trend is concentrated upon healing because we are basically centred on the plane of matter, on the physical.

So any guru who brings in a new kind of healing method becomes very popular. There is hardly anyone who will ask us to transform our consciousness or change our nature.

They will say that if you have pain, if you are not having peace of mind, if you have family problems, in other words, if you have pain at the emotional or physical levels, they have wonderful methods to heal them, and some of these techniques may be pretty effective. Sri Aurobindo is not here to heal, because healing is only temporary and concentrated on one level of being. He has taken up the

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entire nature and is working in consonance with the aim and the effort of ‘the Being in Nature’.

Sri Aurobindo has discovered what the Being in Nature is attempting, and that, he says, is an integral transformation. This is the goal he has put forward as for mankind. He has explained that Nature herself is trying this transformation therefore it is most appropriate to follow Nature. Any other pattern would be temporary and localised. Having this as the emphasis, he also says that each time there is a heightening nature also brings in a widening and broadening of consciousness; every new level of consciousness that is reached also spreads out and embraces the others.

Having said that, he continues:

This evolution, this process of heightening and widening and integralisation, is in its nature a growth and an ascent out of the sevenfold ignorance into the integral knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo gives us confidence by confirming that this movement of heightening and widening and integralisation is nothing but Nature's own movement and is gradually moving out of its sevenfold Ignorance into the sevenfold Knowledge. It is the whole cosmic movement; it is not the individual trying to do it by himself.

Regarding this cosmic movement, he says: The crux of that ignorance is the constitutional; it resolves itself into a manifold ignorance of the true character of our becoming, an unawareness of our total self, of which the key is a limitation by the plane we inhabit and by the present predominant principle of our nature.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* **Constitutional Ignorance**

What is the constitutional ignorance? It is unawareness of the total self. This means that a human being does not realise that he is truly a divine 'Self', a 'soul'. By the very fact that we have a mind, every one of us automatically believes that he is separate from others, that he is a separate body and mind. This unawareness, Sri Aurobindo calls constitutional ignorance. The word 'constitutional'

suggests that it is fundamental. We have a constitution in India which is the fundamental basis of our rules, our values, our laws; that is what we call our constitution.

Similarly, when we say 'constitutional ignorance', it means that is the basis, the fundamental law of our Nature that we are unaware that we are a divine Self or soul.

This happens because the present predominant principle of our Nature is Matter. Every human being believes he is separate from the others. Even the greatest yogi, to begin with, believes that he is separate. It is only much

later when we realise our psychic being, that we understand that we are not separate. Sri Aurobindo says, The plane we inhabit is the plane of Matter; the present predominant principle in our nature is the mental intelligence with the sense-mind, which depends upon Matter, as its support and pedestal.

We believe we are separate because of our mental intelligence with its sense-mind which in turn depends upon Matter. When a child is growing, then he or she understands the world not through intuition or psychic contact, but through the physical senses. The senses provide the child a means to contact the material world. If our knowledge is limited to the senses, then obviously the senses themselves tell us that these are my eyes, my ears,

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my fingers; so right from the beginning of childhood we are trained to look upon ourselves as somebody who is distinct and different from others.

Suppose a baby were to understand the world through intuition and didn't need the senses at all! Then the baby would understand by intuition that we are all one, that there is only one spirit, we are not separate, and that even though my body is there, we are all one. Intuition gives always this feeling of oneness rather than separateness.

Unfortunately, that is not to be. All of us grow up using the senses as our medium for receiving knowledge, and the senses necessarily limit us.

As a consequence, the preoccupation of the mental intelligence and its powers with the material existence as it is shown to it through the senses, and with life as it has been formulated in a compromise between life and matter, is a special stamp of the constitutional Ignorance.

The constitutional ignorance, we have seen, is formed of an intelligence which is dependent upon the senses, which is again delimited by Matter and Life, a life which is also a compromise with matter. Sri Aurobindo is describing our basic constitution, the fundamental nature of our consciousness which is limited by our senses and the life element which are

both limited by matter. Life also cannot be exuberant, cannot express itself fully, because of matter. We may have lot of energy but then it becomes compromised by some problem in the body, because the body also has its weaknesses and limitations.

This natural materialism or materialised vitalism, this clamping of ourselves to our beginnings, is a form of self-restriction narrowing the scope of our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* existence which is very insistent on the human being.

It is a first necessity of his physical existence, but is afterwards forged by a primal ignorance into a chain that hampers his every step upwards: the attempt to grow out of this limitation of the wholeness, power and truth of the spirit by the materialised mental intelligence and out of this subjection of the soul to material Nature is the first step towards a real progress of our humanity.

Here we understand that establishing the physical existence is the first necessity. The fact that we are born with a body means we have been limited and segregated from the whole. It is like when we make a chapatti, out of the ball of dough, we scoop out a little quantity that is enough for one *chapati*. By scooping it out we have separated it from the totality. Similarly, our body is like something scooped out from the universal body, and that is what makes our body individual and separate.

The first necessity is to take out this scoop and make a physical separation, otherwise, we cannot enjoy the *chapati*. The enjoyment of manifestation is there because of individualization – this is the first necessity. But after creating this physical individuality, it must be pressed and cooked properly, the ‘denseness’ of the individual must be prepared and made translucent.

The physical separation and individualisation, although necessary, limits growth; he says it “hampers his every step upwards: the attempt to grow out of this limitation of the wholeness, power and truth of the spirit” . What happens is that we enjoy this individuality so much that it becomes in itself

a limitation and a problem. We are all the time thinking “I am separate, I am an individual,

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I am doing this or that.” As we grow up, this sense of individuality develops from a physical individuality to a vital individuality and eventually to a mental ego. It hampers every step. In order to grow out of this limitations we form societies, groups, clubs, circles. Being a part of the group broadens our ego-consciousness. But then most people get stuck there. If that can be surpassed, then we can really make progress.

Today, humanity is at its peak, the elite of humanity, not all of it, has grown into the consciousness that humanity is one. This began at the beginning of the 19th century and Sri Aurobindo notices this in his book *The Ideal of Human Unity*. He says that this concept that mankind is one humanity and is going to be united has already taken birth in the philosophy of humanism.

Sri Aurobindo says,

For our ignorance is not entire; it is a limitation of consciousness,—it is not the complete nescience which is the stamp of the same Ignorance in purely material existences, those which have not only matter for their plane but matter for their dominant principle. It is a partial, a limiting, a dividing and, very largely, a falsifying knowledge; out of that limitation and falsification we have to grow into the truth of our spiritual being.

Sri Aurobindo tells us that this growth towards a higher consciousness is possible because “our Ignorance is not entire; it is a limitation of consciousness,—it is not the complete nescience”. He says that the complete nescience is there only in the purely material existence; that means in matter there is complete ignorance, but in human beings there is only a limitation of consciousness. Ignorance

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* becomes lesser and lesser as evolution proceeds from matter to the plant to the animal to the human being. On the

level of matter self-awareness is nil.

If we apply this to our own life we can observe that if we are grossly materialistic and think of nothing but wealth, physical comforts and success then the proportion of ignorance is greater. In simple terms, it means the more materialistic we are the more we are ignorant. It is as simple as that. Materialistic means we are dominated by the principle of the matter, that for us it seems that matter alone is the Truth and that there is no other Truth apart from matter. One may have great knowledge of genetics, chemistry, physics, or astronomy but he is still steeped in the ignorance of the matter.

Sri Aurobindo says “It is a partial, a limiting, a dividing and, very largely, a falsifying knowledge”. It is interesting that he says this kind of human knowledge is “falsifying knowledge”. We can understand that it is limited, but why is it falsifying? Limited knowledge leads to falsification.

How does it happen? And why does it happen? Because of the limitation of our knowledge, many vital twists and perversions invade our mental consciousness making it false. Finally, he says here that “with that limitation and falsification we have to grow into the truth of our spiritual being”. This is the challenge and difficulty we face.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

This preoccupation with life and matter is at the beginning right and necessary because the first step that man has to take is to know and possess this physical existence as well as he can by applying his thought and intelligence to such experience of it

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as his sense-mind can give to him; but this is only a preliminary step and, if we stop there, we have made no real progress: we are where we were and have gained only more physical elbow-room to move about in and more power for our mind to establish a relative knowledge and an insufficient and precarious mastery and for our life-desire to push things about and jostle and hustle around amid the throng of physical forces and existences.

This is a perfect description of our present life.

Sri Aurobindo has a full understanding and acceptance of every level of human consciousness. He says that this preoccupation with life and matter at the beginning is right and necessary. We cannot jump right into spirituality.

As the ancients said, *kama* and *artha* are necessary steps and *moksha* comes at the end when we are more mature.

This kind of acceptance has been there right from our ancient times. Sri Aurobindo also says it is important and necessary, but this is just the first step. Mankind has

“to know and possess this physical existence as well as he can by applying his thought and intelligence to such experience of it as his sense-mind can give to him”.

Adolescent children, as we have noticed, are always looking in the mirror, because for them it is important to know and possess this physical existence. We have all grown with the physical consciousness first, and Sri Aurobindo justifies this and says that we should take care of the physical, it is after all our vehicle. It has its own utility, but this is only a preliminary step, if we stop there, we have made no real progress. That is the bane of modern society. A friend was recently describing her daughter who is so eager to go with the running fashions. Fashions are

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* nothing but the importance of vital-physical. The family may be very religious, and very spiritual, but a child has to grow in her own rhythm. We can only try to help the children in this growth and nothing more.

It is interesting that when we were kids in the Ashram, we used to go back for our vacations to our own hometown. The Mother was there with us in the physical body at that time. But still, it did not stop our going through this vital physical stage. When we returned to our hometown we bought the

best clothes, best shoes, the fashion of the day, and we used to see the best movies, the craze of the day. It was a natural growth, but we grew out of that.

As Sri Aurobindo says, it is a preliminary step, but it is not the end, and if we stop there, we have made no real progress. If we do not go further, he says we “have gained only more physical elbow-room to move about in.” We may get wonderful jobs, and we may earn lakhs of rupees per year, but what are we doing with all that?

We only gain “more physical elbow-room to move about in and more power for our mind to establish a relative knowledge and an insufficient and precarious mastery and for our life-desire to push things about and jostle and hustle around amid the throng of physical forces and existences”. Everyone in the rich and higher society is jostling, competing with each other to see who wears the better dresses and has better things. It is a wonderful description of the life element.

Sri Aurobindo says that everything has its place and time. Be natural, but keep sincerity and aspiration, then we are bound to go beyond. Then life becomes a wonderful adventure and a joy. If our central flame

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is always lit, if our aspiration and faith are strong, then whatever challenges we face, we will not go on the wrong path. We will have a fulfilled life and we will see, when we look back, that somebody has taken us by the hand through all the movies, through all the fashions, through all the vital things and we have gone on, and finally we do arrive at our destined goal.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

The utmost widening of a physical objective knowledge, even if it embrace the most distant solar systems and the deepest layers of the earth and sea and the most subtle powers of material substance and energy, is not the

essential gain for us, not the one thing which it is most needful for us to acquire.

Here we have an observation about the discoveries of Science: ‘that even if we embrace the most distant solar systems and deepest layers of the earth and sea...’; none of these things, whatever their importance, ‘is not the essential gain for us, not the thing which is most needful for us to acquire’. What Sri Aurobindo would always want is a growth and heightening of consciousness.

The conquest we make in the sky or the sea does not necessarily bring a growth of consciousness. He says, That is why the gospel of materialism, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, proves itself always in the end a vain and helpless creed, and that too is why physical Science itself with all its achievements, though it may accomplish comfort, can never achieve happiness and fullness of being for the human race.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Make the phrase “for the human race”, that’s the key here. We can, on the individual level, gain some happiness, and some comfort, but Sri Aurobindo is looking into the contribution of Science to the race as such. The human race, he says, can gain hardly anything except a bit of comfort, but Science can never contribute to humanity’s real happiness or fullness of being.

Continuing, he says,

Our true happiness lies in the true growth of our whole being, in a victory throughout the total range of our existence, in mastery of the inner as well as and more than the outer, the hidden as well as the overt nature; our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began, but by transcendence.

He puts it very beautifully: we may draw wider circles on the material level, we may go deeper into Science, conquer the skies and the secrets of Nature, but this is all still on the horizontal plane of our material existence, and true happiness requires integral growth and transcendence.

‘Transcendence’ does not necessarily mean going beyond the mind, it is also related to mastery of the ‘inner being’.

If one is purely an intellectual or a vital or a physical person, he may keep expanding on the same level as an artist, a singer, or studying the philosophies of the world. He may achieve stability, some achievement and satisfaction, but sooner or later the other dimensions of his being will intrude in his happiness. So, on the individual level, if we do not take care of the development of our whole being and pursue development only one-sided of being, it is not sure that we will remain happy.

Sri Aurobindo is also concerned with the collective

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growth of humanity; for humanity to progress it needs to reach to the higher levels and not continue forever in the same circle of activity. He further writes,

...our true completeness comes not by describing wider circles on the plane where we began, but by transcendence. It is for this reason that, after the first necessary foundation in life and matter, we have to heighten our force of consciousness, deepen, widen, subtilise it; we must first liberate our mental selves and enter into a freer, finer and nobler play of our mental existence.

Sri Aurobindo shows us the line of individual progress.

He says that after establishing the first necessary foundation in life and matter, “we have to heighten our force of consciousness, deepen, widen and subtilise it”.

This idea is very much in line with our ancient system where we are permitted to satisfy our physical-vital beings first. After passing the stage of *artha* and *kama* one may find some stability to make efforts to rise higher in consciousness. This is where the mind comes in. We cannot be forever

satisfied with simply having a good job and earning good money and continuing to increase our salary, we must heighten our consciousness, deepen it, widen it and sublise it. How are we to do that? We must liberate our mental selves into a freer and finer and nobler mental existence. This is not to say we must right away come into spirituality; the mental being also has to be sufficiently satisfied. It means we begin to read literature, and other philosophies, learn about cultures and other religions, and not be bound to our petty circle. If we do not embrace and enlarge our minds we may get stuck on

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the mental level. However high the ideal in front of us, the human mind can become limited and fundamentalist.

Especially if we want to follow Sri Aurobindo's yoga, we should come already prepared with the wideness of mind, or start expanding our mental horizons.

Reading Sri Aurobindo alone does help in preparing our minds, but reading other literature also expands our mental boundaries. Sometimes it does help us to appreciate him better and to bring out the nuances of Sri Aurobindo's thought, to bring out the inner shades of the many colors of his writings. Then the mind develops a critical analytical power. It can perhaps discriminate better. If we read Sri Aurobindo's works alone we tend to get lost in a submissive attitude and the intellect may not get sharpened. Even if one is intelligent, analytical intelligence is not consciously encouraged and one tends to adore, admire and become a devotee. These tools are good, and we see them in Sri Aurobindo himself. He was first and foremost a self-critic. All the time he was looking at his own work critically. Inspiration would come but his mind and intellect would go back and see if the inspiration was right or wrong. This is why he says that there has to be a widening of the mental existence.

He continues and says,

For the mental is much more than the physical our true existence, because we are even in our instrumental or expressive nature predominantly mind

and not matter, mental much rather than physical beings.

The satisfaction of the mind brings greater fulfilment for human beings who are predominantly mental beings than the satisfaction of salaries, comforts and physical

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pleasures. Let us satisfy, and fulfil what we truly are or at least what we are supposed to be. The vital and the physical, we have inherited from the lower evolution, that is our base, but more essentially, we are a mental consciousness in a physical body. We are to use the physical and the vital for the purposes and fulfilment of the mind. We should not think that the mind has no role and we should only think of the Supermind or the Overmind.

Sri Aurobindo further writes,

That growth into the full mental being is the first transitional movement towards human perfection and freedom; it does not actually perfect, it does not liberate the soul, but it lifts us one step out of the material and vital absorption and prepares the loosening of the hold of the Ignorance.

Here he describes the role, need, necessity of the intellectual approach, of the intellectual study, and of the growth of the mental consciousness. This kind of intellectual process and effort will “lift us up one step out of the material and the vital absorption’. This is a “first transitional movement towards human perfection and freedom”. Many people have the opinion that devotion is still on the same horizontal level. It is not that: devotion can also pull us out of the material and vital consciousness.

True devotion can elevate us. But it may be easier for some to go through the mind. This mental development helps to pull us out of the grip of the material and the vital, but it is very clear that it doesn't take us to the soul. The mind cannot take one to the realisation of one's soul; it is rather a devotion that takes us directly to the soul's realisation.

Nevertheless, the development of the mind is a step towards liberation from the sevenfold ignorance.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Further, he explains,

Our gain in becoming more perfect mental beings is that we get to the possibility of a subtler, higher and wider existence, consciousness, force, happiness and delight of being; in proportion as we rise in the scale of mind, a greater power of these things comes to us: our mental consciousness acquires for itself at the same time more vision and power and more subtlety and plasticity, and we are able to embrace more of the vital and physical existence itself, to know it better, to use it better, to give it nobler values, a broader range, a more sublimated action,—an extended scale, higher issues.

This is one of the most beautiful paragraphs on the need for education of the mind. This is what humanity's elite has done. When we look at the great artists, poets and scientists this is precisely what they have done. They have elevated themselves into the mental consciousness, and therefore and thereby they have been able to acquire

“more vision and power and more subtlety and plasticity, and ... are able to embrace more of the vital and physical existence”. This is the importance of culture. Great cultures like ancient India and Greece realised the importance of the growth of intellect, and when they did so the culture flourished in its art, vital creativity and physical creativity.

There, great organisation and sublimation were achieved because their elite had reached the mental consciousness.

From there we are able to embrace more of the vital existence, to know it better, use it better and give it nobler values.

We can use the mind to enrich life not only through art or literature, it also helps to elevate physical existence.

Western countries have made physical life quite beautiful.

They have lovely, clean, well-ordered streets, the trees are well-placed, the traffic is well-controlled, convenient walkways are provided, and the buildings are generally kept in good condition and are made to look attractive.

It is the mental consciousness which has been used to improve the physical existence. In India, we do not see such orderliness. If we go by these outer standards we are hardly mentalised, we seem to be more on the vital-emotional level and therefore we are unable to organise our material existence properly, something the West has achieved marvellously. The West has its own drawbacks but, let us not get into them. Their greater organisation comes due to a rise in the scale of mind.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Man is in his characteristic power of nature a mental being, but in the first steps of his emergence he is more of the mentalised animal, preoccupied like the animal with his bodily existence; he employs his mind for the uses, interests, desires of the life and the body, as their servant and minister, not yet as their sovereign and master.

Please mark this wonderful distinction he makes. We are supposed to be mental beings, but in the very first steps of its emergence, we use mind only to the extent that it helps us to fulfil our physical needs and vital desires.

In the beginning, the mind is the slave of the vital and the physical beings, but when it becomes the master of the physical and the vital, we see the results, as in the wonderful western civilisation with its outer beauty and organisation. He continues:

It is as he grows in mind and in proportion as his

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mind asserts its selfhood and independence against the tyranny of life and matter, that he grows in stature.

On one side, mind by its emancipation controls and illumines the life and physicality; on the other, the purely mental aims, occupations, pursuits of knowledge begin to get a value.

On one side the outer life gets more and more organised.

On the other side purely mental aims, occupations, and pursuits of knowledge begin to gain value. Then we begin to appreciate philosophy, aesthetics, psychology and other intellectual pursuits.

The mind liberated from a lower control and preoccupation introduces into life a government, an uplifting, a refinement, a finer balance and harmony; the vital and physical movements are directed and put into order, transformed even as far as they can be by a mental agency; they are taught to be the instruments of reason and obedient to an enlightened will, an ethical perception and an aesthetic intelligence: the more this can be accomplished, the more the race becomes truly human, a race of mental beings.

This was the essence of the ancient Greek culture in which they mastered with the aid of the mind, the physical and the vital. Socrates and Plato and other thinkers rose to a high level of the mind where Philosophy, Science and Mathematics got a tremendous boost – with their mental achievements they organised life on the physical and vital levels too. They achieved on the higher levels of the mind and on its lower levels also. They achieved what Sri Aurobindo calls here an “enlightened ethical perception and aesthetic intelligence”. The Greeks are especially known for their aesthetics. They had perfect

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harmony in most of their sculptures, poetry and dramas.

This was attained because of their reaching perfection on the mental level not only on the individual level but on a collective basis.

We are bringing this out to show that India has failed miserably in this mental development of the lower levels. We have gone high into intuition, we created great spiritual scriptures which were gained during that period of mental development. At that time, we also organised the material existence. But as Sri Aurobindo tells us, when this mental capacity waned there was disorganisation of the vital and physical existence. The disorder that we see on our roads is this lack of mental mastery. We have many great yogis but they are not on the intellectual level. They are either centred on the inner being or the higher being.

That has been the bane of our culture. At one time we had a very strong intellectual development and were really leading the world in Science, Mathematics and Literature.

The moment we lost that mental development, everything below fell into chaos.

Why did we lose that development and at what point did we lose it? This is where the ascetic influences came in; these are the negative influences of Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya. By taking away interest from the world, by neglecting it, the mental intelligence lost interest in organising the world and turned to the transcendent. We can see how much asceticism has destroyed our country.

We are unable to know and organise the physical, to give it nobler values and broader ranges. Nolini-da writes in one of his books that because of this ascetic tendency our attitude towards women became derogatory. Women were considered enemies because men wanted to be ascetic.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo would say this is man's own weakness; instead of conquering his vital, he rejected it. Once women were pushed out of society and into the home the society got imbalanced and our culture saw a degradation.

Even now when we go to some parts of India, especially the East, we see an overwhelming impact of emotionalism.

We have come down to a common lower level of mind, where it's not the Buddhi but the Manas who is organising things. Unless and until this higher intellectual mind is brought out, we will have these problems. We can see how far we have fallen back; we have lost the intellect, Buddhi and the vital energy has declined, we have become tamasic.

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo had to shake us from that gross physical *tamas*. That is what Sri Aurobindo did in his journals of the *Bande Mataram* and *Karmayogin*. He shook us to arouse the vital power, the Kshatriya and urged Indians to fight for their freedom.

The British had set out to destroy India's values and Hindu culture. Why? So that we would lose our confidence and become imitators, and they succeeded in it wonderfully to a large extent. They brought in an education which made us parasites. Sri Aurobindo had to begin by awakening us from that level. He had to churn the Indian consciousness and in this process of churning he brought out some butter. Once the consciousness of Swaraj was awakened then rest was comparatively easy.

It is this perception of life that was put in front by the Greek thinkers, and it is a vivid flowering in the sunlight of this ideal that imparts so great a fascination to Hellenic life and culture. In later times this perception was lost and, when it came back, it returned much diminished, mixed with more

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turbid elements: the perturbation of a spiritual ideal imperfectly grasped by the understanding and not at all realised in the life's practice but present with its positive and negative mental and moral influences, and over against it the pressure of a dominant, an inordinate vital urge which could not get its free self-satisfied movement, stood in the way of the sovereignty of the mind and the harmony of life, its realised beauty and balance.

It is magnificent, how Sri Aurobindo can, in a single sentence write volumes of history with an extraordinary analysis!

To further develop this point, I have brought something from Sri Aurobindo's *The Human Cycle*, where he writes, The Hellenic ideal was roughly expressed in the old Latin maxim, a sound mind in a sound body. And by a sound body the ancients meant a healthy and beautiful body well-fitted for the rational use and enjoyment of life. (CWSA 25: 124) Please note that everywhere the mind is dominating and arranging physical things for its own expression – a beautiful healthy body for its own use and the enjoyment of life. In Sri Aurobindo's ideal we want a healthy and good body not for the use of the mind and the enjoyment of life but to put it at the service of the divine consciousness. He continues:

And by a sound mind they meant a clear and balanced reason and an enlightened and well-trained mentality, – trained in the sense of ancient not of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* modern education. It was not to be packed with all available information and ideas... (Ibid: 124-125) Here there is a fine distinction between the modern western ideas of education and ancient Greek ideals. As we know, it is from Greek and Roman cultures that the modern western civilisation was born; but Sri Aurobindo notes the changes that have come in by the modern thrust.

He says that in the ancient ideal of education the mind was not to be packed with all the available information and ideas. It was not to be:

...cast in the mould of science and a rational utility and so prepared for the efficient performance of social and civic needs and duties, for a professional avocation or for an intellectual pursuit; rather it was to be cultured in all its human capacities intellectual, moral, aesthetic, trained to use them rightly and to range freely, intelligently and flexibly in all questions and in all practical matters of philosophy, science, art, politics and social living. (Ibid: 125) In the next sentence he summarises the distinction between the ancient and modern ideals: The ancient Greek mind was philosophic, aesthetic and political; the modern mind has been scientific, economic and utilitarian.

(Ibid) The utilitarian emphasis has spoiled the aesthetic sense that was there in the ancient Greek ideal. Because of this utilitarian and economic attitude, the modern mind has a great deal of information but is less philosophical, aesthetic and political. This is what Sri Aurobindo had decried when he spoke about education in India under British rule. He continues:

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The ancient ideal laid stress on soundness and beauty and sought to build up a fine and rational human life; the modern lays very little or no stress on beauty, prefers rational and practical soundness, useful adaptation, just mechanism and seeks to build up a well-ordered, well-informed and efficient human life.

(Ibid)

This is what I was saying that when we go to the West these days, we see a wonderful organisation and people are well-informed. Today they have all the information available on the internet. The communication is good and there is a beautifully ordered and efficient state with their laws, police, judges, and ministers; they run the show very efficiently. But what it lacks is that aesthetic and philosophic sense. In the next lines Sri Aurobindo adds that before the Hellenic ideal there was a still older spiritual and religious ideal which viewed the physical life to be not just for the use of the mind but for the use of the spirit and soul. The West has succeeded in developing a well-ordered, well-informed and efficient life, something we lack in India. However, we still have kept the spiritual ideal intact.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

Both take it that man is partly a mental, partly a physical being with the mentalised physical life for his field and reason for his highest attribute and his highest possibility. But if we follow to the end the new vistas opened by the most advanced tendencies of a subjective age, we shall be led back to a still more ancient truth and ideal that overtops both the Hellenic and the modern levels. For we shall then seize the truth that man is a developing spirit trying

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* here to find and fulfil itself in the forms of mind, life and body; and we shall perceive luminously growing before us the greater ideal of a deeply conscious self-illuminated, self-possessing, self-mastering soul in a pure and perfect mind and body. (Ibid) Now Sri Aurobindo takes us a step beyond. He says that beyond this Hellenic and Greek ideal of a beautiful body, a sound mind and a well-ordered society, there is within us a spirit and soul trying to find itself here in this world.

This is the ideal that India and the East had caught, that beyond life, mind and body there is a spirit, a soul, and it is the soul which is utilising the mind, life, and body as its instruments. The West had the ideal that life and the body were meant for the utilisation and enjoyment of the mind.

We observe a drastic change in approach.

For the West the mind is the leader commanding the body and life. They obey it and therefore we see this outer beauty and efficiency. For the East the soul is the leader, but it is too far from us, we don't have a good connection with the soul. Therefore, we are not able to see or follow what the soul really wants, and the life and mind are in a chaos because they have no leader to command them or guide them. This is a beautiful analysis of why there is chaos here and order there. In the earlier times when India had a great orderly life it was because the mind itself was open to the spirit, and it transferred the soul's commands to the life and body. At the height of our culture, the mind was an instrument of the soul. In the West, the mind is not under the command of the soul; so the element of spirituality always lacks there. In India whatever the extent of mental development, it was imbued with spirituality.

These are the elemental differences between the East and

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the West. At the end of the paragraph Sri Aurobindo says of the greater ideal of the future: The wider field it seeks will be, not the mentalised physical life with which man has started, but a new spiritualised life inward

and outward, by which the perfected internal figures itself in a perfected external living. Beyond man's long intelligent effort towards a perfected culture and a rational society there opens the old religious and spiritual ideal, the hope of the kingdom of heaven within us and the city of God upon earth. (Ibid)

It is a very interesting remark that he makes here that the "wider field it seeks will be, not the mentalised physical life with which man has started, but a new spiritualised life". What is the solution for India and the West and their shortcomings? Where are they going? In the West the entire physical and vital life has been under the influence of the mind. Must India also pass through this mentalised stage or should India pass through this mentalised stage? That is the question. The answer is that it is not necessary that India should pass through the stage of mentalised physical life. Because of our innate spirituality, Sri Aurobindo envisages a leap from the life that we have into a spiritualised life, inward and outward, just as it has taken many leaps even in its outer growth.

For example, India has not followed the western stage of industrialisation. Long back when we were children we used to wonder when will India become an industrial country like Germany. But we see an India that has leapt over the stage and has become a leader in Information Technology. With this leap we have caught up with whatever we lost in the industrial age and even have taken

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* a lead. This is a very pragmatic example to show that it is not necessary that India should follow every step that the West has taken. It can follow its own *swabhava*, take a leap and bring the ideal of a spiritualised life both on the inner and outer life.

If spirituality comes in as an ideal then a better organisation and better efficiency can also come. The Ashram is a very beautiful example, though it is limited perhaps. But here we see that a spiritualised life can create a well-structured, well-ordered and efficient physical and vital existence. When people from abroad come here they see not only this well-organised community but also this ideal of dedication to the Divine which is not

present in the West. This is already a beautiful integration which Sri Aurobindo has given us as the new path forward. It means that we do not have to follow the western path but we can follow our own Indian ideal of spirituality which is important to retain and further develop. Now we understand why Sri Aurobindo struggled so much to bring back the spiritual ideal in his *Bande Mataram* articles because it is there that lies the solution. He wants that India should solve its problems in the light of its own genius. Instead of that if we try to follow whatever the West is doing then we will not find a solution, rather we will have many complications because it would be a kind of an imposition on the Indian psyche. There would be a deterioration on the psychological level.

Now I return to our reading of the chapter in *The Life Divine* where he was speaking of the ancient Greek ideal: In later times this perception was lost and, when it came back, it returned much diminished, mixed with more turbid elements...

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The ancient ideal came back with the Renaissance in Europe but it had passed through the dark ages in which Europe lost much of its Hellenic culture and mental idealism. With Renaissance and Enlightenment, the old Greek ideals were brought back. “Renaissance”, means a kind of rebirth in which something from the past is brought back.

That is what Sri Aurobindo also tried in Bengal, to recover our old roots. Bengal had gone through a stage in which it had gone astray and imitated the West blindly and fully. After going to that extreme, with the birth of the great Avatar Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, who was followed by Swami Vivekananda, there was a recoil.

Sri Ramakrishna in his simplicity said you don't have to imitate the West, we can still have happiness, spirituality and a balanced life. That was the birth of the renaissance in Bengal. Sri Aurobindo explains in *The Foundations of Indian Culture* that India has had various movements going from one extreme to the opposite and it shows the catholicity of the Indian mind. He says that we never limited ourselves to one type of thought. We had this extreme courage of going to the farthest limits of spirituality as

well as of materialism. The movement in Bengal is a wonderful example of this catholicity in the recent history of India.

The renaissance was born in Bengal. There were great artists, musicians, philosophers, and scholars, a whole renaissance ended with the independence movement.

The independence movement in India did not come just like that, it was the high peak of this renaissance. What Sri Aurobindo precisely did was to bring back this root consciousness and said that Indians must once again

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* find out their own truth. He said, we needed to find the fundamental truth of our nation and get our country back by whatever means necessary, peaceful if possible, but if it cannot be done peacefully, then by violence. He linked up the freedom movement with the renaissance movement. He set out to get back to our cultural roots.

He insisted that we must have our own body, not a body that is under the grip of the British. In a short time, from 1905 to 1909, hardly four to five years, he rejuvenated the whole country. The truth was already there, he just had to remove all the ashes that the British had heaped upon our soul. He did the stupendous act of removing the ashes and once that was done the Indian fire was again alright, the soul of India was still alive and not dead. And then one little call of 'Bande Mataram' was enough. On the 7th of August 1905 when there was the partition of Bengal, millions of people gathered and there was a revolt against the partition. Somebody had great inspiration and one single voice uttered 'Bande Mataram'. That was the moment of India's victory, sparked by a single man; instantaneously this slogan 'Bande Mataram' caught on.

Starting from one single voice, a million voices began to cry 'Bande Mataram'. That was the beginning of the end of British rule and eventually, we won our freedom.

Sri Aurobindo prepared a whole generation to demand freedom for the country.

Sri Aurobindo says of the ancient Hellenic ideal in Europe,

...it returned much diminished, mixed with more turbid elements: the perturbation of a spiritual ideal imperfectly grasped by the understanding and not at all realised in the life's practice but present with its

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positive and negative mental and moral influences, and over against it the pressure of a dominant, an inordinate vital urge which could not get its free self-satisfied movement, stood in the way of the sovereignty of the mind and the harmony of life, its realised beauty and balance.

Unfortunately, when the European renaissance returned, it came back too much mentalised. It lost its aesthetics; it lost its beauty and balance. We think of the Hellenic culture, those two words, beauty and balance, describe it the best. Balance in art, balance in painting, balance in architecture, balance in life. It was neither too mental nor too emotional. Sri Aurobindo says unfortunately all this was lost when the reawakening took place and it was imperfectly grasped by the mind. It was influenced by a dominant vital urge which could not get its free self-satisfied movement. Therefore, the ideal became mixed with more turbid elements, the vitality took over its greater mental concepts and the balance was lost, the beauty was lost, and the spiritual elements that were there in ancient times were lost. He says, An opening to higher ideals, a greater range of life was gained, but the elements of a new idealism were only cast into its action as an influence, could not dominate and transform it and, finally, the spiritual endeavour, thus ill-understood and unrealised, was thrown aside...

Spirituality could not dominate and had only a slight influence. In spite of great figures like Leonardo da Vinci the spiritual element was given a more religious form.

What came forward was the vital urge which actually ended in industrialisation. The rest of it is common

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* history; we are living in that period. Here, he says, the spiritual endeavour was ill-understood and thrown aside.

Continuing, Sri Aurobindo writes,

...its moral effects remained, but, deprived of the sustaining spiritual element, dwindled towards ineffectivity; the vital urge, assisted by an immense development of physical intelligence, became the preoccupation of the race.

There was immense development of physical intelligence but largely under the influence of the vital.

The ancient Greeks had a pure intelligence, but now all this development was turned towards the physical and comforts and vital greed for more and more. The level got changed from the mental to the vital. Enlightenment did not bring back the old religion because of the vital excesses of religion during the dark ages; it revolted against religion. The mind was given supremacy over religion but the mind was also dominated by the vital. Now West is subservient to the vital; its mind, its physical, and even its spirituality and religion are mostly subservient to the vital. Sri Aurobindo concludes:

An imposing increase of a certain kind of knowledge and efficiency was the first result; the most recent outcome has been a perilous spiritual ill-health and a vast disorder.

Imagine that he was writing this almost a hundred years ago! He says, there is “a perilous spiritual ill-health”. That ill-health has only become worse and diseases like cancer which has spread all over the world. When spirituality is withdrawn, then there is ill health of the body, of the mind, of the vital and on the material level too. If we are poor now, the solution is not to enthrone the mind.

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The solution is to get back spiritual health. This is why Sri Aurobindo wanted spirituality to come back because this spiritual health alone can

bring back order into our life and mind. When we say we must have a sound mind and a sound body it means we need a sound spirituality because then only will we have a healthy mind and life.

If India renounces its spirituality then the world will be in grave peril because India is the centre of spirituality in the world. When Sri Aurobindo says India will be the guru of the nations it is not mere patriotism, it comes from this logical, rational analysis. Some people think Sri Aurobindo was an Indian so he said that India will be the guru of the world. It is not so. From the evolutionary point of view itself, this is where we have landed, and the only doctor for this disorder in the world is India. She alone is still the spiritual healer.

Balance, harmony and refinement were the characteristics of the Greek culture, but unfortunately, it did not last long because it could not add to itself the higher element of spirituality. It is the vital urge which has become the dominant preoccupation of the race. As Sri Aurobindo says, "The most recent outcome has been a perilous spiritual ill-health and a vast disorder". This line so well exemplifies the present world, the present civilisations in both East and West.

Further, Sri Aurobindo writes:

For mind itself is not enough; even its largest play of intelligence creates only a qualified half-light. A surface mental knowledge of the physical universe is a still more imperfect guide; for the thinking animal it

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* might be enough, but not for a race of mental beings in labour of a spiritual evolution. Even the truth of physical things cannot be entirely known, nor can the right use of our material existence be discovered by physical Science and an outward knowledge alone or made possible by the mastery of physical and mechanical processes alone: to know, to use rightly we must go beyond the truth of

physical phenomenon and process, we must know what is within and behind it.

These sentences are almost prophetic. He says that the physical sciences cannot really find out entirely the secrets of Matter, and secondly, that our highest and largest display of intelligence is only a “qualified half-light”. It can never be the supreme guide of our lives. Science which really prides itself as giving us a rational knowledge of the secrets of nature cannot reach the depths of Nature or of Matter.

Ultimately Science has to go beyond itself, “beyond the truth of physical phenomenon and process”. It is to this dimension of the occult, of the spiritual, of the mystical that Science can evolve. Unless one goes into the dimensions beyond Matter, into the supraphysical, one cannot find out the secrets of Matter. That is one of the central principles of Sri Aurobindo. If we want to truly know the mind we must get into the supermind, similarly if we want to know Matter we have to get into the supraphysical layers. He says, For we are not merely embodied minds; there is a spiritual being, a spiritual principle, a spiritual plane of Nature.

This is a beautiful statement: “we are not merely embodied minds”. Normally, we think that the best and the

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highest part of us is the mind. An individual is more than the mind, more essentially, he is a ‘soul’ or ‘psychic being’.

Mind is only one of the instruments of the soul. He says,

“there is a spiritual being, a spiritual principle, a spiritual plane of Nature”. We think of Nature as the mountains and the trees and the rivers together with animals, but it also has a higher spiritual dimension because behind all matter there are several layers of the spiritual reality. If we want to know Nature we have to find out the occult truth behind it and if we want to find out the nature of human beings, then we have to get into its deeper layers.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Into that we have to heighten our force of consciousness, to widen by that still more largely, even universally and infinitely, our range of being and our field of action, to take up by that our lower life and use it for greater ends and on a larger plan, in the light of the spiritual truth of existence.

We have to rise into our higher consciousness and widen ourselves. We have to integrate the lower life into the higher and use it for its greater ends. We have read in the previous chapter about ascent and integration. It is to this that Sri Aurobindo is referring to. The process is not one-way in which we keep going upward and leave the lower levels behind. Ascent by itself is incomplete for Sri Aurobindo – it is the integration of the lower into the higher consciousness that completes the process.

Higher knowledge must rule our normal day-to-day life in the light of the spiritual truth. This is unique to Sri Aurobindo, he wants to always bring the higher into the lower levels and look at the lower existence from a

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* higher consciousness. It is never an escape into the higher consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo has done this with the supramental consciousness, but we, on our own levels, also have to do this. We may not yet be able to get into the higher mind or illumined mind or the psychic being. We have mental ideas, which do not have a very strong or transformative force, but whatever heights we can reach, from that height we must work on the lower levels for its greater end.

He further writes,

Our labour of mind and struggle of life cannot come to any solution until we have gone beyond the obsessing lead of an inferior Nature, integralised our natural being in the being and consciousness, learned to utilise our natural instruments by the force and for the joy of the Spirit. Then only can the constitutional ignorance, the ignorance of the real build of our existence from which we suffer, change into a true and effective knowledge of our being and becoming.

Earlier, we had said that constitutional ignorance “is the life dominated by the mind and the mind that is guided by the senses”. This kind of life is obsessed with the senses and the vital. This stands in opposition to integrating our being in the higher consciousness and the need

“to utilise our natural instruments by the force and for the joy of the Spirit”. In simpler words, we can say that constitutional ignorance can be reduced by living in the higher consciousness and integrating into it the lower life.

We can speak a lot about ideals quoting the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, but if we do not implement them in our actual life then we will never come out of this

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constitutional ignorance. We will still be led by the senses, by the vital, by the ego. Just by claiming to be devotees of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo we cannot be affecting a change within. We have to make a personal effort.

Religion is precisely this, in it, we have golden ideals, and golden statues of gods and goddesses, but nothing within changes because we don't implement them.

For what we are is spirit, —at present using mind predominantly, life and body subordinately, with matter for our original field but not our only field of experience; but this is only at present. Our imperfect mental instrumentation is not the last word of our possibilities; for there are in us, dormant or invisibly and imperfectly active, other principles beyond mind and closer to the spiritual nature, there are more direct powers and luminous instruments, there is a higher status, there are greater ranges of dynamic action than those that belong to our present physical, vital and mental existence. These can become our own status, part of our being; they can be principles, powers and instruments of our own enlarged nature. But for that it is not enough to be satisfied with a vague or an ecstatic ascent into spirit or a formless exaltation through the touch of its infinities; their principle has to evolve, as life has evolved, as mind has evolved, and organise its own instrumentation, its own satisfaction. Then we shall possess the true constitution of our being and we shall have conquered the Ignorance.

The solution for our ignorance cannot come unless the higher consciousness is brought into the lower unless we begin to live a higher life in interaction with our neighbours, family, friends, and spouses. This is where

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the whole struggle comes in. Just as the mind is central to our normal daily existence, so too the spirit will become part of our day-to-day existence. It will not be there only in moments, or as he puts it here, “a vague or an ecstatic ascent into spirit or a formless exaltation”. It will not simply be that only when we go to the Samadhi or look at the Mother’s picture we say ‘I have been in a great mood of devotion’. This is not the ecstatic ascent Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are looking for. That is why they would rather have us live a simple normal life wherein spirituality is practised as much as possible without beating drums declaring ‘I am practising spirituality’.

What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother wanted is that the principle of the spirit would evolve on earth just as the mind has evolved. That is why they did not especially try to attract great devotees, great intellects or yogis. They chose normal people with a normal rhythm of life, people going to work every day. They may have the same timings to their jobs as a non-Aurobindonian, go to the same market, walk along the same seashore. Into this normal day-to-day life they wanted to bring the higher spiritual consciousness. As Sri Aurobindo says in the quote above, “there are other levels, dormant and invisibly and imperfectly active, other principles beyond mind, there are more direct power and luminous instruments”, and he wanted all these things beyond the mind to be brought into the normal rhythm of life. He did not want us to do an extra five hours of meditation every day because the common man has to work and take care of other responsibilities, but the beauty is that, into the normal rhythm of life, we can bring in this spiritual element from

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above. What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are asking for is not something impossible.

Way back in the process of evolution before humans, if a Zebra were told the he could reach the mental consciousness the animal would have said, “how is it possible that one day I start thinking, I will have self-consciousness”. But this is the process of evolution, that out of this animal life mind has emerged. It is not a miracle that drops in, it is from life itself that the mind has evolved. Similarly, out of the human mind, the spiritual consciousness is evolving, with or without our participation or in spite of us. If we participate it will proceed faster. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are not asking for the impossible. It is within our reach and it can be brought in, but we seem to be so much bothered with our own day-to-day problems with our neighbors or our family or within our own minds that we hardly ever open up to the higher consciousness. Unless we become dissatisfied to live in the rhythm of this small troubled life we will not feel the need to elevate ourselves. Even if, by luck, our life is relatively untroubled, it remains small. If one becomes a little more aware, one sees that there is much more than this that is possible. This is what Sri Aurobindo is implying when he says that the higher consciousness will organise its own instruments and its own satisfaction. We can go on in the same normal rhythm, but the question is whether we have instilled into that rhythm something of the higher consciousness.

That is the true judgment of a man’s life; it is not how comfortable life is or how satisfied we are with it. I have quoted many a time the adage that it is better to be ‘A Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied’. A pig may be

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* satisfied, but Socrates was not; he wanted to go beyond, to achieve something greater. The spirit will build a new life to its own satisfaction.

Psychological Ignorance

We now come to the second type of ignorance, psychological ignorance. Sri Aurobindo writes, The conquest of our constitutional ignorance cannot be complete, cannot become integrally dynamic, if we have not conquered our psychological ignorance; for the two are bound up together. Our psychological ignorance consists in a limitation of our self-knowledge to that little wave or superficial stream of our being which is the conscient waking self.

If we observe an iceberg we see 1/10th of it is above water and 9/10th is under water. That is exactly the image of our psychological ignorance; we are aware of 1/10th of our existence only. We may feel ashamed to know how much we are bothered and how we give our full concentration to just the 1/10th of our whole being while we are completely ignorant of the other 9/10th. Sri Aurobindo add, This part of our being is an original flux of formless or only half-formulated movements carried on in an automatic continuity, supported and held together by an active surface memory and a passive underlying consciousness in its flow from moment to moment of time, organised and interpreted by our reason and our witnessing and participating intelligence.

This 1/10th of our being is made of “half-formulated movements carried on in an automatic continuity”. This part of our existence is moving from day-to-day, from week-to-week, from month-to-month and from year-

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to-year. When we recollect our life two years ago we do not exactly remember anything, we have only a vague memory of the events and incidences.

What Sri Aurobindo describes here is similar to the concept of Buddhist philosophy which they call *kshanikavada*, where we keep moving from moment to moment and what holds us together is the memory.

When I look ten years back, I hardly remember what I did because the grip of memory is lost. If I see a photograph, I may say ‘yes, that is me doing the high jump in Auroville’.

Because of the photograph, I can remember it, but I don’t have an active memory of it. That part of my being is almost lost to me.

Sri Aurobindo says this flux of self-awareness which is the part of me of which I am aware is supported by

“an active surface memory and a passive underlying consciousness in its flow from moment to moment of time, organised and interpreted by our reason”. This latter factor is important. I may have forgotten what I did ten years back, but my mind comes in and says ‘you started SACAR, you did this, you have photographs of that’, so there is a kind of a rational linking that is also a part of my memory. Even if I had forgotten what I did ten years ago, I can still create a rational connection. But there is more than this, as Sri Aurobindo says, Behind it is an occult existence and energy of our secret being without which the superficial consciousness and activity could not have existed or acted.

This is where Buddhism fails. Of course, they have very strong arguments that there is no soul, there is no continuity, and there is only a memory of one’s ‘Self’

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* which is a kind of reconstruction. But Sri Aurobindo would say that behind this superficial consciousness and activity there is a ‘secret being’. This is where Sri Aurobindo disagrees with Buddhism and the doctrine of momentariness and flux. Both Heraclius and the Buddha are more or less at the same time they gave similar philosophy of flux. Heraclitus said that we cannot step twice into the same running waters of the river. But what we forget is that this water is running on the river basin, which is static, unmoved, and firmly grounded. It is on something firm and permanent that we recognise motion.

If we see only the river we say it is all flux, but underneath the waters of the river, there is a river bed which is stable.

That is the kind of interpretation Sri Aurobindo is giving here. We have behind this flux of the surface self, a ‘secret being’ and the ‘energy of our secret being’. Such is the basis of all our memories and impressions and constructed continuity.

In Matter only an activity is manifest, —inconscient in the outside of things which is all we know; for the indwelling Consciousness in Matter is secret, subliminal, not manifested in the inconscient form and the involved energy: but in us consciousness has become partly manifest, partly awake.

‘In matter only activity manifests’, only the surface activity is seen. When I make a movement, one sees the external manifestation of my action. But behind this activity, there is a consciousness which is not as obvious.

What you are seeing is only the gesture of my hands, but behind the gesture of my hands, there is this mind which has ordered the movement. Similarly, behind all this activity of matter, there is a consciousness which

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acts, but it is subliminal, it is not coming to the forefront, it is hidden, not manifest. In us, this consciousness has become partly manifest and partly awake. He is giving us parallel examples of pure matter, say of a mountain, where we do not see any play of consciousness, and a human being, where we know from experience that there is a play of the consciousness also, that my moving body is my consciousness expressing itself.

But this consciousness is hedged and imperfect; it is bound by its habitual self-limitation and moves in a restricted circle,—except when there are flashes, intimations or upsurgings from the secrecy within us which break the limits of the formation or flow beyond them or widen the circle.

This is our normal restricted consciousness, but sometimes we all experience “flashes, intimations or upsurgings from the secrecy within us”. We may have a great *élan* of devotion that rises beyond this circle of

common consciousness. We have strong leaps of joy that go beyond the normal circle of limited consciousness.

He says that these upsurgings, these flashes, come from the level of the psychic, and the Mother has said that any deep, pure joy which is not connected to an external cause has a psychic link. Joy that is not dependent on the outer is always 'psychic'. When we get a new TV or car we get happiness, but that is not psychic happiness, that is vital and mental, because it is directly related to the object. But sometimes when we have a beautiful moment of silence, or we are listening to music, suddenly we may feel a leap of joy – words don't matter, money doesn't matter, the rhythm doesn't matter, but something somewhere leaps

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* up. This is when Sri Aurobindo says we go beyond the normal circle. Then he says,

But these occasional visitations cannot enlarge us far beyond our present capacities, are not enough to revolutionise our status.

This is where Yoga comes in. We may have flashes of insight or joy but they do not necessarily change our consciousness. Some people have wonderful dreams, but do they really revolutionise their being or their status?

Do they push us to the next level of consciousness? What they may do is give a kind of foretaste of what lies beyond or of what lies beneath. And we do require this foretaste because it is sometimes necessary to convince our mind or to give us the zeal to really attain that ecstasy of the beyond. Our nature is such that once we get a taste, then we keep looking for that taste again. For somebody who doesn't have the taste of the spiritual reality at all, no amount of reading, no amount of lectures, no amount of listening to the Mother's words will take them there.

But when reading the Mother's words, sometimes we may experience such a leap. That is one of the reasons, I suppose, that we keep reading. Somewhere in order to make a dent in the outer consciousness, we get one

of those leanings of the higher consciousness. Those experiences make us read more, make us work harder and really dedicate ourselves to Yoga.

Sri Aurobindo says,

That can only be done if we can bring into it the higher undeveloped lights and powers potential in our being and get them consciously and normally into play; for this we must be able to draw freely from those ranges of our being to which they are

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native but which are at present subconscious or rather secretly intraconscious and circumconscious or else superconscious to us.

He says that to have this kind of revolution of consciousness, this new birth, we must bring into our normal consciousness “the higher undeveloped lights and powers potential in our being and get them consciously and normally into play”. Notice the phrase ‘undeveloped lights’; the lights are there as potential, but they are undeveloped, we simply are not tapping them. We must bring them into our normal being, our normal day-to-day life. He says that we must bring them down from the higher ranges of our being “to which they are native but which are at present subconscious; rather secretly intraconscious and circumconscious or else superconscious”. This means that these ranges are not really subconscious or below our normal surface consciousness. They are intraconscious, meaning they are deep within our consciousness in its subliminal secrecies. They are circumconscious, meaning around our personal consciousness, or superconscious, meaning above and beyond our normal level of consciousness.

There are different ways of doing yoga; people interpret the term ‘yoga’ in many ways. What our great sadhaks have done is, first they ascended to the higher consciousness and then brought it down into the normal consciousness. That is why these sadhaks stand so tall in front of us. They had the master key of the Mother’s grace, no doubt about it, but the amount of tapasya they put in to bring that grace into the outer life has to be

appreciated. With the grace of the Mother we may rise to the higher levels of consciousness and get glimpses

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of it, but it needs the effort to bring it down to the lower levels of our normal consciousness. We have to put it into practice, tapasya and bring this greater awareness into our normal consciousness. These sadhaks are yogis because they have done that, put that higher consciousness into their outer lives. Of course, the grace of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother is with us. We can count on them to help in our sincere efforts. But this grace only opens the inner doors; the real yoga begins when the consciousness that she has shown us in her grace is applied to our life.

Without application, it is not yoga. This consciousness that is within has to come out into normal life.

As Sri Aurobindo puts it,

Or, — the yet more that is also possible, — we must enter into these inner and higher parts of ourselves by an inward plunge or disciplined penetration and bring back with us to the surface their secrets.

This is a wonderful description of Yoga: ‘an inward plunge or disciplined penetration’ together with this bringing back to the surface of our outer consciousness the secrets that are revealed in this inner or higher consciousness.

Or, achieving a still more radical change of our consciousness, we must learn to live within and no longer on the surface and be and act from the inner depths and from a soul that has become sovereign over the nature.

A greater achievement, a more radical change of consciousness, is to stand in the depths of the soul and from there act on the surface consciousness. When one is stationed within the soul, the conscious mental effort is no longer needed. We could say in common parlance that

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we are then walking in her consciousness, living in her consciousness, speaking in her consciousness, breathing in her consciousness! That becomes the normal way of life and that is when one becomes a yogi.

Sri Aurobindo explains what is the subconscious, and moves on to explain the intraconscient, circumconscient and superconscient.

That part of us which we can strictly call subconscious because it is below the level of mind and conscious life, inferior and obscure, covers the purely physical and vital elements of our constitution of bodily being, unmentalised, unobserved by the mind, uncontrolled by it in their action.

Of course, we have come across this concept of the subconscious before but here he is going to explain in a different manner. The prefix 'sub' denotes below; for example, a "sub-marine" goes underwater. So that being the basic meaning, we see now that the subconscious is that consciousness which is below the mental consciousness.

Normally, when we say we are conscious of something we mean we have a mental awareness of it. All that is below this mental consciousness we call the subconscious. He says the subconscious "covers the purely physical and vital elements of our constitution of bodily being". The mind tries to influence the vital, the emotions, the bodily movements which are at least partly subconscious, that is, partly outside the range of consciousness of our mind, below its conscious awareness. Another related term we have seen in other chapters is 'the inconscient', which is a kind of absence of consciousness in contrast to the subconscious which is, we could say, semiconscious. The

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* physical body is close to the inconscient whereas the vital and emotions are closer to subconscious. We say the mind is 'conscient' even though it is not fully conscious. Above the conscious

mind there is the superconscious, and it is fully conscious. The superconscious includes the levels above the Mind, Supermind, Sat, Chit, and Ananda.

The habit of death is there in our body and its roots are deeply hooked to the unconscious. That is why there is the apparent impossibility of changing the habits of the body, particularly the most tenacious habit called death. If we want to change anything on the bodily level, our consciousness has to go deep into the unconscious and there change the tracks or erase these tracks of old habits, and that was part of the work done by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Our movements of desire and emotions are largely subconscious. We are not even fully aware of these movements; sometimes we may be a bit shocked and surprised and wonder “how did I behave like that”, because it came uncontrolled and uninvited from the subconscious. We say in psychology that we have pent-up emotions, that is, they are lying in the subconscious and may suddenly burst forth into action and take us by surprise. That is why desirelessness and detachment are for most people just big philosophical words; nobody is desireless because the roots are there deep in the subconscious and we are unable to go consciously into this part of our being. The psychological structure of the human being is very complex; that is why no religion has been able to transform mankind, they have only dealt with the surface consciousness and gave us big sermons to control ourselves but those were not supported by

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yoga or tapasya to really integrate the different levels of consciousness.

Now coming to the mental level, we see that the mental consciousness has its own limitations. The position of the mind is in between the superconscious levels and the subconscious with its unconscious floor. It receives influences from both ends, fortunately, or unfortunately.

Our dreams may come from the subconscious or the subliminal and we may have flashes from the higher consciousness of intuition and inspiration. The mind is in a kind of privileged position and it can be very powerful if it is

used properly. Normally, we are more or less open to the urges and the upsurges of the subconscious vital but instead of looking down, the mind has to look up and say, 'O Lord, let me open to thee and thy light and thy consciousness'. That is the tapasya of the mind.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother went down into the subconscious and the inconscient and did the work of purification and transformation for all of us there. For the descent into the inconscient they needed each other's support. That is why the essence of *Savitri* is the descent into the cave of death where the entire experience of death was absorbed and then transformed. This was such a profound work of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo as reflected in the epic by Savitri and Satyavan.

Sri Aurobindo further says of this subconscious: It can be held to include the dumb occult consciousness, dynamic but not sensed by us, which operates in the cells and nerves and all the corporeal stuff and adjusts their life process and automatic responses.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* The *Mother's Agenda* is in a way a report of her descent into the consciousness of the cells where the subconscious was making its automatic responses to life and illness and death. The inconscient and the subconscious normally rule the cells or the mind of the cells, as we say, and so the Mother had to descend into the cells and bring in the supramental consciousness of immortality there. Here Sri Aurobindo explains that it is the subconscious "which operates in the cells and nerves and all the corporeal stuff".

It covers also those lowest functionings of submerged sense-mind which are more operative in the animal and in plant life; in our evolution we have overpassed the need of any large organised action of this element, but it remains submerged and obscurely at work below our conscious nature.

The subconscious is more dynamically working in the animal and plant life as instinct. One is thrilled to see the exactness of the instinctive behaviour of animals that it makes one wonder whether they are really so conscious!

We could say that intuition working in the subconscious is an instinct which repeats itself until it becomes a quality of the species. Sri Aurobindo says that in our human evolution we have overpassed the need for any large organised action of this element, but it remains submerged and obscurely at work below our conscious nature. He continues:

This obscure activity extends to a hidden and hooded mental substratum into which past impressions and all that is rejected from the surface mind sink and remain there dormant and can surge up in sleep or in any absence of the mind, taking dream forms, forms

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of mechanical mind-action or suggestion, forms of automatic vital reaction or impulse, forms of physical abnormality or nervous perturbation, forms of morbidity, disease, unbalance.

He throws such great light on human behaviour!

All that has been rejected by the mind in its conscious awareness is not really eliminated. Even in our sadhana when we reject a vital movement it doesn't go outside of us, it doesn't get burnt up. It goes into the subconscious and remains there dormant. That is one reason why Sri Aurobindo has discussed the importance of purity in our thinking. I may put on a beautiful smile but have horrible thoughts about someone in my mind, and these things may get submerged into the subconscious. It is not just in individuals and it is not just things from the recent past that are there in the subconscious, all that humanity has rejected from its surface consciousness and suppressed is there. That is why at present we see so much violence and sex coming up because they are being brought up for ultimate purification. They were suppressed in the name of morality and religion and now it has become a common property of the human subconscious. Therefore, we see this violence and sex unabashedly coming up all over the world. There is no culture or country which is not a victim of this because it is the suppressed human subconscious which is being thrown up into open action. In fact, we could say that terrorism has increased because of things that have been pushed into the subconscious of the human race and they are taking revenge and want to come out.

Sri Aurobindo speaks of a coming spiritual age but when we look at the present age it is such a contradiction

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that it is difficult to believe it will come. He had to explain rationally because otherwise it is difficult to accept Sri Aurobindo's vision. The present is a million miles away from what he envisages. But the logic behind it is that with Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's work of purification and transformation in the subconscious they have reduced those million miles down to a few hundred miles.

Out of the subconscious we bring ordinarily so much to the surface as our waking sense-mind and intelligence need for their purpose; in so bringing them up we are not aware of their nature, origin, operation and do not apprehend them in their own values but by a translation into the values of our waking human sense and intelligence.

We are not aware of these subconscious emotions and impulses, "we are not aware of their nature, origin, operation". We translate them into values of our human mind and will, and think they belong to us. Our mind gives a reason for them translating them into its own value. We say, "you made me angry", but actually it may be something rising from the subconscious. He says their

...effects upon the mind and body, are mostly automatic, uncalled for and involuntary; for we have no knowledge and therefore no control of the subconscious.

We have automatic subconscious reactions. For example, many have an automatic fear of snakes, and many people have a fear of cockroaches. That fear is likely buried in the subconscious and it rises and we shudder when we see these creatures. Sri Aurobindo says, It is only by an experience abnormal to us, most

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commonly in illness or some disturbance of balance, that we can become directly aware of something in the dumb world, dumb but very active, of our bodily being and vitality or grow conscious of the secret movements of the mechanical subhuman physical and vital mind which underlies our surface,

— a consciousness which is ours but seems not ours because it is not part of our known mentality. This and much more lives concealed in the subconsciousence.

We understand these things behind our body, emotions, and mind when they come out automatically and involuntarily. We usually think they are not part of our being because they are not part of our known, controllable mind data. Before I go further, I would like to read a passage from Sri Aurobindo, from an earlier chapter of *The Life Divine*. It is a wonderful explanation of the subliminal, which is different from the subconscious.

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 environing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter. (CWSA 21: 561)

Now this is of great importance to understand. The outer being consists of the mind, vital and physical

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* which we know and experience daily. Then there is the subliminal which consists of subtle mental, subtle vital, subtle physical bodies. My outer physical being is limited by this body; I cannot extend my body beyond my hand. The subliminal can go beyond this limit but it also has its own limitations. Sri Aurobindo says that this subliminal can project itself beyond all these sheaths and form a

circumconscient, “an environing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter”. The Mother also explains that diseases first come into this circumconscient body or the nervous body and from there come into the physical body, and that it is possible to become aware of them in the circumconscient and deal with them before they enter the physical body.

He continues by saying,

The subliminal is able to widen indefinitely this circumconscient envelope and more and more enlarge its self-projection into the cosmic existence around it.

I am bringing in this concept because it did not catch our attention in our past discussions of *The Life Divine*, though we have spoken about it in reference to *The Synthesis of Yoga* with regard to how the individual becomes universal, and we have also spoken about it in regard to the Mother. How could the individual Divine Mother become the universe? It is this circumconscient around her body that he says can “widen indefinitely”

and “enlarge its self-projection into the cosmic existence around it”. That is how someone in New York or Berlin or New Delhi could pray to her when they were suffering or were in pain and she would receive that vibration and send a healing force to the person. Her body was like a

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spider in its web. A spider may have a huge web and a little ant may enter at the far other end but its vibration goes right to the spider who catches the ant. Similarly, the Mother’s circumconscient body was universal.

Sri Aurobindo writes,

A point comes where it can break through the separation altogether, unite, identify itself with cosmic being, feel itself universal, one with all existence.

We have seen the example of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa who while sitting with others get whip marks on his back because somebody was beating a bull somewhere on the street. These great yogis have this enlarged circumconscient body. That is why they can say

“I am with you”. When they say “I am with you” it is not only from the point of view of consciousness but includes this subtle physical connection and identification.

This is why sometimes when we are in a quiet mood of meditation, devotion, or calling the Mother we say “I felt her presence”. This is the presence literally of her subtle physical; some people even smell the fragrance of the perfume that Mother used to put on her body.

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.

This is the term that I wanted to highlight.

Sri Aurobindo also mentioned it in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, that one becomes a universal individual. Otherwise, we cannot understand how an individual can become universal. The universal individual is the individual who has really universalised his circumconscient and becomes one with the cosmos.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Continuing, Sri Aurobindo says,

Its first result, when it is complete, is the realisation of the cosmic spirit, the one self inhabiting the universe, and this union may even bring about a disappearance of the sense of individuality, a merger of the ego into the world-being. 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. But more usually there are results of less amplitude; there is a direct awareness of universal being and nature, there is

a greater openness of the mind to the cosmic Mind and its energies, to the cosmic Life and its energies, to cosmic Matter and its energies. 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 Being becomes a certitude and a reality and is no longer an ideative perception. (CWSA 21: 542-543)

We see the great importance of this circumconscient.

It helps us understand the term universal individual, and to understand the meaning of the Mother's presence and the meaning of Sri Aurobindo's statement "Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you." (CWSA 32: 168) Therefore, there are hundreds of people who have not seen the Mother but have felt her presence. She knows all our behaviour wherever we are. This is due to the work that she has done to universalise her circumconscient being.

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This is the literal aspect of her presence which knows us, our actions and our actions and our thoughts.

What is important to note here is that events and memories from the subconscious not only come up in dreams, but as Sri Aurobindo says here, most of our reactions which are involuntary and automatic come from there. What we come to understand is that the human being is like an empty box – especially the outer personality – it is like a junction box into which things from above, things from below, from within, from the circumconscient, keep passing through. It is remarkable to see how complex is this human personality. This is why it is very difficult to understand a person's particular reactions, responses, and what he has done on the spur of the moment, because there are many things that come into being. We are not yogis to have control over things that are passed on into the subconscious.

Something from the subconscious comes in and kicks up emotion and suddenly we respond in a particular manner.

Normally we say, “why did I do that? I don’t normally behave like that”. We think we are doing it, but there is something dormant in the subconscious that has surged up. Sri Aurobindo says “these risings of the subconscious, its effects upon the mind and body, are mostly automatic, uncalled for and involuntary”.

There are involuntary movements in the body. They come from the subconscious itself. Take the example of children killing insects, or of people’s recoil from snakes. Why do we automatically react? It is actually a subconscious movement that has been put into us not

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* only through parents, teachers and society, but it has come into our subconscious through the ages. Personal and social influences also go into our subconscious. We see certain tendencies in western societies and other tendencies in Indian society. They have been given by cultural training and family training and those things get into our subconscious and rise up involuntarily.

Now, Sri Aurobindo tells us in the next paragraph: A descent into the subconscious would not help us to explore this region, for it would plunge us into incoherence or into sleep or a dull trance or a comatose torpor. A mental scrutiny or insight can give us some indirect and constructive idea of these hidden activities; but it is only by drawing back into the subliminal or by ascending into the superconscious and from there looking down or extending ourselves into these obscure depths that we can become directly and totally aware and in control of the secrets of our subconscious physical, vital and mental nature. This awareness, this control are of the utmost importance.

This is Sri Aurobindo’s solution; we cannot understand the movements of the subconscious or control them by descending into it. This has been a defect of some western psychological approaches that they try to remove subconscious influences by descending into the mud.

What happens when we go into this mud is similar to walking into quicksand, we get sucked in. Sri Aurobindo does not advocate going down but rising higher into the superconscient or dive deep within into the subliminal consciousness where there is light and strength to change these subconscious tendencies. Being what we are with our present human faculties and mental capacities, we

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have no power to face the subconscious. If we draw back into the subliminal we can reach the point of the psychic being and with the protection and guidance of the psychic being, we can change the subconscious impulses. But it needs a lot of tapasya.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

For the subconscious is the Inconscient in the process of becoming conscious; it is a support and even a root of our inferior parts of being and their movements.

The Inconscient has roots deep below the earth which cannot be seen at all. The subconscious is kind of an upper layer of those roots. The subconscious stands between the conscient and Inconscient planes; it is a mid-region.

It supports, the inferior parts of our being and their movements. Sri Aurobindo continues: It sustains and reinforces all in us that clings most and refuses to change, our mechanical recurrences of unintelligent thought, our persistent obstinacies of feeling, sensation, impulse, propensity, our uncontrolled fixities of character. The animal in us, the infernal also, – has its lair of retreat in the dense jungle of the subconscious. To penetrate there, to bring in light and establish a control, is indispensable for the completeness of any higher life, for any integral transformation of the nature.

For the integral transformation to take place, then there is no escape from cleansing the subconscious. It is the lair of the animal and “infernal” in us. We use this word

‘infernal’ to describe the characteristics of hell, which is a part of our lower being. There is no hell or heaven outside of us, they are parts of our own being. They are the subconscious and the superconscious of our being, and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* we are under the influence of both. He uses the phrase

‘dense jungle of the subconscious’. It is very difficult to penetrate into this subconscious because it is so thick and dark, we cannot get into that very easily, but it “is indispensable for the completeness of any higher life, for any integral transformation of the nature”.

I would like to note one more thing here, “it sustains and reinforces all in us that clings most and refuses to change”. Here are the characteristics that refuse to change,

“the mechanical recurrences of unintelligent thought; the persistent obstinacies of feeling, sensation, impulse, propensity, our uncontrolled fixities of character”. We can understand that all that refuses to change in us is typically supported by the subconscious. All the habits have their roots in the subconscious. For example, each one of us has food habits, we say, ‘my mother’s food is the best’. Why? It is not the mom’s food, it is that first groove of taste which was fixed in the subconscious when we were children.

Like that we have many things that have become fixed grooves in our subconscious. We may have prejudices against other families or people. This also happens on a social level so that terrorists believe certain people must be killed, that X is not good, that Indians are our enemies, that Americans are our enemies! This is how terrorism gets into the minds of youngsters. How do you think they get the courage to kill or get killed? This kind of groove is etched very strongly into the subconscious mind and the vital of the person. You see how deep our prejudices can go! Religion utilises these prejudices to its advantage, pitting one against the other.

The part of us that we have characterised as intraconscient and circumconscient is a still more

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potent and much more valuable element in the constitution of our being. It includes the large action of an inner intelligence and inner sense-mind, of an inner vital, even of an inner subtle-physical being which upholds and embraces our waking consciousness, which is not brought to the front, which is subliminal, in the modern phrase.

As I said we have a tremendously complex being; we have the subconscious which kicks up all this negative aspects of our reactions, responses, thoughts, emotions, and feelings, whereas the intraconscient gives rise to the positive, creative urge, the talents of music and painting.

The prefix 'intra' means within, this part of us includes the subtle inner mind, inner vital and subtle-physical being. This is the foundation of all our positive thought, emotion, feeling and creativity. As we said, our outer being is an empty junction box receiving signals from all sides; there is hardly anything that I can call myself.

Regarding intraconscient consciousness Sri Aurobindo writes,

But when we can enter and explore this hidden self, we find that our waking sense and intelligence are for the most part a selection from what we secretly are or can be, an exteriorised and much mutilated and vulgarised edition of our real, our hidden being or an up throw from its depths. Our surface being has been formed with this subliminal help by an evolution out of the Inconscient for the utility of our present mental and physical life on earth; this that is behind is a formation mediating between the Inconscient and the larger planes of Life and Mind which have been created by the involutory descent and whose

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* pressure has helped to bring about the evolution of Mind and Life in Matter.

Here we get a little more complicated idea. When we try to enter and explore this hidden self, normally, we have no awareness and control, we must have sharp instruments. Sometimes even great yogis may have fantastic experiences but their outer instruments are not sharpened and so their spiritual experiences are not expressed except in very vague terms. But the Mother and Sri Aurobindo underwent a tremendous training of their mind and vital as a musician, an artist, a poet, a scholar, so they have really learnt how to express themselves. That is why they are so wonderful in their self-expression, because their instruments have been very well prepared.

Let us not think that just because they are Avatars that all this was possible. They had to train their instruments.

Otherwise, Sri Aurobindo says, normally they are not there on the surface, they come out through rigorous training. Then he says;

But when we can enter and explore this hidden self, we find that our waking sense and intelligence are for the most part a selection from what we secretly are or can be...

The intraconscious may have a lot of creative ideas, but we also select from these, that's where the role of the mind or the intelligence comes in. When Sri Aurobindo was writing *Savitri* he revised it many times. He was quite objective and critical about it. It is supposed that *Savitri* is a kind of *pashyanti vak*, what he saw, he wrote down.

But then why did he revise it? Book I, Canto I of *Savitri* was revised twelve times. Even the original draft could have stood out in English literature. We could see his

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wonderfully trained mind and intelligence. It was not for nothing that he had read all the great classic literatures of the world. By reading them he had mastered the rhythms and the meters of English poetry; he had to find out the soul of English poetry and train his mental faculty. If we read Nirodbaran's account, he says that Sri Aurobindo would sometimes dictate a flood of lines, as if there was an avalanche of inspiration. And yet the

same Master would say, 'Nirod, bring out those lines, I want to see them again', and he would correct them, by changing the words or the structure or the placement of the lines. Sri Aurobindo alone could do this because of his extraordinary and well trained mind.

Continuing this sentence, Sri Aurobindo says:

...a selection from what we secretly are or can be, an exteriorised and much mutilated and vulgarised edition of our real, our hidden being or an upthrow from its depths.

Sri Aurobindo says that what we manage to bring out to the surface mind are "mutilated and vulgarised"

expressions of this intraconscient which is so beautiful, but this happens because our mind's incapacity and ill-training express them in a wrong way. For example, the Mother says that much of the modern art is subconscious, there are patches of colour and lines for which neither the painter nor the on-looker sees any meaning. She said it was an expression of the subconscious of the artist. In fact, Tagore's art was also subconscious. Tagore's poetry is sublime as it comes from a higher level of consciousness, but his art comes from the subconscious. His subconscious being expressed itself as art and his superconscient being

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* expressed itself in poetry with beautiful music, rhythm, language and *drishti*, vision.

Of course, now in the Ashram a lot of attempts have been made to find out new techniques, and new expressions, but here you see definitely an expression of the purer subliminal or, the higher consciousness. There is always affinity, subtleness, a luminosity, which expresses itself in a higher level of art. It is a new kind of expression which has become the style of the Ashram artists. Of course, some of these artists were very much guided and influenced by the Mother, and some of them have passed it down to their students.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Our surface responses to physical existence have at their back the support of an activity in these veiled parts, are often responses from them modified by a surface mental rendering.

If our present outer personality, what we are, has the influence of the unconscious coming through the subconscious, it also has the influences of the subliminal which finds in it a personality through which it can express itself. That is where the question of our swabhava comes in. The Gita tells us to express our swabhava and swadharma. Our swabhava is the outer instrumentation which really captures the subliminal.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

This that is behind is a formation mediating between the Unconscious and the larger planes of Life and Mind which have been created by the involutionary descent and whose pressure has helped to bring about the evolution of Mind and Life in Matter.

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“This that is behind’ is the subliminal or the intraconscious; it is a formation mediating between the unconscious on the one hand and larger planes of Life and Mind which were created in the involution on the other hand. Sri Aurobindo is giving us such great details to explain that there are these higher elements in human beings, these higher possibilities which are still hidden and can be brought out because they are still dormant within us. He has opened up the human being to show us every part, the hidden ones, the deeper ones, the known ones, the unknown ones. He is doing a kind of scientific analysis, examining the human personality. He further clarifies,

But also that large part of our mentality and vitality which is not a response to the outside world but lives for itself or throws itself out on material existence to use and possess it, our personality, is the outcome, the amalgamated formulation of powers, influences, motives proceeding from this potent intraconscious secrecy.

We have seen within us, is this subliminal consciousness and that this subliminal is connected to the universal, “the larger planes of Life and Mind” and their subtle worlds.

We have also seen that the circumconscient is the outer circle of consciousness around us that connects our personal consciousness to the universal.

Just as we have a physical body which limits us, the subliminal consciousness has a body which has its own limitations, it has what we call the subtle physical body, and the outer limits of this subtle body are in the circumconscient.

We are really moving with two bodies. Like the physical

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* body, this subtle-physical body can also travel; we have lots of examples of yogis and saints traveling in their subtle-physical body while the gross physical body is stationary. But this subtle body can not only travel, it can universalise itself.

We will next take up the circumconscient and after that we will come to the superconscient. Try to keep in mind that Sri Aurobindo is explaining all this because it is part of the psychological ignorance; we have no idea what our psychological body is. That is why he has taken pains to explain to us the nature of the subconscious, the subliminal, the intraconscient, the circumconscient and the superconscient; these are parts of our psychological body. After that he will come to the third ignorance which is the ‘temporal ignorance’, Sri Aurobindo is not just giving us a lesson on psychology, he is explaining our psychological ignorance and that of which we must become aware; only then can we come out of it.

The subliminal consciousness itself is divided into two sections: the intraconscient and the circumconscient, meaning that which is within and that which is outside.

The subliminal is not only that which is within, there is an extra dimension of the subliminal called the circumconscient. We read now a paragraph connected with that. He says,

Again, the subliminal extends itself into an enveloping consciousness through which it receives the shock of the currents and wave-circuits pouring upon us from the universal Mind, universal Life, universal subtler Matter-forces.

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In a way we could call this as the layer or the envelope around us which is both protecting the outer human personality as well as connecting the human personality to the subtle worlds. Sri Aurobindo says “it receives the shock of the currents and wave-circuits pouring upon us”. We have to protect ourselves otherwise we may be bombarded by things from the universal mind, life and subtle planes of matter because there are constant waves coming from these worlds. The circumconscient is also a layer of protection from illnesses and diseases. The Mother says that first illnesses come and attack this outer circumconscient and once this layer is penetrated, then the disease can come and settle itself in the physical. It is only then that it expresses itself in some organ in a part of the body and the doctors would say you have a disease. In spirituality, we can be constantly protected if we keep ourselves within the ring of the grace of the Mother. This protective ring is around the gross physical which does not let these diseases penetrate or puncture the circumconscient ring. She says that if we can stop the disease at the level of the circumconscient then we don't get the disease. Spiritually we can stop a disease from entering but once it penetrates the physical it becomes difficult to remove it. Then the doctor comes into the picture and that is why we have different types of medicine and approaches to curing illness based on different philosophies.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

These, unperceived by us on the surface, are perceived and admitted by our subliminal self and turned into formations which can powerfully affect our existence without our knowledge.

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Occult forces can come into us and make formations which powerfully affect our existence. They may influence our thoughts, emotions or body. They may afflict us with diseases or psychological problems such as depression.

Sri Aurobindo continues:

If the wall that separates this inner existence from the outer self were penetrated, we could know and deal with the sources of our present mind-energies and life-action and could control instead of undergoing their results. But though large parts of it can be thus known by a penetration and looking within or a freer communication, it is only by going inward behind the veil of superficial mind and living within, in an inner mind, an inner life, an inmost soul of our being that we can be fully self-aware,—by this and by rising to a higher plane of mind than that which our waking consciousness inhabits. An enlargement and completion of our present evolutionary status, now still so hampered and truncated, would be the result of such an inward living; but an evolution beyond it can come only by our becoming conscious in what is now superconscient to us, by an ascension to the native heights of the Spirit.

If the wall that separates this inner existence from our outer self were penetrated, we could know and deal with these outside influences. We have said that there is this enveloping consciousness and if we were aware of what was happening there, then we could see these influences

– these thoughts, feelings, or subtle physical influences

– and we could stop them. These forces are constantly around us and if there is some kind of invitation or affinity with these forces, then they are attracted to us.

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If that happens not only once but twice and then thrice it may become a habit; it will come automatically and we will automatically let it in.

Initially, a child is pure, but as we grow up these forces find lodging in it and are difficult to remove. But if we could see what was coming, then we could stop them in the circumconscient before they come into us and undergo their results. But though much of this could thus be known by penetrating into the subliminal consciousness, Sri Aurobindo says, the best thing is to rise to a higher plane of consciousness above the normal mind.

We have discussed the subconscious and the subliminal consciousness with its intraconscient and circumconscient aspects and next Sri Aurobindo discusses the superconscient. He says,

In the superconscience beyond our present level of awareness are included the higher planes of mental being as well as the native heights of supramental and pure spiritual being. The first indispensable step in an upward evolution would be to elevate our force of consciousness into those higher parts of Mind from which we already receive, but without knowing the source, much of our larger mental movements, those, especially, that come with a greater power and light, the revelatory, the inspirational, the intuitive.

From the higher consciousness come intuition, inspiration and revelation; from the subconscious come all the dark urges within us; and from the subliminal comes the creativity of artists, musicians and poets. In the subliminal consciousness one has the possibility of connecting with the worlds of music and art. We

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* were talking about Tagore earlier; he was one of those wonderful examples who could draw inspiration from the *gandharvaloka* of music. The Mother clarified that he descended from the *gandharvaloka*. So, Tagore was quite an exception in the sense that, based on my understanding of what the Mother said, he was an involutory being who had descended here, he was not an evolutionary being. Singing and music and rhythm were as natural to him as breathing is for us. This kind of creativity is there in the worlds of music or art or poetry and we can

access them through the subliminal consciousness. In the superconscious there is knowledge and wisdom and the worlds of ideas. The being is beautifully divided in such a way that the mind is open to the upper levels and can get its revelations, intuitions, and inspirations from there, the vital can open to the inner subliminal consciousness and its worlds, and the physical itself is more or less given to the subconscious. We see that these three parts of our being are connected to three vast universalities.

The psychological tragedy is that we feel that we are just this physical body, mind and life, just this name and bio-data and nothing else. Sri Aurobindo tells us not to limit ourselves like this, it is just an infinitesimal part of what we are. Swami Vivekananda use to inspire people by telling that we are all *amritasya putrah*. In giving us this idea that we are children of immortality, he was giving us the truth of our being.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

On these mental heights, in these largenesses, if the consciousness could succeed in reaching them or maintain and centre itself there, something of the direct presence and power of the Spirit, something

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even,—however secondary or indirect,—of the Supermind could receive a first expression, could make itself initially manifest, could intervene in the government of our lower being and help to remould it.

When he says “if the consciousness could succeed in reaching them or maintain and centre itself there” he says that it is not enough to just touch these worlds of illumination or inspiration, one has to become stationed there. Great poets have had visitations, but Sri Aurobindo was constantly an inhabitant of these levels beyond the mind. Then, he says, “something of the direct presence and power of the Spirit, something even ... of the Supermind could receive a first expression”. If we can start becoming an inhabitant of these higher levels of spiritual mind consciousness then the Supermind can start coming in. This is not just philosophy for me because I see the parallels in Sri Aurobindo’s own life. There are parallels in the sense that he has written this because he has done it himself. He says,

Afterwards, by the force of that remoulded consciousness, the course of our evolution could rise by a sublimer ascent and get beyond the mental into the supramental and the supreme spiritual nature. It is possible without an actual ascent into these at present superconscient mental planes or without a constant or permanent living in them, by openness to them, by reception of their knowledge and influences, to get rid to a certain extent of our constitutional and psychological ignorance; it is possible to be aware of ourselves as spiritual beings and to spiritualise, though imperfectly, our normal human life and consciousness.

Here he explains that when one starts living in the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* spiritual mind the supermind starts coming down and expressing itself. But even before this happens it is possible to get rid of our constitutional and psychological ignorance, at least to some extent, and begin to spiritualise our life and consciousness. We would begin to know who and what we are and what are our capacities once we rise higher. He continues,

There could be a conscious communication and guidance from this greater more luminous mentality and a reception of its enlightening and transforming forces. That is within the reach of the highly developed or the spiritually awakened human being; but it would not be more than a preliminary stage. To reach an integral self-knowledge, an entire consciousness and power of being, there is necessary an ascent beyond the plane of our normal mind. Such an ascent is at present possible in an absorbed superconscience; but that could lead only to an entry into the higher levels in a state of immobile or ecstatic trance.

Before really living on these levels permanently there could be a kind of connection with them and reception of their transforming forces. But for a complete self-knowledge it is necessary to ascend into the higher planes. Sri Aurobindo notes here that at present this can be done in an immobile or ecstatic trance, but this is not enough. We know that some people in their meditations reach some higher consciousness in a kind of trance or samadhi. Those experiences may give a glimpse and perhaps a short stay in

these realms, but then they come back and are like any ordinary human being. Even they may have trouble adjusting themselves to the normal life after attaining those beautiful heights; they may become

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angry or disappointed or intolerant with this world with all its fallacies and foolishness and ignorance.

Sri Aurobindo says,

If the control of that highest spiritual being is to be brought into our waking life, there must be a conscious heightening and widening into immense ranges of new being, new consciousness, new potentialities of action, a taking up,—as integral as possible,—of our present being, consciousness, activities and a transmutation of them into divine values which would effect a transfiguration of our human existence. For wherever a radical transition has to be made, there is always this triple movement, —ascent, widening of field and base, integration, —in Nature’s method of self-transcendence.

He concludes this section on the psychological ignorance by saying that if we are to gain a spiritual control over our waking life, and that is the meaning of integral yoga, these visits to the higher levels of the mind, which many yogis have done, is not enough. These yogis may live there in immobile ecstasy, in great peace, but they have not been that useful as such to the world or even to themselves except in that one part of their being that ascended into those great heights. Unless and until we bring their powers down into the “present being, consciousness, activities and a transmutation of them into divine values” nothing changes. Sri Aurobindo wants to bring it down and apply it to life.

His is applied spirituality and not theory. He does not want to simply ascend into and enjoy a sublime state of consciousness, he wants to bring it down to the day-today level. It’s not enough to go into samadhi or go for a

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* retreat for ten days and rise in meditation; that is not day-to-day life. He wants us to breathe spirituality and not to make it an exceptional event. He says that if there is to be a radical transformation there has to be three movements, one of ascent, one of wideness of the field and base, and one of integration.

Temporal Ignorance

Now we come to the third type of ignorance, the temporal ignorance. Sri Aurobindo has spent a lot of time discussing the first two and then from the third to the seven he gives briefer explanations. He says, Any such evolutionary change must necessarily be associated with a rejection of our present narrowing temporal ignorance. For not only do we now live from moment to moment of time, but our whole view is limited to our life in the present body between a single birth and death.

What is the meaning of temporal ignorance? It is the usual belief and acceptance that one is born on a certain date and one is bound to die. One considers this is to be the truth of life. It is an ignorance because we forget that we have lived thousands of lives before and we shall live thousands of lives after this one.

As our regard does not go farther back in the past, so it does not extend farther out into the future; thus we are limited by our physical memory and awareness of the present life in a transient corporeal formation.

In a way our temporal ignorance is equivalent to our physical memory. We remember what we have done ten or fifteen years back and add to that some knowledge about

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our life from piecing together certain facts and inferences, and think that is my life and nothing more.

But this limitation of our temporal consciousness is intimately dependent upon the preoccupation of our mentality with the material plane and life in which it is at present acting; the limitation is not a law of the spirit but a temporary provision for an intended first working of our manifested nature.

As is typical, Sri Aurobindo gives us the reason for temporal ignorance. He says it is a “temporary provision”

for our intended first working of our manifested nature”.

That is the beauty of Sri Aurobindo, he doesn't reject but puts everything in its place. He says, it is a “temporary provision”. It is the same with, he says, it is a provision made by nature. There is a reason behind all this ignorance. The fact that the soul comes into this ignorance has a meaning and a purpose, otherwise why should the soul, knowing all the sevenfold layers of ignorance plunge itself into it? It knows what it is doing and it takes it upon itself purposely. He says,

If the preoccupation is relaxed or put aside, an extension of the mind effected, an opening into the subliminal and superconscient, into the inner and higher being created, it is possible to realise our persistent existence in time as well as our eternal existence beyond it. This is essential if we are to get our self-knowledge into the right focus; for at present our whole consciousness and action are vitiated by an error of spiritual perspective which prevents us from seeing in right proportion and relation the nature, purpose and conditions of our being.

We can get rid of this temporal ignorance if we can

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* get rid of psychological and constitutional ignorance.

The moment I realise I am this universal being then immediately I know that I am not just this physical memory of these few years of my present life; that I am something more beyond. It is possible to realise our persistent existence by realising the first two types of knowledge of our constitutional and psychological being.

He says our “whole consciousness and action are vitiated by an error of spiritual perspective”. Actually, I would say this is one of the attempts that Sri Aurobindo is making by writing all the volumes, to give us a corrected spiritual vision and perspective. The Vedas had said that we are children of immortality but they didn't fully explain it. Now Sri Aurobindo is bringing back that vision into modern times and telling the whole of humanity that

we are not just this thinking animals. This makes a lot of difference in how we treat the world and our life in it. If I think that this material world is all there is, then I will try to take as much as possible from this material life and maximise my comfort and riches. I will, sort of loot the world as much as possible because I have a short life and life is difficult. Our whole psychology changes. He is giving us a corrected spiritual perspective of who we are.

At least that should affect to some degree our thinking and our responses to the world.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Any such evolutionary change must necessarily be associated with a rejection of our present narrowing temporal ignorance. For not only do we now live from moment to moment of time, but our whole

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view is limited to our life in the present body between a single birth and death. As our regard does not go farther back in the past, so it does not extend farther out into the future; thus we are limited by our physical memory and awareness of the present life in a transient corporeal formation.

We have explained the essence of ‘temporal ignorance’

earlier – it is that we think that our present single birth is the beginning and end of the journey of our ‘soul’ because we do not have the capacity to go into the past or the future; we are limited by our physical memory of the present life.

We base ourselves on physical memory and get limited to these memories and think it to be our sole existence.

But this limitation of our temporal consciousness is intimately dependent upon the preoccupation of our mentality with the material plane and life in which it is at present acting; the limitation is not a law of the spirit but a temporary provision for an intended first working of our manifested nature.

When we say we are limited by our physical memory because it goes only to the level of our material plane; we don't gauge our life by our dreams or visions. We don't say, for example, that ten years back I had such and such a dream. On the contrary, we say, ten years ago I was in such and such a place. Our memories are more or less limited to the material plane. We don't go into the other planes of consciousness, into our dreams or visions or inner experiences. This limitation is based on the preoccupation of our mentality with the material plane.

He says "The limitation is not a law of the spirit but a temporary provision for an intended first working of our manifested nature". This implies that this limitation

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is intentional, it is what Sri Aurobindo calls "a temporary provision". The very fact that we are not allowed to know our past lives or have any idea of our future lives is a necessity for our present life's manifestation. I once had written a letter to the Mother about my past lives but she did not respond. Sometimes knowing our past lives could be a hindrance for us, for example, it could boost our ego.

It is not necessary to know the past for our growth in our present life.

We are kind of blindfolded so that we concentrate on this life. If we are constantly thinking about our past lives, we cannot concentrate on the present life. And if we are given knowledge of what we will be, we will lose focus on the present consciousness and life and this may adversely affect our future births because they depend upon what we do in this life. If we fulfill our soul's wish for this life by working upon our manifested nature then our soul can say

‘yes, I am satisfied, I have gained the experience needed to prepare for a new role and experience in my coming life’.

But, if we do not satisfy our soul’s self-expression in this life, it may have to repeat the birth because we did not fulfil its wishes for self-expression in this life.

This ‘temporal ignorance’ is necessary at the beginning of our soul’s development; later, when we realise our psychic being, we automatically get the knowledge of our past births, because by then we are not bothered by what we were as we have realised that “I am a soul and not just a human being with a certain personality and character”.

At the stage when we realise our soul and psychic being, our past and our future are immaterial, it doesn’t affect our present life. Our entire consciousness is of one eternal journey that includes many births. It is like the Nirvanic

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experience of the Buddha in which he came to know of his past births and that the present birth was just one more in his eternal march. What happens is that our emphasis on the present becomes less, because we feel we are a soul moving from birth to birth, from body to body. Even for a sadhak of the Integral Yoga, once we are established in the psychic consciousness, we can know our past births without it affecting our present birth. Sri Aurobindo continues,

If the preoccupation is relaxed or put aside, an extension of the mind effected, an opening into the subliminal and superconscient, into the inner and higher being created, it is possible to realise our persistent existence in time as well as our eternal existence beyond it.

This is what I was just explaining in a different way, that if this preoccupation with our present material life is put aside, we go deeper within ourselves and are able to realise our persistent existence in time, that we have been taking births in the past and that it is a continuous journey of the soul.

This is essential if we are to get our self-knowledge into the right focus; for at present our whole consciousness and action are vitiated by an error of spiritual perspective which prevents us from seeing in right proportion and relation the nature, purpose and conditions of our being. A belief in immortality is made so vital a point in most religions because it is a self-evident necessity if we are to rise above the identity with the body and its preoccupation with the material level. But a belief is not sufficient to alter radically this mistake of perspective...

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is an explanation of why the various religions spoke of the heavens beyond or of the immortality of the soul. This was to tell us that we have forgotten something, we have a higher identity and we should not preoccupy ourselves with material life only, there is something beyond. But Sri Aurobindo says “this belief is not sufficient to alter radically this mistake of perspective”. What is this mistake of perspective? It is explained in the previous sentence: “the spiritual perspective which prevents us from seeing in right proportion and relation the nature, purpose and conditions of our being”. I said earlier that what Sri Aurobindo does essentially through his writings is to give us a corrected spiritual perception. He is correcting our vision of life, our way to live. In giving this right perspective he shows us the way to get beyond our psychological ignorance and telling us what is the fullness of our being. Even before taking to sadhana as such, we need to have the right perspective of life. Then there is this ideal, this perspective that goads us to experience it. If we don't have the perspective then we don't see anything that we need to experience, we don't have a focused goal.

That is one of the purposes, one of the benefits of reading Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. This perspective is not only of our individual life but also our collective life, the social life, the national life; we get a global comprehensive picture.

He continues,

But a belief is not sufficient to alter radically this mistake of perspective: the true self-knowledge of our being in time can come to us only when we

live in the consciousness of our immortality; we have to awaken

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to a concrete sense of our perpetual being in Time and of our timeless existence.

Just to believe in immortality does not make us immortal, obviously, we have to get into that consciousness of immortality, which is that of the soul or psychic being.

Next, he explains this immortality: For immortality in its fundamental sense does not mean merely some kind of personal survival of the bodily death; we are immortal by the eternity of our self-existence without beginning or end, beyond the whole succession of physical births and deaths through which we pass, beyond the alternations of our existence in this and other worlds: the spirit's timeless existence is the true immortality.

Sri Aurobindo gives us two concepts of immortality, one of which is the personal survival of bodily death.

But he says that immortality does not mean merely this.

The moment we talk of immortality, we immediately think that our body would not die. Until now there has been none who has been physically immortal. Indian spirituality has always thought of the immortality of the being within, the soul or the spirit, as he says here:

“beyond the alternations of our existence in this and other worlds: the spirit's timeless existence”. Then he adds another kind of immortality:

There is, no doubt, a secondary meaning of the word which has its truth; for, corollary to this true immortality, there exists a perpetual continuity of our temporal existence and experience from life to life, from world to world after the dissolution of the physical body: but this is a natural consequence of our

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* timelessness which expresses itself here as a perpetuity in eternal Time.

This third kind of immortality is “perpetuity in eternal Time”, and Sri Aurobindo describes it here as corollary of the immortality of the spirit; he says it is “a perpetual continuity of our temporal existence and experience from life to life”.

The realisation of timeless immortality comes by the knowledge of self in the Non-birth and Non-becoming and of the changeless spirit within us: the realisation of time-immortality comes by the knowledge of self in the birth and Becoming and is translated into a sense of the persistent identity of the soul through all changes of mind and life and body; this too is not a mere survival, it is timelessness translated into the Time manifestation.

We could call this immortality a consciousness of timelessness in time. Our existence in time continues indefinitely; the soul has taken fifty thousand lives and will take another thousand. There is the eternal soul, and there is an eternal recurrence of birth and death. So, there is an immortality in timelessness and an immortality in time; immortality in the being and immortality in the becoming; immortality of the soul and eternal perpetuity of the soul incarnating in a succession of bodies. The body may change, it may even transform itself into a supramental body after millions of births, but there is continuity. Sri Aurobindo calls it a perpetual continuity, and in another place, he calls it “eternal change”. These are the two main types of immortality which we may add to the notion of the physical immortality of the body.

By the first realisation we become free from

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obscuring subjection to the chain of birth and death, that supreme object of so many Indian disciplines...

The first immortality is realisation of our soul or spirit.

By that, we go beyond the chain of birth and death and it has been the goal of our ancient yogas and philosophies.

...by the second realisation added to the first we are able to possess freely, with right knowledge, without ignorance, without bondage by the chain of our actions, the experiences of the spirit in its successions of time-eternity.

Previously, in the book we encountered two phrases –

timeless eternity and time eternity; here we have timeless immortality and time immortality. The first comes by realisation of the Atman, then we go beyond birth and death. If we can realise the second one also, if while living in the physical we have the psychic realisation we can move towards the third type of immortality, the immortality of the body. In the second realisation he says, we can live freely with the right knowledge, without ignorance, without bondage.

Sri Aurobindo doesn't want us to get immortality only afterlife or beyond the body, he wants us to get immortality in the body, upon earth, in this very life.

It is a combination of the first and the second types of immortality. It would mean that we are inwardly one with our soul and outwardly, we would come out of our temporal, constitutional, and psychological ignorance. He further says,

A realisation of timeless existence by itself might not include the truth of that experience of persistent self in eternal Time; a realisation of survival of death by itself might still give room for a beginning or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* end to our existence. But, in either realisation truly envisaged as side and other side of one truth, to exist consciously in eternity and not in the bondage of the hour and the succession of the moments is the substance of the change: so to exist is a first condition of the divine consciousness and the divine life.

The realisation of the timeless existence will not give us the experience of the persistence of the self. If we go beyond life and death and do not come back to this earth we will not know this 'time eternity'. The old yogas wanted us to go beyond and merge in Brahman and not take any more births. That has been the aim. But Sri Aurobindo says, once that we go beyond manifestation we miss the delight of existence. If we go beyond the Brahman, we may experience the delight of non-existence, but it is not a multifarious delight, we don't see any kind of "waves". The play of the waves, each one of them reflecting the moonlight and the sunlight, has a different delight. If we go back into Brahman, we miss the delight of manifestation. That is what he is telling us in different words here: "realisation of timeless existence by itself might not include the truth of that experience of persistent self in eternal Time".

He says, "A realisation of survival of death by itself might still give room for a beginning or end to our existence". This means that if we can prolong our body into a kind of deathlessness, that also is not the solution.

Suppose, for example, that by some formula scientists are able to sustain our body for a so-called immortal period. Suppose we live a thousand years is that real immortality? Surviving death is not the only aim, because even if we live two thousand years we may still not have

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this inner immortality, the timeless immortality, and what a hopeless life it would be! We would still have the same consciousness and the same body! So, we have to have both the timeless immortality within and the time immortality without.

Let's put it this way; we must have inner immortality and outer immortality. It means we must have the sevenfold knowledge, then only can these be integrated.

Outer immortality only means the body is living, but it may have the same temporal ignorance, the same constitutional ignorance, etc. What kind of life would it be? It would be completely in bondage and ignorance!

Just because we have prolonged our bodily existence for a thousand years, it doesn't mean we are free.

To possess and govern from that inner eternity of being the course and process of the becoming is the second, the dynamic condition with, as its practical outcome, a spiritual self-possession and self-mastery.

This is the conclusion we have arrived at. We must

“possess and govern from the inner eternity of being the course and process of the becoming”. This is the combination we need. We must have what the Mother described as the psychic governing the being. At present we have – more or less, I won't say absolutely –governance by the mind, but in reality, it is governance by the mind largely influenced by the vital. This governance has to change into the governance of the soul. That's what Sri Aurobindo is saying. We have to have this influence of the inner on the outer life, then only can we have the dynamic condition of “a spiritual self-possession and self-mastery”.

These changes are possible only by a withdrawal

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* from our absorbing material preoccupation, —that does not necessitate a rejection or neglect of the life in the body,—and a constant living on the inner and higher planes of the mind and the spirit.

Please note the parenthetic comment. It is a clarification lest we misunderstand Sri Aurobindo. In the first part of the sentence, he says, “These changes are possible only by a withdrawal from our absorbing material preoccupation”.

People may say Sri Aurobindo says, we must withdraw from our material preoccupation and become ascetics.

Immediately he interrupts and says, “that does not necessitate a rejection or neglect of the life in the body”.

There must be a withdrawal of our preoccupation, but not a neglect of the outer.

For the heightening of our consciousness into its spiritual principle is effectuated by an ascent and a stepping back inward, – both these movements are essential,—out of our transient life from moment to moment into the eternal life of our immortal consciousness;...

This withdrawal from our absorbing material preoccupation can be done only by constantly living in the inner and higher planes of the mind and the spirit.

This is in fact the solution to the ‘temporal ignorance’.

Temporal ignorance, to sum it up, is a complete preoccupation with the material world, which influences us to think that only this material world exists and that this one life we are spending in this material world is all that we are. To get beyond this temporal ignorance, we need first to realise our immortal being within, to realise that we need to draw back from our preoccupation with our material life. That withdrawal comes by a heightening,

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by an ascent of our consciousness, as well as by stepping back into our inner self. The Mother constantly told us, we must step back.

There are hundreds of things which can help us to step back into our consciousness of immortality, and the more often we step back, the easier it becomes to break that

“material preoccupation”. The more we are involved with this material preoccupation, the more we don’t believe there is something else beyond material life. Such is the common mind of human beings. They cannot believe there is something called the soul, they cannot believe there is something beyond life and death, that there are higher planes, etc. People will say, “How do you know it exists? It is not possible to know that. Sorry, I don’t believe in all that”. That itself shows the parameters of their

involvement on the material plane. The more we withdraw from it, the more we become indrawn. We also see that in the normal growth of human beings, younger people tend not to believe in the soul and meditation. But as we grow older, we would have experienced this mad, intense material preoccupation and would have gone over that by age and experience. In our ancient system – the Vanaprastha stage, we are supposed to withdraw from this material preoccupation and give it away to our children.

It is very significant. The very fact of knowing that our children can take over my company or business would help me to have more time and space and consciousness to go within. It is a kind of social structure which gives a possibility, an occasion to go within. Sri Aurobindo says that both the ascent and this stepping back are essential.

He continues,

...but with it there comes also a widening of our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* range of consciousness and field of action in time and a taking up and a higher use of our mental, our vital, our corporeal existence.

I think this sentence relates to the four Ashramas, because with the Vanaprastha stage “comes also a widening of our range of consciousness and field of action”. In this stage, people often make higher use of their mental faculties. They start helping temples or other organisations, they help the poor or the disabled, they contribute to animal welfare etc. Other people get into art or music or something similar which helps them to go within. Because they have withdrawn from their material preoccupations they can make higher use of their mental, vital, and corporeal existence.

There arises a knowledge of our being, no longer as a consciousness dependent on the body, but as an eternal spirit which uses all the worlds and all lives for various self-experience; we see it to be a spiritual entity possessed of a continuous soul-life perpetually developing its activities

through successive physical existences, a being determining its own becoming.

In that knowledge, not ideative but felt in our very substance, it becomes possible to live, not as slaves of a blind Karmic impulsion, but as masters, – subject only to the Divine within us, – of our being and nature.

This paragraph again throws a lot of light on our ancient Indian tradition and the psychology of growth through the four stages. It says, “there arises a knowledge of our being, no longer as a consciousness dependent on the body, but as an eternal spirit”. After the Vanaprastha stage, we enter the Sannyasa. After the period of bringing a wider utility to life, we go to the fourth stage where we

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begin to realise our inner being. Then, he says, “we see it to be a spiritual entity possessed of a continuous soul-life perpetually developing its activities”. In this fourth stage of the Sannyasa we fully reject this material preoccupation and begin to realise that we are a soul which is taking birth in different lives. “...a being determining its own becoming”. That is a beautiful phrase! We are the being which is the centre of this becoming. This knowledge is not ideative but is felt in our very substance. It is then no more a book knowledge, we are realising our true self. We realise *aham brahmashmi*, ‘I am that Brahman’, and it is that Brahman which is taking birth after birth. Then “it becomes possible to live, not as slaves of a blind Karmic impulsion, but as masters... of our being and nature”.

When we have realised that we *are* the soul, not that we *have* a soul, then truly begins the mastery of life. This concludes the discussion of the temporal ignorance.

We shall now take up the fourth ignorance, egoistic ignorance. Sri Aurobindo says,

At the same time we get rid of the egoistic ignorance; for so long as we are at any point bound by that, the divine life must either be unattainable or imperfect in its self-expression. For the ego is a falsification of our true individuality by a limiting self-identification of it with this life, this mind, this body: it is a separation from other souls which shuts us up in our own individual experience and prevents us from living as the universal individual: it is a separation from God, our highest Self, who is the one Self in all existences and the divine Inhabitant within us.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* **The Egoistic Ignorance**

What is the nature of ego? In yoga we often speak of a person's ego and the manifestations of the ego, but here we see it is only one of the seven ignorances. We are not only suffering from ego but we also have the constitutional ignorance, the psychological ignorance and the temporal ignorance. Although it is one of the seven ignorances it takes a prominent place because by working on the ego, by diminishing it or breaking down its walls we are enabled to get rid of other ignorances. All the other six ignorances hang on this egoistic ignorance. If we really work on this egoistic ignorance then we have a better entrance and a greater possibility to work on the other ignorances. It is an entry point for working out all the others. Our ignorance largely consists in our missing the basic truth that we are not only connected with this material world but also with other worlds and with an infinite existence beyond all the worlds. We can realise this truth only when we start getting out of this egoistic ignorance because it is ego that separates us from our larger being.

Sri Aurobindo describes the ego as “a falsification of our true individuality by a limiting self-identification of it with this life, this mind, this body”. We can imagine, with this kind of self-limitation of the ego, immediately will come temporal ignorance because in that we believe we have only this one life which is limited to our physical existence. This temporal ignorance comes as a kind of corollary to egoistic ignorance. Once we are bound in temporal ignorance we are naturally trapped in psychological ignorance where we know ourselves only as a mind, life and body and don't know about our subliminal, superconscient, inconscient, subconscious

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levels. These do not exist for us because of this self-limited falsified view of the ego which does not let us expand our boundaries of knowledge. That is why we can give to the elimination of the ego, a primary position in Yoga.

Ego gives us two important things: first, self-identification with body, life and mind; and second, a separation from other souls and a separation from God.

These are the main tenets of the egoistic ignorance. All great religions and philosophies have been working to overthrow this egoistic ignorance and if they succeed it will open the doors to sevenfold knowledge because of its primary importance.

As our consciousness changes into the height and depth and wideness of the spirit, the ego can no longer survive there: it is too small and feeble to subsist in that vastness and dissolves into it; for it exists by its limits and perishes by the loss of its limits.

This is a crucial sentence. Ego exists by its limits and perishes by the loss of its limits. Its *raison d'être* is self-limitation. If we want to eliminate the ego we have to enlarge its limits. The Mother has told us different ways to expand one's consciousness and when we practice them the ego automatically crumbles. Wherever there is limitlessness the ego breaks. She says you can sit on the seashore and identify yourself with the ocean; it is a simple exercise. We must sit at the shore for a while and extend ourselves, feeling that we are expanding into that ocean, becoming one with the ocean. Or we can go on our terrace at night and look at the sky and identify with that vastness. We can even close our eyes and identify with some magnificent image, perhaps of the Mother, or of light or a lotus. Just expand into the image, and this is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* where imagination plays a positive role. By these exercises of expansion, we could at least, in those moments, find

some release from the ego. We feel as if we are breathing fresh air. Psychologically, we are doing exactly the opposite of what the ego does. The ego stands for limitation but here we expand our consciousness and those limits start cracking down. Sri Aurobindo tells us, The being breaks out of its imprisonment in a separated individuality, becomes universal, assumes a cosmic consciousness in which it identifies itself with the self and spirit, the life, the mind, the body of all beings. Or it breaks out upward into a supreme pinnacle and infinity and eternity of self-existence independent of its cosmic or its individual existence.

The ego collapses, losing its wall of separation, into the cosmic immensity; or it falls into nothingness, unable to breathe in the heights of the spiritual ether.

There are two very significant movements. One is that when we start expanding the consciousness it breaks out of its imprisonment; it becomes universal and assumes a cosmic consciousness. As he says, “It identifies itself with the self and spirit, the life, the mind, the body of all beings”. That is universalisation. Of this we have two magnificent examples: Wordsworth and Tagore. In their songs and poems, there is this kind of horizontal expansion of consciousness. For example, they identify with the sunrise or the daffodils. In Tagore’s songs, there is this expansion into Nature. By the manner he describes it, so very sensitively, we can feel the aura of every flower and every season described there in. The second movement is that the being “breaks out upward into a supreme pinnacle and infinity and eternity of self-existence independent of

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its cosmic or its individual existence”. This is a vertical breaking out as opposed to the other one which is horizontal. This vertical breaking out is what spirituality really is.

Recently, some of us were having a discussion because somebody had said he had read in Sri Aurobindo’s letters that Tagore was not really spiritual. I am not sure of the source of Sri Aurobindo’s comment. However, it was a kind of revelation to us. How is it possible Tagore was not spiritual? But I understood from this line that this vertical breaking out is spirituality, the

horizontal breaking out is not because it expands into the mental and vital and subtle physical realms, though it is a wider consciousness than that of simple individual beings.

Sri Aurobindo called Bankim Chandra a Rishi. A Rishi is one who breaks out vertically, as Sri Aurobindo says, into the supreme pinnacle of infinity and eternity. So Bankim was a Rishi whereas Tagore was a great poet who could capture the cosmic consciousness in his poetry. This is the difference between the vertical which is spiritual and the horizontal which is cosmic. The word spiritual implies contact with the Spirit. Spirituality starts with the realisation of the psychic being and all else, the Mother would say, is a preparation for spirituality. This expansion into universality and this identification with nature is the first move towards that soul and beyond it to the pure spirit or Paramatman.

Everything is imbued with the Spirit, there is no doubt about it. The matter is imbued with Spirit; its contents are the substance of the *Sat*. But when in yoga we mean that a person is spiritual we mean it is someone who has realised the Atman or the psychic being. But both the horizontal

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and vertical expansions break our ego. When we go into the higher levels of consciousness the experience might be similar to that of climbing the Himalayas. There one can't breathe. Similarly, the self-limiting ego when it moves into the higher levels of consciousness can't breathe. It ceases to exist. Perhaps it is then that we talk about Nirvana, extinction. After a point the ego can't say

'I' – the 'I' doesn't exist. We see in the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* some wonderful passages in which she reaches a point where she can't say the word 'I'; she says "it is only Thou". The spiritual is what Sri Aurobindo calls the ether where the 'I' does not exist; it is only Thou, only the Divine exists. He says, If something of its movements remains by habit of Nature, yet these also fall away and are replaced by a new impersonal-personal seeing, feeling, action.

Sri Aurobindo is so marvellous in describing these things! How much detail he gives in each phrase! If something continues to exist, it is only a habit of Nature and falls away and is replaced by “a new impersonal-personal seeing, feeling, action”. It is the first time we get the phrase ‘impersonal-personal’. That is absolutely Sri Aurobindo’s. We have seen that sometimes Sri Aurobindo would sign the word ‘Kali’ instead of Sri Aurobindo or Aurobindo Ghose. The ego was completely lost in the cosmic consciousness; the ‘I’ was gone. That is the impersonal-personal; it was no more Aurobindo Ghose, the personal ‘I’.

This disappearance of the ego does not bring with it the destruction of our true individuality, our spiritual existence, for that was always universal and one with the Transcendence; but there is a transformation

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which replaces the separative ego by the Purusha, a conscious face and figure of the universal being and a self and power of the transcendent Divine in cosmic Nature.

“There is a transformation which replaces the separative ego by the Purusha, a conscious face and figure of the universal being and a self and power of the transcendent”. I am reading this again only because I see the Mother and Sri Aurobindo exactly that way. Perhaps his realisations in Baroda or in Calcutta were still of the individual Aurobindo Ghose, but in 1926 he became a self and power of the transcendent Divine. He became “a conscious face and figure of the universal being”. Similarly, when we saw the Mother it was as a “face and figure of the universal being and a self and power of the transcendent Divine”. Sri Aurobindo speaks of the triple poise of the Mother; that was the universal and the transcendent and the individual all in one face, one power.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother were not only Avatars who have descended from the supreme consciousness, but they have at the same time prepared the human consciousness for a higher descent by their own tapasya.

If we forget this aspect of their tapasya, their entire personal sadhana which they did for the earth and humanity is invalidated. The Avatar doesn’t

reveal his Avatarhood until it is necessary for his manifestation.

Similarly, what I want say here is that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother silently strove and suffered until they reached this self-transcendence. We see in the Mother's *Prayers and Meditations* and in Sri Aurobindo's *Record of Yoga* their diaries of this process of self-transcendence. We see the individual Mother and Sri Aurobindo moving

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* up to the point of becoming impersonal. Only then Sri Aurobindo calls Mirra Alfassa the Mother; she was no more Mirra Alfassa, she was the "conscious face and figure of the universal being and a self and power of the transcendent Divine". In 1914, when the Mother first came Sri Aurobindo didn't call her the Mother, she was still Mirra at that time. It was not that Sri Aurobindo did not know that she was the Mother. But there was still the question of the transcendence of Mirra Alfassa, of her moving into that higher stature. And remember it was in Japan that the Mother met the Buddha in her vision, she was already starting to get into that facet of the Universal Mother. It was only long after she came back in 1920 that Sri Aurobindo started calling her the Mother, though Nolini-da says in one of his memoirs that nobody knows exactly when the great word 'Mother' was first uttered.

We can guess that the moment came when the Mother's separative ego was completely gone and she became a facet of the universal and a face and power of the transcendent.

In the same movement, by the very awakening into the spirit, there is a dissolution of the cosmic ignorance; for we have the knowledge of ourselves as our timeless immutable self possessing itself in cosmos and beyond cosmos: this knowledge becomes the basis of the Divine Play in time, reconciles the one and the many, the eternal unity and the eternal multiplicity, reunites the soul with God and discovers the Divine in the universe.

Cosmic Ignorance

Once we move into the higher consciousness beyond the ego, automatically the cosmic ignorance is dissolved.

This is the fifth ignorance. He says that “this knowledge

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becomes the basis of the Divine Play in time, reconciles the one and the many, the eternal unity and the eternal multiplicity”. He continues,

It is by this realisation that we can approach the Absolute as the source of all circumstances and relations, possess the world in ourselves in an utmost wideness and in a conscient dependence on its source, and by so taking it up raise it and realise through it the absolute values that converge into the Absolute.

If our self-knowledge is thus made complete in all its essentials, our practical ignorance which in its extreme figures itself as wrong-doing, suffering, falsehood, error and is the cause of all life’s confusions and discords, will yield its place to the right will of self-knowledge and its false or imperfect values recede before the divine values of the true Consciousness-Force and Ananda.

Practical Ignorance

As I said, once we tackle the egoistic ignorance the rest of the things become easier. With hardly four or five lines Sri Aurobindo has dismissed the cosmic ignorance. And then once we have this knowledge our practical ignorance disappears, “which in its extreme figures itself as wrong-doing, suffering, falsehood, error”. This sixth ignorance, our practical ignorance is based on this egoistic ignorance; it is a basic misunderstanding of the world in which we seem separated from it and others; it is a kind of twist in our consciousness. It is like if we have a cataract, our vision is blurred and we can't see the true face. Similarly, with this egoistic consciousness everything gets blurred, everything is limited, and we begin to suffer and get into falsehood and error. He says this is “the cause of all life's

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* confusions and discords”. Earlier, Sri Aurobindo said there is an error of spiritual perspective, it is egoism that brings in this error, this blurring. We have to correct this spiritual perspective and by eliminating ego we achieve this.

For right consciousness, right action and right being, not in the imperfect human sense of our petty moralities but in the large and luminous movement of a divine living, the conditions are union with God, unity with all beings, a life governed and formed from within outwards in which the source of all thought, will and action shall be the Spirit working through the truth and the divine law which are not built and constructed by the mind of Ignorance but are self-existent and spontaneous in their self-fulfilment, not so much a law as the truth acting in its own consciousness and in a free luminous plastic automatic process of its knowledge.

Here Sri Aurobindo gives the meaning of “right consciousness, right action and right being”, it is not in the sense of morality but rather acting in a consciousness of unity with the Divine, “a life governed and formed from within outwards”. In one word we can say that this corrected perspective comes when we are centred in the psychic being. It is one thing to

philosophically analyse things, but the point of view of yoga is to go from the ego to the psychic being, then these corrections come automatically. Then will come what Sri Aurobindo calls

“the large and luminous movement of a divine living.” It is not a question of doing the *yamas* and *niyamas* from the moral point of view. When we obey our own inner divinity that will automatically correct our vision.

This would seem to be the method and the result of

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the conscious spiritual evolution; a transformation of the life of the Ignorance into the divine life of the truth-conscious spirit, a change from the mental into a spiritual and supramental way of being, a self-expansion out of the sevenfold ignorance into the sevenfold knowledge. This transformation would be the natural completion of the upward process of Nature as it heightens the forces of consciousness from principle to higher principle until the highest, the spiritual principle, becomes expressed and dominant in her, takes up cosmic and individual existence on the lower planes into its truth and transforms all into a conscious manifestation of the Spirit. The true individual, the spiritual being, emerges, individual yet universal, universal yet self-transcendent: life no longer appears as a formation of things and an action of being created by the separative Ignorance.

Separative Ignorance

Which is the seventh ignorance? It is “the separative Ignorance”. The whole paragraph tells us how as we move from this level of consciousness to the other we move towards the sevenfold knowledge and we conquer the separative ignorance. What is that ignorance? The act of creation itself; symbolised by the story in the Bible when Adam and Eve were thrown out from the Garden of Eden. That is the original separation when individuals felt themselves separate from God. That is the last ignorance and that will be conquered only when the other six are conquered. Then we will get back into that original comprehensive consciousness of the Supreme.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* **Lecture Notes I**. “Evolution is in its essence a heightening of the force of consciousness in the manifest being. It is an ascent out of the sevenfold ignorance into the integral knowledge.”

II. Constitutional Ignorance “It is a partial, a limiting, a dividing and, very largely, a falsifying knowledge; out of that limitation and falsification we have to grow into the truth of our spiritual being.”

III. Psychological Ignorance “...consists in a limitation of our self-knowledge to that little wave or superficial stream of our being which is the conscient waking self. This part of our being is an original flux of formless or only half formulated movements carried on in an automatic continuity, supported and held together by an active surface memory and a passive underlying consciousness in its flow from moment to moment of time, organised and interpreted by our reason and our witnessing and participating intelligence.”

IV. Temporal Ignorance

“For not only do we now live from moment to moment of time, but our whole view is limited to our life in the present body between a single birth and death. As our regard does not go farther back in the past, so it does not extend farther out into the future; thus we are limited by our physical memory and awareness of the present life in a transient corporeal formation.”

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V. Egoistic Ignorance

“For the ego is a falsification of our true individuality by a limiting self-identification of it with this life, this mind, this body: it is a separation from other souls which shuts us up in our own individual experience and prevents us from living as the universal individual: it is a separation from God, our highest Self, who is the one Self in all existences and the divine Inhabitant within us.”

VI. Cosmic Ignorance

“...for we have the knowledge of ourselves as our timeless immutable self possessing itself in cosmos and beyond cosmos: this knowledge becomes the basis of the Divine Play in time, reconciles the one and the many, the eternal unity and the eternal multiplicity, reunites the soul with God and discovers the Divine in the universe. It is by this realisation that we can approach the Absolute as the source of all circumstances and relations, possess the world in ourselves in an utmost wideness and in a conscient dependence on its source, and by so taking it up raise it and realise through it the absolute values that converge into the Absolute.”

VII. Practical Ignorance

“...which in its extreme figures itself as wrong-doing, suffering, falsehood, error and is the cause of all life’s confusions and discords, will yield its place to the right will of self-knowledge and its false or imperfect values recede before the divine values of the true Consciousness-Force and Ananda.”

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Conclusion “This would seem to be the method and the result of the conscious spiritual evolution; a transformation of the life of the Ignorance into the divine life of the truth-conscious spirit, a change from the mental into a spiritual and supramental way of being, a self-expansion out of the sevenfold ignorance into the sevenfold knowledge.”

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