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Deliberations on

The Life Divine

(Chapterwise Summary Talks)

Volume - Twelve

Book – II

The Knowledge and the Ignorance–

the Spiritual Evolution

Part – II

The Knowledge and the Spiritual Evolution Chapters: XX – XXII

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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 – XX

Philosophy of Rebirth

Chapter 20 is titled “The Philosophy of Rebirth”, followed by Chapter 21, “The Order of the Worlds”, and Chapter 22, “Rebirth and Other Worlds”. These three chapters are interlinked, and that is why I would like to study them together.

Let me first explain why Sri Aurobindo has brought in the concept of rebirth at this stage. He was writing about “Integral Knowledge”, “Theories of Existence”, and “God, Man and Nature” and unexpectedly we see a chapter on rebirth. What is the reason for this digression?

Normally, we would think that rebirth has something to do with religion or theology; why is it here in a book on metaphysics? Rebirth is a kind of belief; some people believe in it, and some don't. What has it got to do with Sri Aurobindo's philosophy? Why is it important for him?

When Sri Aurobindo takes up this chapter and calls it “The Philosophy of Rebirth”, he does not intend to deal with a religious belief, rather he will examine the philosophical necessity of the concept of rebirth.

Philosophically, is it necessary? From that angle, he does a kind of review of all the different theories of rebirth.

What he discovers is that the old theories of rebirth are not necessary philosophically. Many people believe in rebirth, but they have their own connotations of what it means. For example, Pythagoras described it as

“transmigration”, meaning the soul leaves one body and gets into another body. It is also rebirth, but not of the same as Sri Aurobindo describes. Adwaita Vedanta also

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* believes in rebirth- and they have a particular way of seeing it. Buddhism has an entirely different take on soul

and rebirth. For Sri Aurobindo, rebirth is philosophically necessary only if there is a spiritual evolution of which it is a part.

For the theory of rebirth to be philosophically necessary three things must be established. One is the existence of the soul or the psychic being. Next is the existence of other worlds, the supra-physical worlds. If what the materialists and scientists say is true, that no other worlds apart from the physical universe exist, then rebirth cannot be true. The third aspect that must be there is spiritual evolution. This concept of spiritual evolution is not the same as Darwinian or other theories of evolution. These correspond to the present chapters Sri Aurobindo writes on this issue.

In this chapter, Sri Aurobindo explains the necessity of the psychic being and its immortality. Then in the next two chapters, “The Order of the Worlds” and “Rebirth and the Other Worlds”, he establishes the necessity of the other worlds. Then in the chapter that follows, “Man and the Evolution” and others he describes the concept of the spiritual evolution of man.

He begins this chapter with several quotes from the ancient scriptures:

An end have these bodies of an embodied soul that is eternal;... it is not born nor dies nor is it that having been it will not be again. It is unborn, ancient, everlasting; it is not slain with the slaying of the body.

As a man casts from him his worn-out garments and takes others that are new, so the embodied being casts

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off its bodies and joins itself to others that are new.

Certain is the death of that which is born and certain is the birth of that which dies. (Gita: II. 18, 20, 22, 27) There is a birth and growth of the self. According to his actions the embodied being assumes forms successively in many places; many forms gross and subtle he assumes by force of his own qualities of nature. (Swetaswatara Upanishad: V. 11, 12.) Let us read the text now before we start the discussion: Birth is the first spiritual mystery of the physical universe, death is the second which gives its double point of

perplexity to the mystery of birth; for life, which would otherwise be a self-evident fact of existence, becomes itself a mystery by virtue of these two which seem to be its beginning and its end and yet in a thousand ways betray themselves as neither of these things, but rather intermediate stages in an occult process of life.

It is a wonderful start! He catches the whole concept there, almost the summary of this whole chapter. In the footnote, he says , “ Birth is the first spiritual mystery of the physical universe. ” Note that he says it is a “spiritual mystery” not simply a mystery. Otherwise, people may say, biologically speaking, what is the big deal about it? Why does he call it a spiritual mystery? Because of the psychic being. He says, “ Death is the second .” Right from the time of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, we have always asked about this mystery of birth and death.

Although it seems to be the beginning and the end of our life, philosophically, these are not the beginning or end.

These are only intermediary stages; as he says, they are “intermediary stages in an occult process of life”. Mark

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* this phrase “occult process”; it is not a physical process. A scientist may claim that we know the whole secret of birth and death, so Sri Aurobindo purposely uses the words

“occult”, “spiritual”, etc.

In this vast universe where things are recurring, we witness the birth and there, and we think that “I was born on such and such a date and will die at such and such a time.” We think our existence is only this much between birth and death. But is that the truth? We know our present lives, but we do not know what was before and what will be after. That is why it becomes a great mystery.

Sri Aurobindo says,

At first sight birth might seem to be a constant outburst of life in a general death, a persistent circumstance in the universal lifelessness of Matter.

On a closer examination it begins to be more probable that life is something involved in Matter or even an inherent power of the Energy that creates Matter, but able to appear only when it gets the necessary conditions for the affirmation of its characteristic phenomena and for an appropriate self-organisation.

But in the birth of life there is something more that participates in the emergence,—there is an element which is no longer material, a strong upsurging of some flame of soul, a first evident vibration of the spirit.

If we look at it biologically, we may say that from Matter, Life has evolved, and from Life, Mind has come.

Today the scientists are saying that if there were oxygen and other required minerals or elements on the moon there would have been a possibility of life there also.

But note Sri Aurobindo's phrase that life would "be able

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to appear only when it gets the necessary conditions for the affirmation of its characteristic phenomena and for an appropriate self-organisation." Life will not be born on Mars or any other planet if there are no appropriate conditions. Now, what are those appropriate conditions?

Are they just elements, a combination of different molecules? That is not all! There is something more in life. As Sri Aurobindo says, "there is an element which is no longer material, a strong upsurging of some flame of soul, a first evident vibration of the spirit." That means life would be there only if there is an "evident vibration of the spirit." Life is not just a few elements put together in a certain combination. The spirit or soul must agree and say "here I will be born and organise myself and evolve".

Even if we take all these material things together and leave them there, still life may not thrive there, not because the material circumstances are not right, but because the spirit, the Divine, has chosen Earth and Earth alone for an evolutionary process.

This is a crucial idea we must remember. Without the evolution of the spirit, the earth itself has no meaning.

Earth is the chosen place of the Divine in this creation where he manifests in matter. Matter is there everywhere, but life is not there everywhere. The moment we say life exists, there has to be an upsurging of some flame. Even into this matter, the Supreme has himself descended; after all Matter is nothing but the outer body of Brahman. The body of the Brahman could be sleeping for millennia, and life comes only when there is an upsurging of a flame of the soul.

Sri Aurobindo says:

All the known circumstances and results of birth

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* presuppose an unknown before, and there is a suggestion of universality, a will of persistence of life, an inconclusiveness in death which seem to point to an unknown hereafter. What were we before birth and what are we after death, are the questions, the answer of the one depending upon that of the other, which the intellect of man has put to itself from the beginning without even now resting in any final solution. The intellect indeed can hardly give the final answer: for that must in its very nature lie beyond the data of the physical consciousness and memory, whether of the race or the individual, yet these are the sole data which the intellect is in the habit of consulting with something like confidence. In this poverty of materials and this incertitude it wheels from one hypothesis to another and calls each in turn a conclusion. Moreover, the solution depends upon the nature, source and object of the cosmic movement, and as we determine these, so we shall have to conclude about birth and life and death, the before and the hereafter.

The moment we say something is born, what does it imply? It could be two things: one is that something was there before and the other is that it comes into existence just at that instance, and there was nothing before. When we say there is death, it implies either there is something after death, or there is nothing after death. Can the intellect, the scientist or the materialist find out whether there is something before birth or after death? It is not possible to find that out with our limited minds. The mind, the intellect with its memory, either individually or through the race, cannot find out what was before birth or after death. Secondly, because we cannot know by intellect, we have lots of theories and guesswork in this

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regard. Sri Aurobindo gives us a review of many theories of rebirth, and we see that those theories may speak of the immortality of the soul, that the soul comes in and goes out, or that there is no soul at all. There are various contradictory theories that we will discuss in further passages.

The first may be called the “materialist hypothesis”: The first question is whether the before and the after are purely physical and vital or in some way, and more predominantly, mental and spiritual. If Matter were the principle of the universe, as the materialist alleges, if the truth of things were to be found in the first formula arrived at by Bhrigu, son of Varuna, when he meditated upon the eternal Brahman, “Matter is the Eternal, for from Matter all beings are born and by Matter all beings exist and to Matter all beings depart and return”, then no farther questioning would be possible. The before of our bodies would be a gathering of their constituents out of various physical elements through the instrumentality of the seed and food and under the influence perhaps of occult but always material energies, and the before of our conscious being a preparation by heredity or by some other physically vital or physically mental operation in universal Matter specialising its action and building the individual through the bodies of our parents, through seed and gene and chromosome.

This is the scientific view. It does not believe in the soul coming and the soul going out. It says there is a seed, what is called the sperm and the ovum, they fertilise, and there is biology which can give you all the details of how a child takes birth in the womb. After death, the body would

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* dissolve into the material elements. There is no big secret.

Once one is dead, the body disintegrates and goes back into matter. Some burn the body and the body returns quickly to its material elements, some bury it, and it disintegrates slowly. For the scientist, there is no mystery.

The after of the body would be a dissolution into the material elements and the after of the conscious being a relapse into Matter with some survival of the effects of its activity in the general mind and life of humanity: this last quite illusory survival would be our only chance of immortality. But since the universality of Matter can no longer be held as giving any sufficient explanation of the existence of Mind, —and indeed Matter itself can no longer be explained by Matter alone, for it does not appear to be self-existent,—we are thrown back from this easy and obvious solution to other hypotheses.

According to this view, after death nothing remains of the body, it dissolves. Also, we are born into this world as a cipher, a zero or nothing. This gives way to a belief that those who do something positive with their lives, contribute something to the world. This idea is popular especially in the Western world what we contribute to society is very important, because we leave behind something for the human race, not necessarily for the individual. This is a very important point, they say live for the human family, the human race. If a scientist does something, he leaves behind something which helps humanity. While I am doing my business, it will help me to get some riches in this life, but once I am gone, what happens? My children will take it up, my family will benefit. But what have I done for humanity?

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In India, we bring in a completely different dimension.

We believe, what we do in life affects our own spiritual growth and the life hereafter. We believe in rebirth, and when we see it in the light of Sri

Aurobindo our entire life becomes meaningful. If I have only one birth, as the materialists say, I do my level best to achieve, by whatever means, success and wealth, there is no other direction for this life. Obviously, rebirth is of immense importance to give meaning to our life. If what we do today is important for the life next, then the whole life gets a different colour. I become more conscious of what I am doing now. Otherwise, life is meaningless, it is just a cut-throat competition. Or we just spend our days with as much laughter and mirth and enjoyment as possible, but there is no direction in it.

If we consider life and rebirth as a Lila, a divine play, but do not believe in spiritual evolution, the whole emphasis centres on karma. If you do well today, in the next life your karma would be better. So according to this theory rebirth is connected only with karma. But Sri Aurobindo says that it is a very limited and negative way of looking at rebirth. For him, the theory of karma becomes part of spiritual evolution. Rebirth is connected with the evolution of consciousness of which karma is one of the ingredients. Whereas the concept of rebirth related to karma is incomplete, Sri Aurobindo's concept of rebirth is integral.

Sri Aurobindo describes another theory of the immortality of the soul as follows: One of these is the old religious myth and dogmatic mystery of a God who creates constantly immortal souls out of his own being or else by his "breath" or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* life-power entering, it is to be presumed, into material Nature or rather into the bodies he creates in it and vivifying them internally with a spiritual principle.

The Bible says God makes this human body out of matter and breathes life into it. The word 'Atman' also means breathing. When the Bible says that the breath of the Lord enters the body, it is more or less the concept of the soul coming into the body. The body becomes alive only with the coming in of the soul. Biologists say that from the moment fertilisation takes place, the ovum is already alive and a biological life. We are often faced with whether pregnancy can be and should be terminated in the later months.

Apart from medical reasons, this issue has an occult angle. When the soul enters the body, then only the fetus becomes alive. Until then, it is only physical growth, not an evolving human being in the womb.

As a mystery of faith this can hold and need not be examined, for the mysteries of faith are intended to be beyond question and scrutiny; but for reason and philosophy it lacks convincingness and does not fit into the known order of things.

If the reason is brought in, can this idea hold its ground?

There are two paradoxes, rationally speaking: For it involves two paradoxes which need more justification before they can even be accorded any consideration; first, the hourly creation of beings who have a beginning in time but no end in time, and are, moreover, born by the birth of the body but do not end by the death of the body; secondly, their assumption of a ready-made mass of combined qualities, virtues, vices, capacities, defects, temperamental and other advantages and handicaps,

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not made by them at all through growth, but made for them by arbitrary fiat, —if not by law of heredity,—

yet for which and for the perfect use of which they are held responsible by their Creator.

In contrast, we have seen that the Gita tells us: “Death is certain for one who has been born”. What is born must die. Christianity says that the soul lives on after the body’s death, and on the day of the last judgment, there will be punishment or reward for the life lived; the body is gone, but the soul lives. God gave my soul and said here is your body, but it might have many capacities and incapacities. It can be defective; it may not have a strong mind, and it may not have the ability to do much. Nevertheless, whatever we do with our capacities, virtues, defects, etc., the soul will be rewarded or punished. Here is the paradox. The soul says I have not chosen this body with these virtues, vices, and capacities; why should you punish me or reward me for how I have lived? For example, somebody gives us a

car that breaks down on the way, and then we are held responsible for the breakdown. We may say we have not been given a good car, but the owner insists on holding us accountable. The paradox is that we are punished for the life in a body we have not chosen. These are the kinds of questions that Sri Aurobindo answers in his philosophy.

In the next paragraph, he gives us a few more arguments against this religious belief. He says, We may maintain,—provisionally, at least,—certain things as legitimate presumptions of the philosophic reason and fairly throw the burden of disproving them on their denier. Among these postulates is the principle that that which has no end must necessarily have had no beginning; All that begins or is created

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* has an end by cessation of the process that created and maintains it or the dissolution of the materials of which it is compounded or the end of the function for which it came into being.

It is a fascinating argument! It says that what is born has to die; does that mean what does not die must not also be born? It becomes a complex of incongruous thoughts with no logic.

There is a second point here. Sri Aurobindo says, If there is an exception to this law, it must be by a descent of spirit into matter animating matter with divinity or giving matter its own immortality; but the spirit itself which so descends is immortal, not made or created. If the soul was created to animate the body, if it depended on the body for its coming into existence, it can have no reason or basis for existence after the disappearance of the body.

In this philosophy, he finds many logical incongruences.

If the soul is born for the body or with the body, what is the reason or logic for it to continue to exist after the body? The soul was made to get into the body and live in it and live correctly, but then the soul continues to exist after the death of the body and does not itself die. He says that it is a fallacious argument.

It is naturally to be supposed that the breath or power given for the animation of the body would return at its final dissolution to its Maker. If, on the contrary, it still persists as an immortal embodied being, there must be a subtle or psychic body in which it continues, and it is fairly certain that this psychic body and its inhabitant must be pre-existent to the material vehicle: it is irrational to suppose that they were

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created originally to inhabit that brief and perishable form; an immortal being cannot be the outcome of so ephemeral an incident in creation.

Sri Aurobindo says that if the soul persists after the body's death, there must be a subtle or psychic body in which it continues. It would require a subtle or psychic body on some subtle level. The soul leaves because the soul cannot live on this earth without the body. The body can be material or a subtle body, but there has to be a body. If we can accept the idea of a subtle body, then what stops us from thinking that it also exists in the subtle body before birth in the physical body? He concludes that the soul is not born with the birth of this body; it pre-exists the body and lives after it also. The soul is independent of this physical body.

This is the journey of the soul. From the subtle body, it comes into this physical body of which we know, and then it goes out again into the unknown in a subtle body.

The soul has always existed; it is immortal, beyond birth and death. Human birth is only an intermediate stage, not the be-all and end-all. It is only a transitory mid-state. He says, "An immortal being cannot be the outcome of so ephemeral an incident in creation", What is the Atman?

It is an aspect of Brahman itself. Such an immortal being cannot be created only for the sake of 70 or 80 years; there would be no meaning in that. Sri Aurobindo adds, If the soul remains but in a disembodied condition, then it can have had no original dependence on a body for its existence; it must have subsisted as an unembodied spirit before birth even as it persists in its disembodied spiritual entity after death.

Again, we can assume that where we see in Time a

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* certain stage of development, there must have been a past to that development. Therefore, if the soul enters this life with a certain development of personality, it must have prepared it in other precedent lives here or elsewhere. Or, if it only takes up a ready-made life and personality not prepared by it, prepared perhaps by a physical, vital and mental heredity, it must itself be something quite independent of that life and personality, something which is only fortuitously connected with the mind and body and cannot therefore be really affected by what is done or developed in this mental and bodily living.

First, we know that the soul comes into this body, into this physical life. Now, is physical life the same for all of us? No! We have all got different capacities, different personalities, and different capabilities. But why do we have these differences? If we were all born in the same clay body, we should all have the same capacities. What does it imply? It implies that each of us has developed the capabilities before. For example, if I have done my Masters, it means I have already passed through kindergarten, primary school, high school, and college.

These arguments suggest that reaching a certain status of development presupposes that there has been an earlier process of development.

But this process of development has not occurred only in this life. How much can one develop in one life? That is why we have in Indian Philosophy the concepts of *prarabdha* and *sanskara*, which imply that in my past lives, my mind must have developed specific capacities, because of which in this life, I come with the mental instrument which is developed to a certain extent. The same thing

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applies to our vital capacity and aesthetic sense. Our musical sense may be more developed because of our past life development. Everybody doesn't become a musician.

Some will say that they may have inherited these abilities from their parents. But is everything genetic? There is also a vital being, a vital capacity that the soul brings.

Sri Aurobindo says,

If the soul is real and immortal, not a constructed being or figure of being, it must also be eternal, beginningless in the past even as endless in the future...

I am taking this into some detail because these are questions that many of us must have had in our lives.

Sri Aurobindo says that when the soul takes birth, it brings its own instrument. This is most important. If my soul says I want to experience the life of a philosopher, what is essential for a philosopher? It is not the sense of music, not a great physical body so I can be in the Olympics; I will have to have a strong mind with clarity, brilliance and which is open. The soul says, this time, I will take a good instrument of the mind. When it descends into birth, it picks up a brilliant mind and puts it in a package because this mind will be necessary for life. When we go on a vacation to a cold place, we carry a lot of warm clothes, along with everyday clothes. Similarly, when the soul wants to manifest as an intellectual person, it brings with it a strong mind; if it wants to be an athlete, it puts in its baggage an incredible body, but other parts of the being may not be so developed. Only a few geniuses like Leonardo Da Vinci could be a painter, an architect, an inventor, etc., at the same time. Similarly, Sri Aurobindo was simultaneously a social thinker, psychologist,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* philosopher, yogi, etc. It is only a very few persons who have these multiple capacities. Otherwise, most of us have one leading quality, which in the Gita's language is called the swabhava.

If the soul brings in this personality for self-experience, it becomes interested, and involved in the work this body is doing. It is as if the soul takes responsibility for the part of the being it chose to manifest in a

particular life. In Christian theory, the soul has no choice; it is thrust into the body by force. So, it is not concerned with the body, it will live for several years, and then it will depart. There is no involvement, whereas, in Sri Aurobindo's theory, the soul is fully involved. Each of us is expressing something of the soul, so it is our own Atman who guides and pushes us; despite so many difficulties, it takes us towards self-expression.

That is what Sri Aurobindo explains in this line,

“prepared perhaps by a physical, vital and mental heredity, it must itself be something quite independent of that life and personality, something which is only fortuitously connected with the mind and body and cannot therefore be really affected by what is done or developed in this mental and bodily living.” If the soul does not choose the personality, it is not to be held responsible for what happens in life. It is disconnected. This sense of responsibility is essential. Why do Sri Aurobindo and the Mother emphasise the realisation of the psychic being? Now we have the answer because it is the soul or the psychic being which has chosen this instrument. If I understand my psychic being, it can guide my life, my feelings, my vital, my circumstances, good or bad, because it is the soul who is responsible for my actions.

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But the immortality or eternity of the soul does not at once impose itself, even if we reject the explanation of all things by eternal Matter. For we have also the hypothesis of the creation of a temporary or apparent soul by some power of the original Unity from which all things began, by which they live and into which they cease. On one side, we can erect upon the foundation of certain modern ideas or discoveries the theory of a cosmic Inconscient creating a temporary soul, a consciousness which after a brief play is extinguished and goes back into the Inconscient. Or there may be an eternal Becoming, which manifests itself in a cosmic Life-force with the appearance of Matter as one objective end of its operations and the appearance of Mind as the other subjective end, the interaction of these two phenomena of Life-force creating our human existence. On the other side, we have the old theory of a sole-existing Superconscient, an eternal unmodifiable Being which admits or creates by Maya an illusion of

individual soul-life in this world of phenomenal Mind and Matter, both of them ultimately unreal, —even if they have or assume a temporary and phenomenal reality,—since one unmodifiable and eternal Self or Spirit is the only entity.

Sri Aurobindo brings in here a new point. We have seen all these theories, and now the question is, “is the soul immortal?” In religious belief, the soul comes into the body and leaves it, but it does not tell us if it is immortal.

Then some other theories say there is no immortality; it does not exist. There are two ways of looking at it.

One is that the superconscient or God has created this, manifests itself in a cosmic Life-force, then becomes a

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* soul in a body and then goes back. The second theory is that from the inconscient, right from matter, something called the ‘Atman’ is installed into the human body, and when the body dies, the ‘Atman’ sinks back down into the inconscient. According to these two theories, there is no immortality.

There is a third view, the Buddhist view: Or we have the Buddhist theory of a Nihil or Nirvana and, somehow imposed upon that, an eternal action or energy of successive becoming, Karma, which creates the illusion of a persistent self or soul by a constant continuity of associations, ideas, memories, sensations, images.

Buddhism believes in rebirth, but the question here is, who is reborn? Because in Buddhism, there is no soul and God. If there is no soul, then who is it that is reborn? In Sri Aurobindo’s theory? The psychic being comes birth after birth and links all our innumerable births. But in Buddhism, what is that link which enables rebirth? It says there is an “illusion of a persistent self or soul by a constant continuity of associations”. Buddha says there is no soul, but a personality is made up of ideas, memories, sensations and images.

For example, if I say I Mr X, how do I know I am the same person I was a decade ago? The body is not the same; it has changed a lot. But I have memories of that time, the places I visited, and the people I met. We link up ourselves by memories, images and sensations. Suppose there is an accident after which someone forgets his past entirely, even his name; how would his life be? He will have no memories to associate with. His identity will be lost. It concludes that our identity is because of our memories.

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Buddhism tells us that we have nothing fixed; we have put all the memories together and drawn a chronology of incidents. We are only incidents that we are listing. We are only a conglomeration of memories and associations; there is nothing permanent, according to the Buddha.

These memories, images, and sensations continue after we leave the body. It is the personality made up of karma or what Sri Aurobindo calls the illusion of the persistent self.

This body of memories and associations comes back into a new body. In Buddha's Nirvanic experiences, he says his first experience was not Brahman, not Sachchidananda, not the Divine Shakti, but the experience of all his innumerable births. There was a personality that continues to exist, and when this personality gets extinguished, that is the meaning of Nirvana. These illusory personalities that go from birth to birth get extinguished, and that is Nirvana. Once the personality gets extinguished, there is nothing in you. There is no soul which is permanent.

Sri Aurobindo says:

In all three theories the apparent soul or spiritual individuality of the creature is not immortal in the sense of eternity; it has a beginning and an end in Time. It is a creation by Maya or by Nature-Force a or cosmic action out of the Inconscient or the Superconscient, and is therefore impermanent in its existence.

He is examining whether the soul is immortal, and whether there are other worlds beyond the physical universe. Is there an evolutionary process? He

does not say “the soul is immortal” straightaway; he will show us why the soul is immortal logically, without basing himself on faith or spiritual experience. Sri Aurobindo wants to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* arrive at a logical answer or conclusion that the soul is immortal, only then a rationalist would feel convinced.

He ends the argument thus:

In these views, whether we suppose the one Eternal Existence to be a vital Becoming or an immutable and unmodifiable spiritual Being or a nameless and formless Non-being, that which we call the soul can be only a changing mass or stream of phenomena of consciousness which has come into existence in the sea of real or illusory becoming and will cease to exist there,—or, it may be, it is a temporary spiritual substratum, a conscious reflection of the Superconscient Eternal which by its presence supports the mass of phenomena. It is not eternal, and its only immortality is a greater or less continuity in the Becoming. It is not a real and always existent Person who maintains and experiences the stream or mass of phenomena. That which supports them, that which really and always exists, is either the one eternal Becoming or the one eternal and impersonal Being or the continual stream of Energy in its workings.

For a theory of this kind it is not indispensable that a psychic entity always the same should persist and assume body after body, form after form, until it is dissolved at last by some process annulling altogether the original impetus which created this cycle. It is quite possible that as each form is developed, a consciousness develops corresponding to the form, and as the form dissolves, the corresponding consciousness dissolves with it; the One which forms all, alone endures for ever. Or, as the body is gathered out of the general elements of Matter and begins its life with birth and ends with death, so the consciousness

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may be developed out of the general elements of mind and equally begin with birth and end with death. Here too, the One who supplies by Maya or otherwise the force which creates the elements, is the sole reality that endures. In none of these theories of existence is rebirth an absolute necessity or an inevitable result of the theory.

According to the Buddhists, there is what Sri Aurobindo calls a “stream of phenomena of consciousness”; there is only an illusion of a persistent personality that goes from life to life. But if things change there must be something constant. One of the principles of Indian philosophy is the concept of soul, not the experience of the soul, but the concept of something stable, something permanent, something eternal which stands behind and supports the change. Buddha says that this world, this life is a flux, and the image of the flux he gives is like the water of the river.

Heraclitus also propounded the same idea – We cannot step twice into the same river. But the question arises how is the river water flowing? It is flowing on a stable riverbed. The riverbed is stable, and the water is unstable.

Wherever there is a flux there is the necessity for stability.

In Buddhism what is stable? If there is nothing called permanence, no soul, if even this personality is changing with every birth, the answer could be that there is an impersonal being which is stable.

Similarly, in the Mayavada theory of illusionism that Sri Aurobindo will explain in detail later, Adi Shankaracharya says, there is rebirth. Still, he would say that the soul is nothing but Brahman in the individual.

He ends up saying that after death the soul comes back to another birth, but when there is a realisation of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Brahman then the soul sees that all these creations are *mithya*, an illusion and that there is nobody bound, nobody free. The soul’s own binding in this world is also an illusion, and the soul’s

release from this binding to the earth is also an illusion. As long as we are living a dream, during the dream, the dream seems like a reality, but when we wake up we realise that it was only a dream, something which was unreal. In the waking state what we see around us becomes real. Similarly, Adi Shankaracharya says, all these lives upon earth are like a dream, and when we go back to Brahman, we see it was a dream, something non-existent. The theory of rebirth exists, but it has no value, it is only temporarily there as an illusion, but it gives no spiritual light. Sri Aurobindo says that in none of these theories is rebirth an absolute necessity or an inevitable result. We have seen the Materialist theory, the Religious theory, the Buddhist theory and the Adwaita or illusionist theory. In all these theories rebirth is not essential. Till now we have not seen the theory of rebirth as a necessity.

We have covered in brief four major views regarding rebirth. We started with the materialistic view, which does not believe in rebirth or a supra-physical world.

Second, we came to the religious belief that God breathes life into human bodies. It is based on faith but does not stand the test of reason, as many paradoxes exist. For example, based on the spiritual experiences described in the Gita, certain is the death of that which is born, and certain is the birth of that which dies. Suppose the soul continues to exist after the death of the physical body.

In that case, it must live in some subtle body, and this subtle body is likely to exist along with the soul before

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it comes into the physical body. These were some of the paradoxes Sri Aurobindo discussed. Then we discussed the theory of the Buddhists, who believe in rebirth, but karma compels the rebirth, not the soul. Karma is the link creating the illusion of a continuous consciousness; there is no immortal soul taking birth and passing through the body's death to be reborn in another body.

In Buddhism, there is only an illusion of a persistent self based on memories, associations, ideas, etc. Finally, we touched upon Adwaita Vedanta's illusionist theory, which says there is an apparent rebirth, but ultimately all is an illusion, a dream.

Let us take up some of these arguments a little deeper.

Then we shall go to Sri Aurobindo's concept of rebirth.

As a matter of fact, however, we find a great difference; for the old theories affirm, the modern denies rebirth as a part of the universal process.

Modern thought starts from the physical body as the basis of our existence and recognises the reality of no other world except this material universe. What it sees here is a mental consciousness associated with the life of the body, giving in its birth no sign of previous individual existence and leaving in its end no sign of subsequent individual existence. What was before birth is the material energy with its seed of life, or at best an energy of life-force, which persists in the seed transmitted by the parents and gives, by its mysterious infusion of past developments into that trifling vehicle, a particular mental and physical stamp to the new individual mind and body thus strangely created.

This we have already seen in the Materialists theory.

Modern thought also does not believe in any other supra-

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* physical worlds; it believes only in the physical world.

Regarding the individual's birth, it considers that material life passes on from one individual to another through the biological seeds of life. In biological terms, we call them genes, chromosomes, DNA, etc., carrying the nature and particular characteristics of the individual parents and, in a new combination, creating a new personality and character in the physical and mental life of the child.

Genetic theories attach everything to genes, whereas in India, we don't attach that importance to genes. Yes, the physical genes may carry the parents' characteristics, but the child's nature does not come only and exclusively from the genes. Otherwise, there would be no role for the psychic being or the soul. But the materialists say this is the life force persisting in the seed transmitted to the children.

What remains after death is the same material energy or life-force persisting in the seed transmitted to the children and active for the farther development of the mental and physical life carried with it. Nothing is left of us except what we so transmit to others or what the Energy which shaped the individual by its pre-existent and its surrounding action, by birth and by environment, may take as the result of his life and works into its subsequent action; whatever may help by chance or by physical law to build the mental and vital constituents and environment of other individuals, that alone can have any survival.

Birth comes through genes, and during our life, the environment, circumstances, education, etc., all contribute to the development of our personality. When we are no more in this body, what remains is only what

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we have passed on through our mental, vital, and physical lives to other individuals. What remains of the individual is what remains for the others, not what we have done for ourselves. We may gain wealth, a good name and some fame, but all that even our children and grandchildren would soon forget. However, if I have built something for the whole community or race, they may benefit from it.

Our name may not be remembered, but the work we have done and contributed to human society will continue. That is why much emphasis is on working for the community through philanthropy. This is the theory behind altruism; at least we can continue to survive through our help to others.

Behind both the mental and the physical phenomena there is perhaps a universal Life of which we are individualised, evolutionary and

phenomenal becomings. This universal Life creates a real world and real beings, but the conscious personality in these beings is not, or at least it need not be, the sign or the shape of consciousness of an eternal nor even of a persistent soul or supraphysical Person: there is nothing in this formula of existence compelling us to believe in a psychic entity that outlasts the death of the body. There is here no reason and little room for the admission of rebirth as a part of the scheme of things.

The main thrust of Sri Aurobindo's discussion here is to see if there is a soul or psychic being and whether it is immortal. Is it the psychic being that takes birth, or is it something else? To all these questions, each theory answers differently. He says, "Behind both the mental and the physical phenomena there is perhaps a universal Life of which we are individualised, evolutionary and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* phenomenal becomings." Modern science may not believe in a universal Life, but the spiritualists believe because, for us, the latter universal Life is universal Consciousness.

For the current or scientific mind, universal life denotes the human race in its totality. They say we are all part of the totality of this human race, or in a smaller way, we are all part of the society; if anything, it is the society which is immortal—the whole emphasis changes. We in the East are much more individualistic and not focused on society. There has been a tendency towards the individual's salvation, especially in India. We have become individualistic, which is one of the primary reasons for what we see around us, the dirty roads, people throwing garbage on the streets etc. We have an attitude – "as long as my compound is clean, my apartment is clean, I don't care what happens elsewhere". But in the West, they will perhaps keep their roads and public places cleaner than their own houses. For example, we can't visit anybody's house without an appointment. They are made so conscious of society that one cannot ever trim their lawn at any time of the day as the neighbour may complain to the Municipality. We can see their philosophical reasons if we look deeply into these actions. In the West, society is emphasised, and in India, the individual is important.

Here we have the philosophy of the Buddha and Adi Shankaracharya, who taught us that we must find our salvation.

When we say “my salvation”, we must go deeper and ask, who is this me? They emphasise finding the soul. Once the soul is realised, it becomes the reality of our existence; the body is neglected. We didn't have physical education; nobody bothered to have good health except those in

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Hathayoga. They focused on physical, outer, and body maintenance in the West. All these suggest the undying philosophy that has guided the East and West societies.

We may not accept it, but that is the truth. Philosophy has a significant impact on our daily life and the formation of our society.

With Sri Aurobindo's intervention, we have an integral vision. After a few hundred years, this integral philosophy and vision will show its impact on life level. First, it has to be established on the mental level; then, it will penetrate to the life level. Adi Shankaracharya and Buddha captured the mind of Indian society, and it became a part of Indian living such that every other person sought liberation. The Indian minds have been given *mukti* as the one pointed goal; therefore, we can't think of anything beyond it.

But what if it were found with the increase of our knowledge, as certain researches and discoveries seem to presage, that the dependence of the mental being or the psychic entity in us on the body is not so complete as we at first naturally conclude it to be from the study of the data of physical existence and the physical universe alone? What if it were found that the human personality survives the death of the body and moves between other planes and this material universe? The prevalent modern idea of a temporary conscious existence would then have to broaden itself and admit a Life that has a wider range than the physical universe and admit too a personal individuality not dependent on the material body. It might have practically to readopt the ancient idea of a subtle form or body inhabited by a psychic entity.

Sri Aurobindo is giving us a prophetic hint. Even to this

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* modern mentality, which now thinks the body alone as real and the physical world as the only existence, there could come a time, thanks to research and science and the influence of spiritual thought, that we have a soul that survives the body in a subtle form. He has said that the spirituality of India will overflow its borders and go to the West and the rest of the world. This spiritual experience and knowledge will have an impact on the western mind.

The mentality of the west is not defined by geography

– one can be living in India with it. This materialistic mind may also be influenced by spiritual thought and the discoveries of psychology. The West is taking immense strides in the field of psychology, and this is good because it may ultimately discover that there are subtle worlds apart from the physical world.

Ken Wilber speaks of this kind of psychology, and these kinds of ideas are coming to be accepted more and more.

As the West enlarges its vision, it might re-adopt the ancient idea of a subtle body inhabited by a psychic entity.

Once psychology discovers this, we may accept that the psychic being could exist in this world and other worlds.

There is no question of the psychic being existing in other worlds; the modern mentality does not even believe in the psychic being or soul itself. So, the first thing to discover is whether there is anything like the Atman within human beings. That is the challenge for western psychology.

Psychology should be the science of the psyche, a word used to mean the soul. When we speak of physics, mathematics, and biology, they are all about the body, but if we talk of psychology, then we have to discover what

this psyche is. Psychologists have started in this direction, but they have to go further.

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A psychic or soul entity, carrying with it the mental consciousness, or, if there be no such original soul, then the evolved and persistent mental individual would continue after death in this subtle persistent form, which must have been either created for it before this birth or by the birth itself or during the life. For either a psychic entity pre-exists in other worlds in a subtle form and comes from there with it to its brief earthly sojourn, or the soul develops here in the material world itself, and with it a psychic body is developed in the course of Nature and persists after death in other worlds or by reincarnation here. These would be the two possible alternatives.

In this question, two things are essential: one is the existence of the psychic entity, and the other is the existence of other worlds. These two go hand in hand. We cannot say the psychic being exists and other worlds do not because then the theory becomes paradoxical. That is why Sri Aurobindo is saying if it is not the “Atman”, which may be too far a cry for western psychologists. However, still, something which is more central, something that lasts beyond this body, automatically we have to accept the existence of supra-physical worlds. Otherwise, we fall into the same paradox – because after leaving this body, where will the psychic go?

Some religious theories say that it goes back to God. But Sri Aurobindo says such a transition would be too abrupt to go from this mortality to the immortality of the Divine Being. And what would be the purpose of coming from God into a human body and then from the human body going back to God? The whole creation cannot have been

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* created for this little ephemeral existence of staying in this body for a few years. What meaning would it carry?

An evolving universal Life may have developed on earth the growing personality that has now become ourselves, before it entered a human body

at all; the soul in us may have evolved in lower life-shapes before man was created.

This is our ancient belief. Before it took the human body, the soul lived many thousands of lives in animal or insect forms. This is quite a prevalent idea in India.

In that case, our personality has previously inhabited animal forms, and the subtle body would be a plastic formation carried from birth to birth but adapting itself to whatever physical shape the soul inhabits. Or the evolving Life may be able to build a personality capable of survival, but only in the human form when that is created. This would happen by the force of a sudden growth of mental consciousness, and at the same time a sheath of subtle mind-substance might develop and help to individualise this mental consciousness and would then function as an inner body, just as the gross physical form by its organisation at once individualises and houses the animal mind and life.

The soul has taken many births before it has taken the human body. This soul, which developed from birth to birth, takes shape at the human level. The soul is amorphous until it comes to human birth; it does not have a shape or a body to itself. This amorphous form, which we call a spark, does not have a fixed form; it is bright with divine light but does not have a form. When it comes to the human level, it takes a particular form. In the old idea, it

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is only in the human body that the soul takes a permanent shape. This could happen with a sudden growth of mental consciousness, and then a sheath of subtle mind substance might develop. This formation of the psychic being or the soul, this formation of the soul or the growing human personality, takes place because of mental consciousness.

A sheath of mind-substance develops and helps it to individualise this mental consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo says mental consciousness provides a kind of substance, a sheath of subtle-mind substance.

We can see from this why the soul takes this kind of a frame, because a subtle-mind substance provides a kind of power, “just as the gross physical form by its organisation at once individualises and houses the animal mind and life.” What is the meaning of a body itself?

When we talk about a body or form or animal or plant or insect, it implies individualisation. When we speak about something amorphous, it doesn't have a particular form that is individualised. This individualisation can occur on physical, vital, mental or psychic levels.

On the former supposition, we must admit that the animal too survives the dissolution of the physical body and has some kind of soul formation which after death occupies other animal forms on earth and finally a human body.

Sri Aurobindo says, “we must admit that the animal too survives the dissolution of the physical body”. The animal soul also, after death, moves from one animal form to another animal form. When it is sufficiently matured, it takes up the human body. However, Sri Aurobindo says, “there is little likelihood that the animal soul passes beyond earth and enters other planes of life

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* than the physical and constantly returns here until it is ready for the human incarnation; the animal's conscious individualisation does not seem sufficient to bear such a transfer or to adapt itself to an other-worldly existence”.

The animal soul transfers immediately to another animal because it is not sufficiently individualised to travel to other worlds. Only the human soul has the maturity and capacity to travel beyond the subtle physical worlds.

Even among human beings, if we are too attached to the physical and materialistic world, our souls will not be able to travel into the subtle-

physical worlds and go to the psychic world. It depends upon our own soul's growth.

On the second supposition, the power thus to survive the death of the physical body in other states of existence would only arrive with the human stage of the evolution. If, indeed, the soul is not such a constructed personality evolved by Life, but a persistent unevolving reality with a terrestrial life and body as its necessary field, the theory of rebirth in the sense of Pythagorean transmigration would have to be admitted.

Mark the sentence – “If, indeed, the soul is not such a constructed personality evolved by Life, but a persistent unevolving reality...”. If we think that the soul is a divine entity which comes to earth, and if that is the end of the march of the human soul, if there is no evolution, then the Pythagorean transmigration would have to be admitted.

This means that our souls keep being reborn in the body after body. Rebirth does not hold any ground unless we bring the theory of spiritual evolution. Sri Aurobindo continues,

But if it is a persistent evolving entity capable of

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passing beyond the terrestrial stage, then the Indian idea of a passage to other worlds and a return to terrestrial birth would become possible and highly probable. But it would not be inevitable; for it might be supposed that the human personality, once capable of attaining to other planes, need not return from them: it would naturally, in the absence of some greater compelling reason, pursue its existence upon the higher plane to which it had arisen; it would have finished with the terrestrial life-evolution. Only if faced with actual evidence of a return to earth, would a larger supposition be compulsory and the admission of a repeated rebirth in human forms become inevitable.

Sri Aurobindo says that there may be only transmigration if there is no evolution. Still, the possibility remains that there is an evolution from one birth to another and that as the psychic being matures or grows wiser, it

goes to higher levels beyond earth. Now arises the question: If the soul goes into the Anandaloka, will it ever return? Why should it? It feels liberated at last to have come away from the damned earth so full of misery! Sri Aurobindo says there is the possibility that a soul would not return to earth once it reaches this higher level of bliss. In the absence of some greater compelling reason, it will not come back.

Why should it come back? Not necessarily for its growth, not just for its own experience and maturation, but it may come back to help divinise the earth. This is the most crucial thought.

In Sri Aurobindo's view, rebirth is not just for one's upliftment or enrichment. The soul comes to earth to divinise matter. Each time the soul goes into the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Anandaloka, it brings back the torch of the Divine with it and puts the seed of the divine Force into the matter.

Each divine birth is a kind of seed put into a matter to divinise it. That is why the Mother says there are millions and millions of human births. Nature gives birth to innumerable individuals in the matter, and the matter is happy because each individual brings something of the Divine into the matter. That is the ultimate aim of the birth of the psychic being. Now we can understand why the soul comes back.

Let us continue with the next paragraph, which discusses the main theory of Buddhism. Here, very interestingly, Sri Aurobindo uses a phrase: "vitalistic Buddhism".

But even then the developing vitalistic theory need not spiritualise itself, need not admit the real existence of a soul or its immortality or eternity. It might regard the personality still as a phenomenal creation of the universal Life by the interaction of life-consciousness and physical form and force, but with a wider, more variable and subtler action of both upon each other

and another history than it had at first seen to be possible. It might even arrive at a sort of vitalistic Buddhism, admitting Karma, but admitting it only as the action of a universal Life-force; it would admit as one of its results the continuity of the stream of personality in rebirth by mental association, but might deny any real self for the individual or any eternal being other than this ever-active vital Becoming.

What survives the death of a body is a kind of a stream of personality by mental association, ideas, emotions and desires. This vitalistic Buddhism is not a spiritual idea –

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Buddhism does not believe in a soul which is the spiritual aspect of the human being. It believes in a personality made of emotions, desires and mental associations. These are the aspects that Sri Aurobindo puts together and calls it a vitalistic personality. This personality which we see in Buddhism takes up the succession of new bodies.

On the other hand, it might, obeying a turn of thought which is now beginning to gain a little in strength, admit a universal Self or cosmic Spirit as the primal reality and Life as its power or agent and so arrive at a form of spiritualised vital Monism. In this theory too a law of rebirth would be possible but not inevitable; it might be a phenomenal fact, an actual law of life, but it would not be a logical result of the theory of being and its inevitable consequence.

The rebirth of the vitalistic personality is the major idea in Buddhist thought; rebirth is imperative because karma compels it. We have to be reborn because of our present karma. But it is said that through sadhana or rather Buddhist practices one can extinguish this vitalistic personality; then the wheel of life comes to a stop and then there is no necessity for rebirth. That is why he says that in Buddhism rebirth is not an inevitable consequence.

Whereas in Sri Aurobindo's conception, even if we achieve a higher consciousness the soul can take rebirth. Souls which have realised the Divine and fulfilled their personal mission, have a choice of whether to

return and help in the evolutionary progress of the earth or continue to live in Anandaloka.

During India's freedom movement there were many souls who participated in the movement and suffered and sacrificed their lives. Many of these individuals were in

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the prison with Sri Aurobindo, and the Mother said that these souls had chosen to come and work along with him. Heroes like Bhagat Singh were not just an upshot from nowhere, they are the souls who chose to come and work for the Freedom Movement of the country with Sri Aurobindo . Sri Aurobindo went into politics in 1905

and was imprisoned within a few years, and in 1910 he came to Pondicherry. Within five years he had recast the entire freedom movement. How did he do that? It was because there were souls who were born to help him in the movement. Sri Aurobindo was behind it, but he had a whole army of souls around him. Once their work was done Sri Aurobindo withdrew. These souls chose that particular moment in history to come to help in the movement. It also happened during the Renaissance in Europe. Within a decade or two the world was pulverized, and there was a flourishing of the whole of Europe which gave a new light to the entire world. Even India got influenced by this Renaissance.

How did it happen? It was not just one Leonardo Da Vinci, there were many sculptors, painters, philosophers, thinkers, poets, etc., who participated in this. It was a chosen moment. Sri Aurobindo came, and a whole lot of them came, and they revamped the human world. These are the souls which come along with particular Avatars or Vibhutis. Everything happens in a short time because these are liberated souls. Napoleon who represented dynamic energy and shakti could not do his work alone, he had to have his commander and an army. These souls come down in groups to enhance the evolutionary movements.

Adwaita of the Mayavada, like Buddhism, started

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with the already accepted belief,—part of the received stock of an antique knowledge,—of supraphysical planes and worlds and a commerce between them and ours which determined a passage from earth and, though this seems to have been a less primitive discovery, a return to earth of the human personality.

At any rate their thought had behind it an ancient perception and even experience, or at least an age-long tradition, of a before and after for the personality which was not confined to the experience of the physical universe; for they based themselves on a view of self and world which already regarded a supraphysical consciousness as the primary phenomenon and physical being as only a secondary and dependent phenomenon.

The Adwaita of Mayavada is based on Adi Shankaracharya, who accepted the supraphysical Brahman and the different levels of *lokas* or supraphysical worlds.

It was around these data that they had to determine the nature of the eternal Reality and the origin of the phenomenal becoming. Therefore they admitted the passage of the personality from this to other worlds and its return into form of life upon earth; but the rebirth thus admitted was not in the Buddhistic view a real rebirth of a real spiritual Person into the forms of material existence. In the later Adwaita view the spiritual reality was there, but its apparent individuality and therefore its birth and rebirth were part of a cosmic illusion, a deceptive but effective construction of universal Maya.

“A deceptive but an effective construction”—this is the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* heart of Adi Shankaracharya's theory. This philosophy also agrees that there is rebirth, and rebirth of the soul, not simply as in Buddhism a vitalistic personality formed of impressions, memories and associations.

Adi Shankaracharya's adwaita accepts an actual Atman.

The Atman takes different forms, “but its apparent individuality and therefore its birth and rebirth were part of a cosmic illusion”. So ultimately it says all these are part of a dream drama. The soul coming on the earth, the soul taking different forms, experiencing this life of sorrow, and misery and then going back into Anandaloka and again coming back, is all a big dream drama. It is very effective because we all suffer, it has a practical reality, but ultimately, it is all a dream. In dreams, we do scream when we see something fearful when someone is chasing us.

There is fear, and happiness, and there is enjoyment, it is all there in our normal dreams also. But when the dream is over all that suffering is over, and also all the great happiness we may experience is over. When we are in the dream everything seems real, but he says that ultimately it is all an illusion. Sri Aurobindo says, it’s a nice theory, but in one go you say it is an illusion and throw it out! So, this does not give a strong and rational founding to the philosophy of rebirth.

In Buddhistic thought the existence of the Self was denied, and rebirth could only mean a continuity of the ideas, sensations and actions which constituted a fictitious individual moving between different worlds,—let us say, between differently organised planes of idea and sensation; for, in fact, it is only the conscious continuity of the flux that creates a phenomenon of self and a phenomenon of personality. In the Advaitic Mayavada there was

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the admission of a Jivatman, an individual self, and even of a real self of the individual;* but this concession to our normal language and ideas ends by being only apparent. For it turns out that there is no real and eternal individual, no “I” or “you”, and therefore there can be no real self of the individual, even no true universal self, but only a Self apart from the universe, ever unborn, ever unmodified, ever unaffected by the mutations of phenomena. Birth, life, death, the whole mass of individual and cosmic experience, become in the last resort no more than an illusion or a temporary phenomenon; even bondage and release can be only such an illusion, a part of temporal phenomena: they amount only to the conscious continuity of the illusory experiences of the ego, itself a creation of the great Illusion, and the cessation of the continuity and the consciousness into

the superconsciousness of That which alone was, is and ever will be, or rather which has nothing to do with Time, is for ever unborn, timeless and ineffable.

**(Footnote: The Self in this view is one, it cannot be many or multiply itself; there cannot therefore be any true individual, only at most a one Self omnipresent and animating each mind and body with the idea of an “I” .)*

Sri Aurobindo concludes that in Buddhism there is a fictitious individual made of associations, memories, etc., and in Mayavada there is an illusory individual. In Buddhism karma is the great binder which creates the continuation of our lives. Because of karma, this entire wheel of rebirth started rotating. This entire theory of Buddhism stands on the one word “desire”; if we become desireless, then we get rid of our karma, and then our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* fictitious personality shrinks and shrinks to the point where it evaporates. We all must have seen the oil lamps alight; the wick burns and gives a flame as long as the lamp has oil, but once the oil is over the flame goes out.

The oil is like our desires. We are required to reduce our karma by reducing our desires. When the desires die our fictitious personality cannot exist anymore, and we become extinguished; that is what is called Nirvana in Buddhism.

Similarly, Adi Shankaracharya says Brahman alone is true, and He cannot be many and multiply itself. He argues that Brahman is One and He cannot be divided.

According to him, that which is divisible cannot be eternal, cannot be immortal. You and I are divisible, so we are mortal; Brahman is infinite, eternal and indivisible.

Adi Shankaracharya got this from the Upanishads, but he has taken only one aspect because the Isha Upanishad says that Brahman can become

Many. But Adi Shankara says that all this is a continuity of illusory experiences of the ego. When the ego is dissolved, we realise that all this was an illusion. The ego gets strengthened when we are involved with this world, so to eliminate the ego we must get away from the world. For that, he gave us the path of *jnana* and meditation. For Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Aurobindo says, “the superconsciousness of That which alone was, is and ever will be, or rather which has nothing to do with Time, is for ever unborn, timeless and ineffable.”

Thus while in the vitalistic view of things there is a real universe and a real though brief temporary becoming of individual life which, even though there is no ever-enduring Purusha, yet gives

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a considerable importance to our individual experience and actions,—for these are truly effective in a real becoming,—in the Mayavada theory these things have no real importance or true effect, but only something like a dream-consequence. For even release takes place only in the cosmic dream or hallucination by the recognition of the illusion and the cessation of the individualised mind and body; in reality, there is no one bound and no one released, for the sole-existent Self is untouched by these illusions of the ego. To escape from the all-destroying sterility which would be the logical result, we have to lend a practical reality, however false it may be eventually, to this dream-consequence and an immense importance to our bondage and individual release, even though the life of the individual is phenomenal only and to the one real Self both the bondage and the release are and cannot but be non-existent. In this compulsory concession to the tyrannous falsehood of Maya the sole true importance of life and experience must lie in the measure in which they prepare for the negation of life, for the self-elimination of the individual, for the end of the cosmic illusion.

More or less, we have discussed that, “there is no one bound and there is not one released,” – this is Adi Shankaracharya’s idea. Here the question remains who is realising the Brahman? When we say my soul is realising the Brahman it means it is separate and then it joins the Brahman. If we accept that the soul is real, then Brahman is divisible. But for Adi

Shankaracharya, the soul is not a reality. If the soul is not real, then who is realising the Brahman, who is bound?

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* There is one more theory we need to take up before coming to Sri Aurobindo's proposition. It is Adwaita starting from the Upanishads which comes closest to Sri Aurobindo's concept.

In the Adwaita of the Upanishads, we have the importance of the individual, but not the necessity of rebirth. Sri Aurobindo is looking for the necessity of rebirth. He continues:

It is conceivable that so the Eternal may have actually chosen to manifest or rather to conceal himself in the body; he may have willed to become or to appear as an individual passing from birth to death and from death to new life in a cycle of persistent and recurrent human and animal existence. The One Being personalised would pass through various forms of becoming at fancy or according to some law of the consequences of action, till the close came by an enlightenment, a return to Oneness, a withdrawal of the Sole and Identical from that particular individualisation. But such a cycle would have no original or final determining Truth which would give it any significance. There is nothing for which it would be necessary; it would be purely a play, a Lila.

In this version of the theory, the One Being personalised

“would pass through various forms of becoming either at fancy or according to some law of the consequences of action, till the close came by an enlightenment, a return to Oneness...” If we go towards the Knowledge or Vidya in the Vedantic if we go away from desires, eventually after many lives we will achieve a cessation of births.

In this case, we are not simply individuals that are like temporary waves, we are individuals with a purpose in

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life. Still, Sri Aurobindo says that this does not bring in the necessity of rebirth. Even in this theory, all this is an illusion – all this morality, spirituality, desire, etc. –

everything is an illusion and is all part of a Lila. It almost amounts to the same thing as Adi Shankaracharya's theory, it is all an illusion. All this is a play of the Divine with himself: he is the mountain, he is the ant, he is the tiger, he is the devil, he is everything. In India, we have imbibed this thinking that all is the Divine's play and we don't take it seriously. We have this relaxed attitude because it is all a game. This is the problem of Advaita Vedanta. Even if we have problems in life we are told that it is all part of the game. In a way it is good to think that everything is a game because if we think we are doing everything ourselves then the onus of all right and wrong is on us. If it is a game then we can take it lightly.

However, it can be a good attitude, but if you stretch it too far you will get nothing out of it.

Sri Aurobindo then proposes his theory, for which rebirth would be a necessary component: But if it is once admitted that the Spirit has involved itself in the Inconscience and is manifesting itself in the individual being by an evolutionary gradation, then the whole process assumes meaning and consistence; the progressive ascent of the individual becomes a key-note of this cosmic significance, and the rebirth of the soul in the body becomes a natural and unavoidable consequence of the truth of the Becoming and its inherent law. Rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution; it is the only possible effective

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation in the material universe.

“Rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution;” – this is the central sentence of the whole chapter – “it is the only possible effective condition, the obvious dynamic process of such a manifestation of the material universe.” Here Sri Aurobindo has given the conclusion, which he will develop in the next few paragraphs.

If we see that there is an evolution, right from the unconscious going up to the superconscious, the whole meaning of life and rebirth changes. It is not that the Supreme Being has become everything just for fun and play. Individuals are here to reveal the Divine stage by stage until the Divine is fully manifest upon the earth. He says, there is an evolutionary gradation. Each individual is not like a wave coming for a while and disappearing, but coming to progressively manifest the Divine upon the earth. Human beings have evolved up to a mental consciousness as a partial manifestation of the Divine, but now we have to go forward to manifest the Divine as Supermind. The first human beings were animalistic; they had a mental consciousness, but what was most prominent was the physical consciousness concerned with the survival of the body. Then came the vital age of mankind where the intellect was still not prominent; power was dominating the world. Now mankind is going through the mental consciousness, and all over the world, there is an exuberance of the mind. This is the age of information, and technology has helped us to procure knowledge and develop our mental consciousness. The next stage is to bring the supramental consciousness.

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The Divine is not here to while away his time, have a little fun and suffering, he is here for the progressive ascent of his consciousness. This is the central keynote of the entire cosmic existence, the *raison d'être* of the birth of the individual. As Sri Aurobindo wrote earlier, “to fulfil God in life is man’s manhood” (CWSA 21: 41). Individuals are created for this purpose. Now he says that “rebirth is an indispensable machinery for the working out of a spiritual evolution”. Why is it necessary for working out this spiritual evolution? Because I cannot achieve its goal in one life. We have to take many lives in order to grow into the spiritual consciousness. Even today we all are reading *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Upanishads, the Bible, etc., but do we have a spiritual consciousness? No, we are still far from it. We are perhaps awakened to the need to become spiritual; we are putting in bit of effort, but it is still very insufficient. It is a little better than the millions and billions of people who are not yet even awakened to the necessity of a spiritual life, but this is the only difference, we are not too ahead of them. Still, all these spiritual efforts will never go

waste; whatever effort we put in now, remains as a credit in our bank for the next life. Just as our karma remains in our bank for the next life, so too our spiritual efforts. That is why it is never too late to start a spiritual life. For this ascent and progress, the rebirth of the individual is necessary. The conclusion is that if we understand that this life is meant for spiritual evolution, then and only then does rebirth become inevitable. For any other philosophy, there is no inevitability.

In Sri Aurobindo's conception of involution, from the supreme Sachchidananda, there is a descent of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* consciousness to different levels. One thing we should not miss is that the Divine Centre arranges the cosmic order.

The aspect of the Divine which arranges the cosmic order is Supermind. It is the immediate creator, not Brahman.

That is because, in the involutory order, Supermind is that stage of consciousness of Sachchidananda which selects from the millions of possibilities of manifestation.

The Supreme has an infinite number of possibilities. It is like walking into a library. One can go into any room, any section, any shelf, and choose any book; it is this kind of choice that is made by the Supermind. That is why Sri Aurobindo says here that the Gnosis has arranged the cosmic order. Once it has been chosen there is a series of steps that follow, from Supermind to Overmind and then Intuition etc., until it goes into the Inconscient. From the Inconscient there arose evolution. Sri Aurobindo says, "out of this nescience the evolution of that manifested being into a recovered self-awareness was from the very first inevitable." Why was evolution necessary? Why couldn't the involution have stopped there in the inconscient?

Sri Aurobindo clarifies,

It was inevitable because that which is involved, must evolve; for it is not only there as an existence, a force hidden in its apparent opposite, and every such force must in its inmost nature be moved to find itself, to realise itself, to release itself into play, but it is the reality of that which conceals it, it is the self which the Nescience has lost and which therefore it must be the whole secret meaning, the constant drift of its action to seek for and recover.

What is it that is involved in the nescience? It is Sachchidananda who has become the very opposite

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in his consciousness, from the Superconscient to the Inconscient. He has hidden himself in the darkness of the inconscient, and once he hides there, he cannot stay there static eternally. Sri Aurobindo describes it as not only the Sat or Existence which is embedded, but there is also the Chit, the divine Force and the divine Ananda in the Inconscient. Wherever there is the divine Force it means it has dynamism, it seeks to express itself, and there is a movement. Force cannot lie static eternally. It may be there for millions of years, but it cannot continue to be there forever, because Force always has an impetus for movement. After millennia of being there as Matter, the Force starts moving, and there was a burst of life.

Once there is dynamism it also seeks to enjoy. When I make an action, when I move, there is always an inherent motivation to find some kind of joy. Every action has in its very base a search for joy. So too the infinite Sachchidananda is also expressing itself to find some kind of joy.

Now, we come back to the individual human being. Once we accept that there is an evolution, we realise that this return movement, this process has been extremely slow; it has taken billions of years to evolve human beings. With the appearance on earth of the individual human being the evolving movement toward the Divine got accelerated.

Of what is this human being made? The human being is a sample of the whole evolution, there is matter, there is microscopic life, there is the consciousness of the animal, and then we have this mental consciousness

which was not there earlier in the evolution. We are a product of evolution, and we have everything of this evolution within us. That is a big disadvantage because Matter pulls

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* us down; the body is tamasic, and it doesn't respond. The vital is like that of an animal, full of instincts and desires, so it does not let us go forward into spirituality. The mind is there, but it is still weak. We are supposedly mental beings, but how much are we really mental? Our mind is often the servant of the vital and is limited by the body. In all this there is something or someone which is evolving.

Who is that? The soul!

It is the soul which has come birth after birth. It has come into the human being as a psychic being. That is our divine psychic element. Upanishads have described it as big as a thumb. So, we can imagine the size of a thumb relative to our entire body and get a sense of how small the spiritual element is within us relative to the rest of the human being and personality with its ignorance, incapacity and limitation. We are supposed to take the evolution forward in a spiritual manner, but we carry a large part of the past along with a soul. How then can we fulfil our aim on earth with adequate instrumentation.

But if we analyse the power of the soul we would know that we are a small part of Brahman himself! It is like saying we have a ray of the sun inside a dome. Matrimandir is not illumined by artificial lights; one ray of the sun illumines the whole inner chamber. How powerful that sun must be?

One ray of light in the whole building, one single ray can illumine a huge mass of matter. So too is the soul within us, so potent that if we light it, it will work within us and illumine our whole being. It can guide and enlighten our entire personality. But we have to let it in, just like at the top of the Matrimandir the light comes from a single spot.

If we close that small opening all becomes darkness. And how does that light reflect? The one ray hits the crystal in

there, and then it spreads. That crystal is like the soul in us. That sunlight is the light from the Supreme Brahman.

But what is happening to us? We have the crystal soul, but there is no sunlight dropping in because we are so closed; it is only when we open our mind, our heart, and our body that the light can come in and hit the crystal and then radiate and illumine our whole being. That is the extreme importance of mankind, that we have this crystal in us which can reflect the light of the Supreme Brahman.

This soul which has taken birth as a human being has come up from the animal level. Someone was asking me the question; how can the human population increase every year if the same people are being reborn? But whoever said only the same people are being reborn? From where are the souls coming? They are not dropping from heaven. Sri Aurobindo tells us that souls come from the evolutionary process. The souls of animals are maturing to become human beings. Every year there are millions of souls that are maturing from animal state and taking birth as human beings. At the lower end of the evolution, there is an infinite supply. Fifty million years ago Matter was not ready to evolve so many human souls, because the souls in the matter were at first just a spark. They evolved into plants, into animals and then into human beings.

In the next paragraph, we get an elaboration of Sri Aurobindo's view of the individual. He says, But if the individual is a persistent reality, an eternal portion or power of the Eternal, if his growth of consciousness is the means by which the Spirit in things discloses its being, the cosmos reveals itself as a conditioned manifestation of the play of the eternal One in the being of Sachchidananda with the eternal

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Many. Then, secure behind all the changings of our personality, upholding the stream of its mutations, there must be a true Person, a real spiritual Individual, a true Purusha. The One extended in universality exists in each being and affirms himself in this

individuality of himself. In the individual he discloses his total existence by oneness with all in the universality. In the individual he discloses too his transcendence as the Eternal in whom all the universal unity is founded.

This trinity of self-manifestation, this prodigious Lila of the manifold Identity, this magic of Maya or protean miracle of the conscious truth of being of the Infinite, is the luminous revelation which emerges by a slow evolution from the original Inconscience.

Sri Aurobindo says, there is a real spiritual individual, a true Purusha and he is “an eternal portion or power of the Eternal”. It is that individual which continues to take birth after birth in different forms. In the next paragraph he would say:

A dense and solid basis has been laid for this play of division in a world of separative forms of Matter by an involution of the active self-consciousness into a phenomenal Nescience. It is this foundation in Nescience that makes the division secure because it imperatively opposes a return to the consciousness of unity; but still, though effectively obstructive, it is phenomenal and terminable because within it, above it, supporting it is the all-conscient Spirit and the apparent Nescience turns out to be only a concentration, an exclusive action of consciousness tranced into self-forgetfulness by an abysmal plunge into the absorption of the formative and creative

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material process. In a phenomenal universe so created, the separative form becomes the foundation and the starting-point of all its life action; therefore the individual Purusha in working out its cosmic relations with the One has in this physical world to base himself upon the form, to assume a body; it is the body that he must make his own foundation and the starting-point for his development of the life and mind and spirit in the physical existence. That assumption of body we call birth...

Now, we said the persistent individual is the Purusha.

This Purusha, once it takes up the evolution upon earth, has to take a body and the body becomes the foundation, the starting point of the soul's evolution. When the individual soul comes into manifestation it has to have a body in order to evolve. What is the meaning of taking a body? It is to become an individual, a separate individual, we are basically divided from each other by the body.

We cannot join two bodies, but my emotions could join others, and mentally we may be identified, but physically we can never become one. That is why to achieve a secure and true individuality the soul has to take a body. The mind adds a lot to the sense of being separate individual beings because the mind brings in the ego, a mental sense that we are separate which reinforces the separation of our bodies. Mind adds a sense of independent individuality.

The function of the mind is to separate. The work is difficult, and the journey is long, but the work begins with the individuation in the physical body. From there humanity has evolved to create philosophies, religions, etc. These are attempts of the mind to show us the path to unity, but they can never take us to God or even to human unity. Unity and mind don't go together. Mind can give

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* us an idealism of unity, but not real unity. It is only the psychic being that can bring real unity.

Sri Aurobindo says:

Birth then is a necessity of the manifestation of the Purusha on the physical plane; but his birth, whether the human or any other, cannot be in this world-order an isolated accident or a sudden excursion of a soul into physicality without any preparing past to it or any fulfilling hereafter. In a world of involution and evolution, not of physical form only, but of conscious being through life and mind to spirit, such an isolated assumption of life in the human body could not be the rule of the individual soul's existence; it would be a quite meaningless and inconsequential arrangement, a freak for which the nature and system of things here have no

place, a contrary violence which would break the rhythm of the Spirit's self-manifestation... Human life is itself only a term in a graded series, through which the secret Spirit in the universe develops gradually his purpose and works it out finally through the enlarging and ascending individual soul-consciousness in the body. This ascent can only take place by rebirth within the ascending order; an individual visit coming across it and progressing on some other line elsewhere could not fit into the system of this evolutionary existence.

Here Sri Aurobindo links up the repeated rebirth of human souls with the rhythm of universal growth.

This rebirth of the individual soul must be a part of the evolutionary march of nature. Every individual is the epitome of evolution. Every time the soul comes into birth, it participates in the evolutionary process. Biologists

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tell us how in the womb of the mother the process of the growth of the fetus reproduces the process of evolution itself. There is a cosmic rhythm that comes into the womb of the mother. He would say, "human life itself is only a term in a graded series". We are at the mental level now in our evolution, and we are trying to be spiritual, but we cannot become supramental overnight. I may want to be, but I cannot be unless and until there is a representative human elite which takes up the supramental journey.

There could be some *avant-garde* who goes ahead on the supramental path, such as those pilots who go on a reconnaissance flight in advance of the army to find out the extent of the resistance in the area and report back.

Such was Sri Aurobindo and the Mother who went ahead of humanity, found the supramental consciousness, brought it down, made a chart of it, saw how it works, and gave us the entire picture of it. They said that human beings are children of God, and if we aspire to be supramental beings, which is the next evolutionary target, the map has been laid. However, we cannot leap into the supramental in one life.

Our life on earth is not an isolated accident or a sudden excursion of a soul into physicality without any past preparation or future progress. Even the souls of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were prepared in their own past lives for this life. If our souls had this kind of past experience, maybe we could reach the Supermind. But obviously, when we see our incapacities, desires, problems, we can say that our souls are not yet ready. A soul which is ready for the elevation of the consciousness to the Supermind shows already the signs of preparation. We can move towards that, no doubt, but even that requires lots

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* and lots of tapasya, a tapasya which is far from our daily routine. There have been individuals in the Ashram who have done that tapasya, who have walked a long way on the supramental path, who have even crossed the bridge from mind to the Supermind. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given the road map to the Supermind, and some individuals have used it and gone a long way. The Mother has invited all of us, those of us who can, to take this route, but there are conditions. There is no luggage allowed; our baggage of desires must be left behind.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Nor is the human soul, the human individual, a free wanderer capriciously or lightly hastening from field to field according to its unfettered choice or according to its free and spontaneously variable action and result of action. That is a radiant thought of pure spiritual liberty which may have its truth in planes beyond or in an eventual release, but is not true at first of the earth-life, of life in the physical universe. The human birth in this world is on its spiritual side a complex of two elements, a spiritual Person and a soul of personality; the former is man's eternal being, the latter is his cosmic and mutable being. As the spiritual impersonal person he is one in his nature and being with the freedom of Sachchidananda who has here consented to or willed his involution in the Nescience for a certain round of soul-experience, impossible otherwise, and presides secretly over its evolution. As the soul of personality he is himself part of that long development of the soul-experience in the forms of Nature; his own evolution must follow the laws and the lines of the universal evolution. As a spirit he is

one with the Transcendence which is immanent in the world and comprehensive of it; as a soul he is at once one with and part of the universality of Sachchidananda self-expressed in the world: his self-expression must go through the stages of the cosmic expression, his soul-experience follow the revolutions of the wheel of Brahman in the universe.

As Sri Aurobindo said in the previous paragraph, human birth does not take place capriciously; the soul is not just a wanderer, it doesn't come upon earth saying

“this time I want to be a rich man, I want to be a poet”, etc.

This freedom is not given to the caprice, the choice of the soul. There are two elements involved in the birth of the soul: one Sri Aurobindo calls the spiritual person and the other he calls the soul of personality. This spiritual person is what we call the Jivatman, and the soul of personality is the psychic being. The Jivatman is the individual being above manifestation, and the psychic being is that which comes down into the manifestation and evolves here.

The Jivatman doesn't come into evolution, he sends his delegate called the soul or psychic being. It is like the General commanding the soldier. The soul cannot fully and capriciously do what it wants, the General or the Jivatman controls and says “this time you will go as a philosopher, you will go as an artist, you will be a beggar or a rich man”, etc. It is like helping a child to grow more and more to its fullest capacity. The child is not clear about what is the next step, but the teacher and the parents say, we will help you to take the next step. In the same way, Jivatman guides the psychic being.

The universal Spirit in things involved in the Nescience of the physical universe evolves its nature-

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* self in a succession of physical forms up the graded series of Matter, Life, Mind and Spirit. It emerges first as a secret soul in material forms quite subject on the surface to the nescience; it develops as a soul still secret but about to emerge in vital forms that stand on the borders between nescience and the partial light of consciousness which is our ignorance; it develops still farther as the initially conscient soul in the animal mind and, finally, as the more outwardly conscious, but not yet fully conscient soul in man: the consciousness is there throughout in our occult parts of being, the development is in the manifesting Nature. This evolutionary development has a universal as well as an individual aspect: the Universal develops the grades of its being and the ordered variation of the universality of itself in the series of its evolved forms of being; the individual soul follows the line of this cosmic series and manifests what is prepared in the universality of the Spirit... The individual must have followed this line of development; he must have presided over a soul-experience in the lower forms of life before he took up the human evolution: as the One was capable of assuming in its universality these lower forms of the plant and animal, so must the individual, now human, have been capable of assuming them in his previous stages of existence.

I have explained before how the matter has developed into the plant and from the plant to the animal form.

The animal is conscious, it has rudiments of mind, but it is only with the further development of the mental consciousness that the soul becomes self-aware. Animals have the rudiments of mental consciousness, but they are not yet self-aware. They are only aware of the outer being

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and their environment, they are not aware of their inner self. They are moved mainly by instinct, whereas humans use analysis and self-planning. In the evolution from matter to plant to animal to man, each time the soul is becoming more and more conscious. Sri Aurobindo adds, He now appears as a human soul, the Spirit accepting the inner and outer form of humanity, but he is not limited by this form any more than he was limited by the plant or animal forms previously assumed by him; he can pass on from it to a greater self-expression in a higher scale of Nature.

Once the soul has come to the level of the human being, obviously it is not in its last form. The same soul will move forward and will proceed to other, greater physical forms in which it will be more and more akin to the consciousness of the Divine. Now we are able to think of the Divine, but we are not yet fully and consciously connected with him. In the future, in the new race, individuals would be centred in their psychic being, and they will evolve from there.

The main point is that the soul takes new forms. What the materialists tell us, that the body creates the mind and soul in its upward evolution is not correct. If it appears that way it is because they gradually manifest in the body, not because they are created by the body or exist only by it.

In fact, it would then be reasonable to suppose that it is not immortal but has come into existence by the appearance of the human mind and body in the evolution and would disappear by their disappearance. But body and mind are not the creators of the spirit, the spirit is the creator of the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mind and body; it develops these principles out of its being, it is not developed into being out of them, it is not a compound of their elements or a resultant of their meeting. If it appears to evolve out of mind and body, that is because it gradually manifests itself in them and not because it is created by them or exists by them; as it manifests, they are revealed as subordinate terms of its being and are to be finally taken up out of their present imperfection and transformed into visible forms and instruments of the spirit.

Next, Sri Aurobindo answers two perennial questions: Then the farther question arises whether, humanity once attained, this succession of rebirths still continues and, if so, how, by what series or by what alternations. And, first, we have to ask whether the soul, having once arrived at humanity, can go back to the animal life and body, a retrogression which the old popular theories of transmigration have supposed to be an ordinary movement. It seems impossible that it should so go back with any entirety, and for this reason that the transit from animal to human life means a decisive

conversion of consciousness, quite as decisive as the conversion of the vital consciousness of the plant into the mental consciousness of the animal.

It is surely impossible that a conversion so decisive made by Nature should be reversed by the soul and the decision of the spirit within her come, as it were, to naught.

These are questions that many of us may have had in our minds. Can the soul go back from the human level to the animal body? There are theories in which it can. But Sri Aurobindo says, the soul has come from the animal

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to the human being, it has taken a big leap forward in its evolution, so how can such a big leap in nature be reversed? The soul has been prepared for thousands of years in the animal form, and only when it was ready it has taken the leap forward to the human level. He says it is impossible that such a major conversion could revert back to the animal level. Philosophically, it is untenable. But he says there is a possibility that in some cases the soul might partially and temporarily go back into an animal if it was necessary to work out some strong animal tendencies that remained. Further,

Or at most there might be, supposing certain animal propensities to be vehement enough to demand a separate satisfaction quite of their own kind, a sort of partial rebirth, a loose holding of an animal form by a human soul, with an immediate subsequent reversion to its normal progression.

If there is a strong animal propensity, for example, a lust for food, sex, violence, etc., then the soul after leaving the physical body may go into an animal body for a while to get rid of these propensities. So, there can be a temporary bifurcation in which the soul may loosely associate itself with an animal, but only temporarily for a specific purpose; it will not fully go back to the animal form for good.

Then another question is whether rebirth will continue after taking the human form and if so what is the process?

Sri Aurobindo writes,

But why a succession of human births and not one alone? For the same reason that has made the human birth itself a culminating point of the past succession, the previous upward series,—it must be so by the very

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* necessity of the spiritual evolution. For the soul has not finished what it has to do by merely developing into humanity; it has still to develop that humanity into its higher possibilities... At any rate this present highest point at least must be reached before we can write finis on the recurrence of the human birth for the individual. Man is there to move from the ignorance and from the little life which he is in his mind and body to the knowledge and the large divine life which he can compass by the unfolding of the spirit... the imperfection of Man is not the last word of Nature, but his perfection too is not the last peak of the Spirit.

This last sentence is interesting: “The imperfection of Man is not the last word of Nature, but his perfection too is not the last peak of the Spirit.” Even if we have a brilliant, wonderful body, a perfectly harmonious and luminous mind, even a spiritual deliverance, even then this perfect human being is not the highest possibility of the spirit.

Beyond this, there is possible a higher supramental being.

This possibility becomes a certitude if the present leading principle of the mind as man has developed it, the intellect, is not its highest principle. If mind itself has other powers as yet only imperfectly possessed by the highest types of the human individual, then a prolongation of the line of evolution and consequently of the ascending line of rebirth to embody them is inevitable. If Supermind also is a power of consciousness concealed here in the evolution, the line of rebirth cannot stop even there; it cannot cease in its ascent before the mental has been replaced by

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the supramental nature and an embodied supramental being becomes the leader of terrestrial existence.

Ultimately, rebirth can come to a stop only with the coming of the supramental race. Up until then, we have to go on, from level to level, from consciousness to consciousness, until an embodied supramental being becomes the leader of terrestrial existence.

In the last paragraph Sri Aurobindo writes: If there is no soul, then there can be a mechanical evolution without necessity or significance and birth is only part of this curious but senseless machinery.

If the individual is only a temporary formation beginning and ending with the body, then evolution can be a play of the All-Soul or Cosmic Existence mounting through a progression of higher and higher species towards its own utmost possibility in this Becoming or to its highest conscious principle; rebirth does not exist and is not needed as a mechanism of that evolution. Or, if the All-Existence expresses itself in a persistent but illusory individuality, rebirth becomes a possibility or an illusory fact, but it has no evolutionary necessity and is not a spiritual necessity; it is only a means of accentuating and prolonging the illusion up to its utmost time-limit. If there is an individual soul or Purusha not dependent on the body but inhabiting and using it for its purpose, then rebirth begins to be possible, but it is not a necessity if there is no evolution of the soul in Nature: the presence of the individual soul in an individual body may be a passing phenomenon, a single experience without a past here or a future; its past and its future may be elsewhere.

But if there is an evolution of consciousness in an

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* evolutionary body and a soul inhabiting the body, a real and conscious individual, then it is evident that it is the progressive experience of that soul in Nature which takes the form of this evolution of consciousness: rebirth is self-evidently a necessary part, the sole possible machinery of such an evolution.

It is as necessary as birth itself; for without it birth would be an initial step without a sequel, the starting of a journey without its farther steps and

arrival. It is rebirth that gives to the birth of an incomplete being in a body its promise of completeness and its spiritual significance.

It is a brilliant summary of all that we have seen till now.

Lecture Notes

1) “Birth is the first spiritual mystery of the physical universe, death is the second which gives its double point of perplexity to the mystery of birth;”

2) “All the known circumstances and results of birth presuppose an unknown before, and there is a suggestion of universality, a will of persistence of life, an inconclusiveness in death which seem to point to an unknown hereafter. What were we before birth and what are we after death, are the questions, the answer of the one depending upon that of the other, which the intellect of man has put to itself from the beginning without even now resting in any final solution.”

3) “Modern thought starts from the physical body as the basis of our existence and recognises the reality of no other world except this material universe.

What it sees here is a mental consciousness

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associated with the life of the body, giving in its birth no sign of previous individual existence and leaving in its end no sign of subsequent individual existence.”

4) “In the Buddhist theory rebirth is imperative because Karma compels it; not a soul, but Karma is the link of an apparently continuing consciousness, – for the consciousness changes from moment to moment: there is this apparent continuity of consciousness, but there is no real immortal soul taking birth and passing through the death of the body to be reborn in another body.”

5) “Adwaita of the Mayavada, like Buddhism, started with the already accepted belief—part of the received stock of an antique knowledge—of supraphysical planes and worlds and a commerce between them and ours

which determined a passage from earth and, though this seems to have been a less primitive discovery, a return to earth of the human personality.

At any rate their thought had behind it an ancient perception and even experience, or at least an age-long tradition, of a before and after for the personality which was not confined to the experience of the physical universe; for they based themselves on a view of self and world which already regarded a supraphysical consciousness as the primary phenomenon and physical being as only a secondary and dependent phenomenon.”

6) “Birth then is a necessity of the manifestation of the Purusha on the physical plane; but his birth, whether the human or any other, cannot be in this world-order an isolated accident or a sudden excursion of a soul into physicality without any preparing past to it or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* any fulfilling hereafter. In a world of involution and evolution, not of physical form only, but of conscious being through life and mind to spirit, such an isolated assumption of life in the human body could not be the rule of the individual soul’s existence; it would be a quite meaningless and inconsequential arrangement, a freak for which the nature and system of things here have no place, a contrary violence which would break the rhythm of the Spirit’s self-manifestation.”

7) “We arrive then necessarily at this conclusion that human birth is a term at which the soul must arrive in a long succession of rebirths and that it has had for its previous and preparatory terms in the succession the lower forms of life upon earth; it has passed through the whole chain that life has strung in the physical universe on the basis of the body, the physical principle. Then the farther question arises whether, humanity once attained, this succession of rebirths still continues and, if so, how, by what series or by what alternations.”

8) “But why a succession of human births and not one alone? For the same reason that has made the human birth itself a culminating point of the past succession, the previous upward series, – it must be so by the very necessity of the spiritual evolution. For the soul has not finished what it has to do by

merely developing into humanity; it has still to develop that humanity into its higher possibilities.”

9) “If supermind also is a power of consciousness concealed here in the evolution, the line of rebirth cannot stop even there; it cannot cease in its ascent before the mental has been replaced by the

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supramental nature and an embodied supramental being becomes the leader of terrestrial existence.”

10) “If there is an individual soul or Purusha not dependent on the body but inhabiting and using it for its purpose, then rebirth begins to be possible, but it is not a necessity if there is no evolution of the soul in Nature: the presence of the individual soul in an individual body may be a passing phenomenon, a single experience without a past here or a future; its past and its future may be elsewhere. But if there is an evolution of consciousness in an evolutionary body and a soul inhabiting the body, a real and conscious individual, then it is evident that it is the progressive experience of that soul in Nature which takes the form of this evolution of consciousness: rebirth is self-evidently a necessary part, the sole possible machinery of such an evolution. It is as necessary as birth itself; for without it birth would be an initial step without a sequel, the starting of a journey without its farther steps and arrival. It is rebirth that gives to the birth of an incomplete being in a body its promise of completeness and its spiritual significance.”

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Chapter – XXI

The Order of the Worlds

In the previous chapter Sri Aurobindo establishes the philosophical and logical necessity of the existence of the psychic being, of a central being, which is the spiritual personality that goes from body to body, from birth to birth. Sri Aurobindo went through different philosophies, Buddhism, Adwaita Vedanta, Adi Shankaracharya's Illusionism, materialism and Christian religious theories, and found that none had the necessity for a central being.

Ultimately, Sri Aurobindo put forward his theory showing the necessity of the psychic being and its immortality.

In the present chapter – “The Order of the Worlds”, Sri Aurobindo examines the idea that if there is rebirth, there must be other worlds apart from this physical world.

If any theory says that the physical world alone is real and no other worlds exist, then it cannot be reconciled with the theory of rebirth. In the third chapter, “Rebirth and Other Worlds; Karma, the Soul and Immortality”, he takes up again the issue of the necessity of the other worlds.

Once the soul leaves the physical body it travels through these other worlds. The soul, the subtle physical worlds, and the idea that the soul itself travels through these subtle physical worlds are all interlinked with rebirth.

In the opening quotes for the chapter, Sri Aurobindo cites the following:

Seven are these worlds in which move the life-forces that are hidden within the secret heart as their

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dwelling-place seven by seven. (Mundaka Upanishad: II.1.8)

May the Peoples of the five Births accept my sacrifice, those who are born of the Light and worthy of worship; may Earth protect us from earthly evil

and the Mid-Region from calamity from the gods. Follow the shining thread spun out across the mid-world, protect the luminous paths built by the thought; weave an inviolate work, become the human being, create the divine race.... Seers of truth are you, sharpen the shining spears with which you cut the way to that which is Immortal; knowers of the secret planes, form them, the steps by which the gods attained to immortality. (Rig Veda: X. 53. 5, 6, 10) This is quite a metaphysical chapter in the sense that there is not much on rebirth as such, but it goes very deep into the other worlds. Are these worlds just imaginations, creations of the mind, or old superstitions? Sri Aurobindo establishes their existence logically and experientially. He begins by saying,

If a spiritual evolution of consciousness in the material world and a constant or repeated rebirth of the individual into an earthly body are admitted, the next question that arises is whether this evolutionary movement is something separate and complete in itself or part of a larger universal totality of which the material world is only one province. This question has already its answer implied in the gradations of the involution which precede the evolution and make it possible; for, if that precedence is a fact, there must be worlds or at least planes of higher being and they must

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* have some connection with the evolution which has been made possible by their existence.

He says, if we have established that there is a repeated rebirth of the individual, then the question comes of whether there are other worlds. He says there must be; at least there must be planes of a higher being, and they must have some connection with evolution. This question will be examined in the next paragraph. Here the question is whether these other worlds are independent of the evolutionary process. Moreover, the evolutionary process is preceded and made possible by the involution. So the question is whether these worlds are part of the involution and evolution or they are separate. For Sri Aurobindo, we know by now that there is nothing in this world apart from the process of involution and evolution; everything belongs to its structure.

The next question is if there are other worlds, is there a hierarchy or grades or do there exist one or two planes?

Do these worlds have an impact on human life? What are the other worlds? If they are required for the soul to travel in when the soul leaves the physical body, why are they required? Do the other worlds communicate with us? It is necessary to look more closely into these issues. As we will see Sri Aurobindo takes up these questions from different points of view and analyses them objectively.

He says,

The descent of the Soul into the Ignorance can be thought of as an abrupt precipitation or immediate lapse of a pure spiritual being out of the superconscient spiritual Reality into the first inconscience and the subsequent evolving phenomenal life of material Nature.

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This is one theory; here Sri Aurobindo explains different possibilities. There is the possibility that beyond this world there is only the Supreme Reality. We may have come from God; the souls come down from this Supreme Reality and fall into the Inconscient. That would mean there are no intermediary levels, only the Supreme Reality, God, Brahman, Sachchidananda, and below the Inconscient which is the starting point of the evolution.

There is a descent and then an ascent to the Supreme Reality, meaning it returns to its source. Sri Aurobindo says,

There would be no intermediate powers or realities other than Matter and Spirit, no other planes than the material, no other worlds than the world of Matter. But this idea is too trenchant and simple a construction and cannot outlive a wider view of the complex nature of existence.

He says it is too simple that there is just Spirit and Matter, that from the Spirit the soul comes into Matter and from Matter it goes back to Spirit. It is “too trenchant”

and simplistic, but nevertheless, he examines it.

There are, no doubt, several possible originations of cosmic existence by which such an extreme and rigid world-balancement could have conceivably come into being. There could have been a conception of this kind and a fiat in an All-Will, or an idea, a movement of the soul towards an egoistic material life of the Ignorance.

The eternal individual soul urged by some inexplicable desire arising within it can be supposed to have sought the adventure of the darkness and taken a plunge from its native Light into the depths of a Nescience out of which arose this world of Ignorance; or a collectivity

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of souls may have been so moved, the Many: for an individual being cannot constitute a cosmos; a cosmos must be either impersonal or multipersonal or the creation or self-expression of a universal or infinite Being.

He says, let us presume these souls, out of some desire, come down into the darkness. The Upanishads say that the Brahman was alone and wanted to become many, so it plunged into its very opposite. If we can say that about the Brahman, we can very well say the same about individual souls. These individual souls out of desire came down to the very opposite. They lived in the Supreme and then wanted an adventure, that of going into the darkness.

They all came down into this darkness and then desired to go back to the Light. What are they doing on this earth?

They are undergoing an experience in Matter. Where did this Matter come from? It was created by the All-Soul or the Divine himself.

Or, if the individual is not pre-existent, if we are only a creation of the All-consciousness or a fiction of the phenomenal Ignorance, either creatrix may have conceived all these myriads of individual beings by the evolution of names and forms out of an original indiscriminate Prakriti; the soul would

be a temporary product of the indiscriminate stuff of inconscient force-substance which is the first appearance of things in the material universe.

This argument suggests that the soul, the individual, is a product of inconscient matter, of nature or Prakriti. In the next paragraph he says:

If we find that there are other planes of conscious being and that there already exist other worlds than

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the material universe, these ideas might become difficult to substantiate; but we can escape from that annulment if we suppose that these worlds have been subsequently created by or for the evolving Soul in the course of its ascent out of the Inconscience.

If we find that there are other planes of existence than the material universe, perhaps the Divine or the soul itself created them in the evolutionary process. Sri Aurobindo raises the question of whether the other worlds are part of the involution or the evolution, and here he is saying that perhaps they are part of the evolution.

In any of these views the whole cosmos would be an evolution out of the Inconscient, either with the material universe as its sole and sufficient stage and scene or else with an ascending scale of worlds, one evolving out of the other, helping to grade our return to the original Reality. Our own view has been that the cosmos is a self-graded evolution out of the superconscient Sachchidananda; but in this idea it would be nothing but an evolution of the Inconscience towards some kind of knowledge sufficient to allow, by the annihilation of some primal ignorance or some originating desire, the extinction of a misbegotten soul or an escape out of a mistaken world-adventure.

If we say these other worlds are created out of evolution, then what is the consequence? Sri Aurobindo says that then the only point of the evolution would be an escape out of this adventure into inconscient matter back into the spirit, or perhaps simply an extinction of a transitory or fictional soul that has emerged in Matter. This is in contrast to Sri Aurobindo's own

theory that the intervening worlds and the material earth itself were created in a downward

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* involution from and out of the spirit. In that case, the spirit would be involved in Matter, and could gradually be revealed in Matter in the process of evolution. There could be a spiritual fulfilment in Matter, and not simply an escape from it. He says further, But such theories either imply a premier importance and originating power of mind or a premier importance of the individual being; both have indeed a great place, but the one eternal Spirit is the original power and the original existence. Idea, conceptively creative,—not the Real-Idea which is Being aware of what is in itself and automatically self-creative by the force of that Truth-awareness,—is a movement of the mind; desire is a movement of life in mind; life and mind then must be pre-existent powers and must have been the determinants of the creation of the material world, and in that case they can equally create worlds of their own supraphysical nature. Or else we must suppose that what acted was not desire in an individual or a universal Mind or Life, but a will in the Spirit,—a will of Being deploying something of itself or of its Consciousness, realising a creative idea or a self-knowledge or an urge of its self-active Force or a turn to a certain formulation of its delight of existence. But if the world has been created, not by the universal Delight of existence, but for the desire of the individual soul, its caprice of an ignorant egoistic enjoyment, then the mental Individual and not the Cosmic Being or a Transcendent Divinity should be the creator and witness of the universe.

If the one eternal Spirit has not created the world, then it must be created by mind or life, and if they are

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the creators, then they must pre-exist the creation. Or if the individual soul has come into the inconscient to enjoy its adventure and not the Cosmic Being, then the mental individual must be the creator and sole witness of the universe. In this theory, there is nothing truly universal or transcendent.

This is the materialistic view; in fact, it believes that even one's soul is simply a combination of chemicals.

In the past trend of human thought the individual being has always loomed enormously large in the front plan of things and in the premier dimensions of importance; if these proportions could still be maintained, this origination might conceivably be admitted: for a will towards the life of the Ignorance or an assent to it in the individual Purusha must indeed be part of the operative movement of Consciousness in the involutory descent of the Spirit into material Nature. But the world cannot be a creation of the individual mind or a theatre erected by it for its own play of consciousness; nor can it have been created solely for the play and the satisfaction or frustration of the ego.

Can the human mind be responsible for this tremendous universal play? The mind can find no solution to the problems of life, no solution to the disharmony and violence of life. Can this small human mind be the creator of the complexity of this world? Does the mind even know what it wants, what it is feeling? Can the human mind know the heart of the tiger or elephant? Sri Aurobindo says that the world is too vast in its complexity for us to accept the idea that the human mind is the creator; the world is far beyond the grasp of the human mind.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Because of the vastness of the complexity, there has got to be something called the cosmic mind. We may call it to mind, perhaps, but it has to be a cosmic mind and not an individual human mind. There may be such a cosmic mind and above that a transcendent being. But the first thing we should understand is that the human mind cannot be responsible for the cosmos; there has to be a cosmic power or being who is the creator and upholder of the cosmos. Sri Aurobindo further writes; Accordingly, this world-creating or participating Individual and its desire or assent to the Ignorance must have been awake before the world at all existed; it must have been there as an element in some supracosmic Superconscient from which it comes and to which it returns out of the life of the ego: we must suppose an original immanence of the Many in the One. It becomes then conceivable that a will or an impetus or a spiritual

necessity may have stirred, in some transmundane Infinite, in some of the Many which precipitated them downward and compelled the creation of this world of the Ignorance. But since the One is the premier fact of existence, since the Many depend upon the One, are souls of the One, beings of the Being, this truth must determine also the fundamental principle of the cosmic existence.

Whereas the individual mind cannot be the creator of the universe, its consent to its individual play in the universe may be a truth. But that would suppose that this consenting Individual is there above the universe in which it consents to participate; “it must have been there as an element in some supracosmic Superconscient”. He

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says that both the cosmic being and the Individual come from the transcendent.

In the previous chapter, we learned that Adi Shankaracharya had argued that the Brahman cannot become the Many for the simple reason that if He becomes the Many then He is changing and any change in Brahman means it is not eternal and infinite but finite. One of the main characteristics of the individual, of you and me, is this divisibility; we are all divided, and that is what makes us individual. If we are not divided, we become cosmic and do not remain individual. Adi Shankaracharya says that the Supreme Brahman is indivisible. What Sri Aurobindo says is that the Many are already involved in the One. It is like one whole pomegranate fruit: when we open the pomegranate, we see clusters of seeds. In all those clusters there are individual seeds, and what we eat are the individual seeds. We have the One and then we have the cosmic within that One, and then there are these individuals in the cosmic. It is not that the Brahman is dividing himself into individuals. Individuals are part and parcel of the Brahman; they are innate in Brahman.

Sri Aurobindo says, “we must suppose an original immanence of the Many in the One.” However, he also says, “the One is the premier fact of existence, since the Many depend upon the One...”

Here the question is which is more important, the Brahman or the Individual, Brahman or the World? If we ask whether the seeds in the pomegranate fruit are more important or the fruit is more important, we must see that the seeds are inside the fruit and are dependent on it. If the fruit is rotten, we don't want to eat the seeds, however, both are real. Let us take a different example. When a

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* ring is made out of a lump of gold, the ring is as real as the lump. But if we ask which is more real, then we say the lump of gold is more real because the ring is only a temporary form; it can melt back into the lump, but if we melt the lump, it remains a lump. Forms are temporary, but the lump of gold is permanent. Similarly, the Brahman is the eternal truth, and the cosmos and individuals are transitory or secondary truths. Why secondary? Because they are dependent realities whereas the transcendent Brahman is the original Reality.

We were discussing that the Many are dependent on the One with reference to the argument that individual souls come down out of their own desire to go into the inconscient, and that when they came down, the Divine created this world for their experience. Here Sri Aurobindo says that these individual souls are not the Supreme, the Many are dependent on the One. It is the One which is the Supreme, the Many are only subordinate realities. In the middle of the paragraph he says: It is inconceivable that the Many should have independently or by a departure from the One Will desired cosmic existence and forced by their desire the supreme Sachchidananda to descend unwillingly or tolerantly into the Nescience; that would be to reverse altogether the true dependence of things. If the world was directly originated by the will or the spiritual impetus of the Many, which is possible and even probable in a certain sense, there must still have been first a Will in Sachchidananda to that end; otherwise the impetus,— translating here the All-Will into desire, for what becomes desire in the ego is Will in

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the Spirit,—could not have arisen anywhere. The One, the All-Soul, by whom alone the consciousness of the Individual is determined, must first accept the veil of inconscient Nature before the Individual too can put on the veil of the Ignorance in the material universe.

The Many cannot have a desire or a wish to come down into the world without the Supreme's consent. It is not that a group of souls came down and forced the Sachchidananda to create this world. Individuals can't force the Divine.

The Divine himself must have had the will to enable the Many to desire that descent. The argument here is that there must be a Will in Sachchidananda to come down.

As a sequel to this clarification, there is another thing that needs to be taken up.

But once we admit this Will of the supreme and cosmic Being as the indispensable condition of the existence of the material universe, it is no longer possible to accept Desire as the creative principle; for desire has no place in the Supreme or in the All-being.

It can have nothing to desire; desire is the result of incompleteness, of insufficiency, of something that is not possessed or enjoyed and which the being seeks for possession or enjoyment.

It is often quoted that the Supreme desired to be Many, but the moment we say desire, it suggests incompleteness, insufficiency, etc. If I desire happiness, money or whatever, it means I want to acquire or possess something which I do not have, which is not already part of me. If this is so, how can we apply desire to the Divine? The Divine is not incomplete, he is not insufficient, he doesn't lack anything.

A supreme and universal Being can have the delight of its all-existence, but to that delight desire must

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* be foreign,—it can only be the appendage of the incomplete evolutionary ego which is a product of the cosmic action. Moreover, if the All-consciousness of the Spirit has willed to plunge into the inconscience of Matter, it must be because that was a possibility of its self-creation or manifestation. But a sole material universe and an evolution there out of inconscience into spiritual consciousness cannot be the one solitary and limited possibility of manifestation of the All-being.

The Divine cannot have incompleteness, and so it has no desires. The Supreme has the Will – it is not desire – to get into the Inconscient, its opposite. The superconscient Will was that there should be darkness and for it to plunge into it. From this darkness of the Inconscient he willed to slowly emerge in the evolution. Was this the only possibility? Was there no other possibility of creation or manifestation? Sri Aurobindo says there were other possibilities. According to the materialists, however, there cannot be manifestation without matter. He continues, This would bring us to a materialistic evolutionary Pantheism; we would have to regard the beings who people the universe as souls of the One, souls born here in It and evolving upward through inanimate, animate and mentally developed forms till the recovery of their complete and undivided life in the superconscient Pantheos and its cosmic Oneness would intervene as the end and goal of their evolution. In that case, everything has evolved here; life, mind, soul have arisen out of the One in the material universe by the force of its hidden being,

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and everything will fulfil itself here in the material universe.

If matter alone is real, then there is no God, no Spirit, no supraphysical worlds etc. They perhaps have mental imaginations only.

It has then to be asked what are Mind and Life, and it may be answered that they are products of Matter or of the Energy in Matter. Or else they are forms of consciousness that arise as results of an evolution from Inconscience to Superconscience: consciousness itself is only a bridge of transition; it is spirit becoming partially aware of itself before plunging into its normal trance of luminous superconscience. Even if there proved to be

planes of larger Life and Mind, they would only be subjective constructions of this intermediary consciousness erected on the way to that spiritual culmination. But the difficulty here is that Mind and Life are too different from Matter to be products of Matter; Matter itself is a product of Energy, and mind and life must be regarded as superior products of the same Energy.

If matter is the ultimate, from where did the mind come? How did life come about? The materialists would say they have come as a result of biological growth – they are only some chemical compounds. The problem with this argument is that when we compare trees with stones, they are too different from one another to have any link with each other and when we look at the human being this difference becomes even wider. The nature of mind and the nature of matter, are so very different, that there is hardly anything in common. It becomes untenable to hold

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that matter is the ultimate reality because what emerges from it in the evolution is so vastly different.

If we admit the existence of a cosmic Spirit, the Energy must be spiritual; life and mind must be independent products of a spiritual energy and themselves powers of manifestation of the Spirit.

If we ask, “what is matter?” It is nothing but energy; today that is a scientifically proven fact. The answer is that there is one supreme energy which has become matter and that same energy has become life and mind.

The base energy has transformed into Matter. Einstein’s equation $E=mc^2$ says that energy equals matter. If we go further into Vedanta, it says that consciousness becomes Matter and Life. Why consciousness? We must always remember that consciousness and force are inseparable.

Force is another form of consciousness. Consciousness, through the process of energy, has become Matter. That is the Vedantic truth. All this manifestation is that of consciousness. Whose consciousness? Not the

human consciousness; we know that the human consciousness is too limited. It is the consciousness of Sat, of Existence.

The Vedantic formula for the Divine is Sat-Chit-Tapas-Ananda.

It then becomes irrational to suppose that Spirit and Matter alone exist, that they are the two confronting realities and that Matter is the sole possible basis of the manifestation of Spirit; the idea of a sole material world becomes immediately untenable. Spirit must be capable of basing its manifestation on the Mind principle or on the Life principle and not only on the principle of Matter; there can then be and logically there should be worlds of Mind and worlds of Life;

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there may even be worlds founded on a subtler and more plastic, more conscious principle of Matter.

Once we accept that matter is not the only truth, then there must be other levels of existence such as life and mind. Through the evolution, we have seen that out of matter have come life and mind. Therefore, the same energy that has created the physical world could have created other worlds also. Sri Aurobindo opens the possibility that the same Chit has become something more than Matter also.

Three questions then arise, interrelated or interdependent: whether there is any evidence or any true intimation of the existence of such other worlds; whether, if they exist, they are of the nature we have indicated, arising or descending in the order and within the rationale of a hierarchical series between Matter and Spirit; if that is their scale of being, are they otherwise quite independent and unconnected, or is there a relation and interaction of the higher worlds on the world of Matter?

Now Sri Aurobindo asks philosophically whether there is any evidence of the existence of other worlds. If they exist, whether there is a hierarchical gradation from matter to spirit, and whether there is a relation between these worlds and the earth? He says, It is a fact that mankind almost from the beginning of its existence or so far back as history or tradition can go,

has believed in the existence of other worlds and in the possibility of communication between their powers and beings and the human race. In the last rationalistic period of human thought from which we are emerging, this belief has been swept aside as an

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* age-long superstition; all evidence or intimations of its truth have been rejected a priori as fundamentally false and undeserving of inquiry because incompatible with the axiomatic truth that only Matter and the material world and its experiences are real; ...

He says the attitude of materialists and scientists is that if supraphysical worlds cannot be objectively proved, they must be hallucinations, superstitions, imaginations, etc. The other worlds are not tenable for the materialists.

However, since ancient times most civilisations have believed in other worlds.

Sri Aurobindo is going to give an analysis of what is subjective and what is objective. We may ask the question of whether there is anything objective at all. Scientists say spiritual experiences are subjective and not to be believed, but it is not only spiritual experience that is subjective, even every material object we see is seen and known only subjectively. What I see and what you see is different because when we see an object it is seen with our consciousness, and every person's consciousness is different from another's. Sri Aurobindo asks, is your science objective? He says the scientist is as subjective as the yogi.

We are examining the three questions posed by Sri Aurobindo : (1) whether there is proof of the existence of other worlds, (2) if they do exist whether they are of a hierarchical nature, and (3) is there a relation of the higher worlds with the material world. Regarding the first question, Sri Aurobindo says,

It should be evident that this demand for physical valid proof of a supraphysical fact is irrational and

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illogical; it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective.

For Science to demand physical proof of the supraphysical is itself irrational. Science takes the physical truth to be the ultimate reality. It has a right to demand physical proof for things on the physical level, but if they ask for physical proof of supraphysical things, it is illogical. For example, when we want to see a microbe, we use a microscope, which is the right instrument, but if we want to see the moon's surface, we use a telescope, not a microscope. We have to change our instruments in order to find the truth of a particular level. Similarly, when we want to prove things on the physical level, a physical instrument is good, but for things at the supraphysical level, we need to use a supraphysical instrumentation.

A supraphysical fact may impinge on the physical world and produce physical results; it may even produce an effect on our physical senses and become manifest to them, but that cannot be its invariable action and most normal character or process.

Supraphysical forces have an effect on the physical level, and while they themselves may not be seen, their effects can be seen. In Mother's life, there were many examples.

When she was coming from Japan, suddenly a storm came up creating big waves, and the Mother saw there were a few vital beings creating this stormy weather around the ship. Other people couldn't see it, of course, they just saw a rough sea. This is proof that the supraphysical can produce effects on the physical world, and though it is not

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* its normal character, sometimes it does produce effects on the physical level.

Ordinarily, it must produce a direct effect or a tangible impression on our mind and our life-being, which are the parts of us that are of the same order as itself, and can only indirectly and through them, if at all, influence the physical world and physical life.

If it objectivises itself, it must be to a subtler sense in us and only derivatively to the outward physical sense.

This derivative objectivisation is certainly possible; if there is an association of the action of the subtle body and its sense-organisation with the action of the material body and its physical organs, then the supraphysical can become outwardly sensible to us.

One must have proper instrumentation to see what is happening in the supraphysical worlds; one has to have a subtle vision, it cannot be seen with our physical eyes.

This is what happens, for example, with the faculty called second sight; it is the process of all those psychic phenomena which seem to be seen and heard by the outer senses and are not sensed inwardly through representative or interpretative or symbolic images which bear the stamp of an inner experience or have an evident character of formations in a subtle substance. There can, then, be various kinds of evidence of the existence of other planes of being and communication with them...

For example, there is crystal ball reading, but people who do that have an extra sensory perception, common people, cannot look into the crystal and say what is happening elsewhere. Sri Aurobindo says that it is a fallacy

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to argue that everything has to be proven in a physical laboratory giving physical evidence.

Our physical mind is not the whole of us nor, even though it dominates almost the whole of our surface consciousness, the best or greatest part of us; reality cannot be restricted to a sole field of this narrowness or to the dimensions known within its rigid circle.

The physical world is not the only reality, and it is not even the whole of us. There are layers and layers of our being within us; we have to discover and use them for different levels of understanding. It is a fallacy to ask for physical evidence for everything. People even ask what is the proof of the existence of God. Even in our own mythology, Hiranyakashyapu asked the question of whether God is there in this very pillar and Prahlad answered yes! We all know the story.

Swami Vivekananda asked Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, “have you seen God?” To this the master replied in affirmative. How did he see God? Not with his physical eyes. He could see the Mother walking up and down the staircase, but the other *purohits* could not see the same Mother. There is an existence of other worlds and beings, but we need another kind of instrumentation to see them.

If it be said that subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognised method or standard of verification and a too great tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supernatural at its face-value, this may be admitted: but error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective or subliminal parts of us, it is also an appanage of the physical mind and its

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* objective methods and standards, and such liability to error cannot be a reason for shutting out a large and important domain of experience; it is a reason rather for scrutinising it and finding out in it its own true standards and its characteristic appropriate and valid means of verification.

If I say I cannot prove the supraphysical with physical means, we might say that it is the problem with the subjective world, it is prone to errors which cannot be corrected. But the error is not the prerogative of the subjective

world alone, thousands of physical errors are made every day on the physical level! Let us not cancel all subjective phenomena because it may have errors. That only means that we must examine them more carefully using methods better suited to the phenomena.

Our subjective being is the basis of our objective experience, and it is not probable that only its physical objectivisations are true and the rest unreliable.

The subjective is the basis of our objective experiences.

I am a subjective being; when I look at a thing, I look at it from my own angle. Sri Aurobindo says that every objective thing has at its base a subjective perception and experience; an object cannot be said to exist without a subject who experiences it.

The subliminal consciousness, when rightly interrogated, is a witness to truth and its testimony is confirmed again and again even in the physical and the objective field; that testimony cannot, then, be disregarded when it calls our attention to things within us or to things that belong to planes or worlds of a supraphysical experience.

He indicates that our subliminal consciousness can be a

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witness to the truths of the supraphysical realm. We have studied earlier that beyond this physical level of mind, life and body there is an inner being called the subliminal being which has its own subtle mind, subtle vital and subtle physical. They too have an outer and an inner part, the latter of which is called the *manomaya purusha*, *pranamaya purusha* and *annamaya purusha*, respectively.

Then in the subliminal being, there is an inmost part which is called the psychic being. This subliminal being is also connected with the universal or cosmic consciousness. The supraphysical worlds can be accessed by the subliminal, whereas our normal outer being can only connect with the outer

physical world. If we want to see the supraphysical worlds, we must go deep within our subliminal consciousness.

All the great yogis have this kind of connectivity with the cosmos through their subliminal consciousness. It has nothing to do with spirituality; that is where many yogis fool the common man. If somebody can contact the vital world, immediately we think he is a spiritual person; but it is more like a scientist who can look into a huge telescope and see what is in space. A person who can connect with the vital world is not necessarily spiritual, because the spirit is above the vital and the mind. There is an occult science that shows how to connect with the cosmic worlds by developing the subliminal consciousness as the instrument. One who is spiritual is connected with the spirit. It is only when we are connected with our Atman or our psychic being that we begin to be spiritual.

When yogis move from the outer towards the inner consciousness, they develop this possibility of seeing the supraphysical worlds, and many get arrested at the vital or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mental levels of the subliminal consciousness because they get a lot of power and knowledge and don't continue to go towards the inner spirit. Let us be clear in our notions of spirituality. We can be great healers or an occultist, but it has nothing to do with spirituality.

Nevertheless, regarding the existence of the supraphysical, Sri Aurobindo says "that this testimony cannot be disregarded", because it comes from a connection with cosmic worlds through the subliminal consciousness.

All truth supraphysical or physical must be founded not on mental belief alone, but on experience,—but in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain or by a consciousness which is capable only of truths of another order; so

alone can we be sure of our steps and enlarge firmly our sphere of knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo establishes here a general principle for evaluating truths which are based on experience: “in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter.” If we want to enter into the cosmic worlds, then we must be empowered to go there which requires that we are awake in our subliminal consciousness. If the truth is scientific and material, then I must train myself as a scientist to evaluate it. I cannot say that this tree has no life because for the

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last six months it has looked the same; if one is a scientist, he will see that it has plenty of life. A simple example is from Sri Aurobindo’s book *The Renaissance in India*. He has written a series of articles arguing against a critic William Archer, who criticised Indian culture in every aspect – its literature, philosophy, architecture, art, poetry, everything. Sri Aurobindo says that if one superimposes the western ideals of philosophy or art on Indian, he can never appreciate it. The same thing holds good for us as well. If we go and criticise western painting by saying, “It is not like the Ajanta paintings,” then we will not be able to appreciate western art. The basic principle is that we should never superimpose our values or principles on another culture. If we want to appreciate another culture, then we must learn its rules and regulations, which means we must identify ourselves with them.

When Indians go abroad, they tend to hang on to our rituals and culture much more strongly than what we do in India, because they are adamant about identifying themselves as Indians. It is good to retain our Indian identity, but we must also try to learn the other culture.

For most foreign people coming to India either one of two things happens, they either have love at first sight or want to get out of it at the first instance. Those who stay back and learn the inner culture, begin to love the country.

Sri Aurobindo says: “appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain.” If we want to understand the supraphysical, we must enter

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the supraphysical according to its own laws. What is that law? We must use subliminal consciousness.

If we scrutinise the intimations of supraphysical world-realities which we receive in our inner experience and compare with it the account of such intimations that has continued to come down to us from the beginnings of human knowledge, and if we attempt an interpretation and a summarised order, we shall find that what this inner experience most intimately conveys to us is the existence and action upon us of larger planes of being and consciousness than the purely material plane, with its restricted existence and action, of which we are aware in our narrow terrestrial formula.

To summarise, the subtle mental, the subtle vital and the subtle physical world all have an influence upon the physical world. They exist independently, and yet they are in constant interaction with the physical world. Having interaction also connotes that there are beings in those worlds just as in the physical world we have animals, birds, people, etc. Sri Aurobindo further says: There are two main orders of experience in our contact with them; one is purely subjective, though in its subjectivity sufficiently vivid and palpable, the other is more objective. In the subjective order, we find that what shapes itself to us as a life-intention, life-impulse, life-formulation here, already exists in a larger, more subtle, more plastic range of possibilities, and these pre-existent forces and formations are pressing upon us to realise themselves in the physical world also; but only a part succeeds in getting through and even that emerges partially in a form and

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circumstance more proper to the system of terrestrial law and sequence.

The higher or supraphysical worlds have a greater perfection than earth. For example, there is a world of music and Mother would say that Beethoven drew his music from that world and that sometimes Mozart did and that there are others who do it. They draw their music from a perfect world of music, which wants to come down and manifest upon the earth. This is the beauty of the earth, that although it is so very imperfect, it is the only playfield, the only *kshetra* of the Divine, where everyone wants to come and manifest. Even the gods want to come down upon the earth, even though they live in the divine worlds. Earth is the field of evolution, there is change and interaction, it is a Lila, and the divine is more active and dynamic here. The world of music, the world of art, the gods, everyone wants to come down here and manifest.

And when they come down on earth, the best instruments in which to manifest are human beings. Both for good and for bad forces. For example, Hitler was used by a great Asura. Similarly, we have the great Napoleon who was an instrument of Maheshwari. Human beings can be instruments for both the Divine and the devil; that is why this earth and human beings have such great importance in the evolutionary process.

It is not just here in India we have such a belief. In western mythology also there is Zeus who wanted to come down to earth, and there was a rivalry between which god or goddess would possess that single man. This is there in every culture, but the manifestation of these godheads does not take place in its fullness. They may come down into some people for some time, like Apollo,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Indra, Varuna, etc. There were examples in our Ashram as well. There were gods and goddesses who came into our sadhaks and made them overnight poets and singers and such sadhaks became famous among the Ashramites.

Then Sri Aurobindo made it clear that this was due to the descent of the overmental godheads. He said to the Mother that this would make her famous but that this is not their work. Then the Mother disconnected this

link with the godheads. Once it was done, the sadhaks lost their great powers.

This precipitation takes place, normally, without our knowledge; we are not aware of the action of these powers, forces and influences upon us, but take them as formations of our own life and mind, even when our reason or will repudiates them and strives not to be mastered: but when we go inwards away from the restricted surface consciousness and develop a subtler sense and deeper awareness, we begin to get an intimation of the origin of these movements and are able to watch their action and process, to accept or reject or modify, to allow them passage and use of our mind and will and our life and members or refuse it.

In the same way we become aware of larger domains of mind, a play, experience, formation of a greater plasticity, a teeming profusion of all possible mental formulations, and we feel their contacts with us and their powers and influences acting upon our parts of mind in the same occult manner as those others that act upon our parts of life.

The sadhaks thought they had become great artists, and painters on their own, because they were not aware of the influences behind, from the subliminal. When we are not

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aware of them, we take these influences as formations of our own life and mind. This swells up the ego because we don't know that we have been possessed by subtle influences that could leave us at any time.

This kind of experience is, primarily, of a purely subjective character, a pressure of ideas, suggestions, emotional formations, impulses to sensation, action, dynamic experience. However large a part of this pressure may be traced to our own subliminal self or to the siege of universal Mind-forces or Life-forces belonging to our own world, there is an element which bears the stamp of another origin, an insistent supraterrrestrial character.

These experiences of beings and forces from other worlds that influence us have an element that clearly indicates they are supraterrrestrial in nature,

they have a certain unusual power or greatness that is not native to our world.

When the Mother spoke about occultism she said that if you want to learn occultism you have to be extremely courageous. Imagine if our subliminal opens and we suddenly see beings floating around. We would become frightened! That is why it is said that ignorance is bliss or blindness is joy. If we see these subtle beings and forces when we are not prepared inwardly, then life can become horrendous; people may say that we are out of our minds.

Sometimes people see beings, hear voices, etc., but the inner being is not yet ready for this. Suddenly there may be an opening, and they all rush in. That is why one should not be too hasty in sadhana. If we go too fast, we may become a victim of psychological problems.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Let us continue with the next paragraph; most of this I have covered already.

But the contacts do not stop here: for there is also an opening of our mind and life parts to a great range of subjective-objective experiences in which these planes present themselves no longer as extensions of subjective being and consciousness, but as worlds; for the experiences there are organised as they are in our own world, but on a different plan, with a different process and law of action and in a substance which belongs to a supraphysical Nature. This organisation includes, as on our earth, the existence of beings who have or take forms, manifest themselves or are naturally manifested in an embodying substance, but a substance other than ours, a subtle substance tangible only to subtle sense, a supraphysical form-matter.

Here Sri Aurobindo discusses in greater detail the mental and vital worlds. Those who have read *Savitri* would understand better the wide range of worlds that exist beyond the physical world in which we live. There are subtle-physical, subtle vital and mental planes which have their worlds

arranged in a hierarchy from lower to higher. Each of these planes has beings which are evil, and anti-divine, but as we go higher on the ladder, even on the subtle-physical plane, there are angels. All of these planes have a subtle substance tangible only to our subtle

senses. Their substance is not gross like our physical but is more fluid. The subtle physical, vital or mental beings of those worlds have bodies, but not so rigid and resistant to change as the physical body of a man on earth. Every plane has beings made of a substance commensurate with

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that world. They do not have the same forms as human beings yet they do have forms or can take forms.

These worlds and beings may have nothing to do with ourselves and our life, they may exercise no action upon us; but often also they enter into secret communication with earth-existence, obey or embody and are the intermediaries and instruments of the cosmic powers and influences of which we have a subjective experience, or themselves act by their own initiation upon the terrestrial world's life and motives and happenings. It is possible to receive help or guidance or harm or misguidance from these beings; it is possible even to become subject to their influence, to be possessed by their invasion or domination, to be instrumentalised by them for their good or evil purpose.

In reality, there are many of these beings around us, intervening, guiding, interfering, etc. Even a sudden burst of anger may be due to the influence of one of these vital beings, and we may be surprised by our sudden anger.

At times the progress of earthly life seems to be a vast field of battle between supraphysical Forces of either character, those that strive to uplift, encourage and illumine and those that strive to deflect, depress or prevent or even shatter our upward evolution or the soul's self-expression in the material universe.

This is a wonderful explanation of what happened in the Second World War. There were Asuras, called Titans in the West, possessing people like Hitler.

They were trying their best to stop humanity from progressing. They wanted a regression. There are forces which can take hold of our earth, not just individuals, and try to prevent our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* evolution. If Germany had won the war, then the Divine's work and human evolution would have gone back hundreds or thousands of years, whereas Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were helping the earth to make a giant leap forward.

Some of these Beings, Powers or Forces are such that we think of them as divine; they are luminous, benignant or powerfully helpful...

Hitler thought he was being guided by a divine being which appeared to him as luminous and powerful and helpful. The Mother could see the Force that was possessing Hitler.

There are others that are Titanic, gigantic or demoniac, inordinate Influences, instigators or creators often of vast and formidable inner upheavals or of actions that overpass the normal human measure.

Even today we can see these disintegrating Forces on earth.

It is possible also to pass beyond a subjective contact or a subtle-sense perception and, in certain subliminal states of consciousness, to enter actually into other worlds and know something of their secrets.

We can see in the life of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo that such things have happened. The Mother went into these worlds in her subtle physical body and got their secrets and she could see the Asuric Being which was guiding Hitler. In that way, she was able to imitate him and misguide Hitler during the Second World War. It is the more objective order of other-worldly experience that seized most the imagination of mankind in the past, but it was put by popular

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belief into a gross-objective statement which unduly assimilated these phenomena to those of the physical world with which we are familiar; for it is the normal tendency of our mind to turn everything into forms or symbols proper to its own kind and terms of experience.

Sri Aurobindo says, what the ancients have seen was right, they had an intuitive experience; but, unfortunately, they have translated their vision into symbols and this has led to superstitious beliefs and black magic, etc. This goes on even now. Human beings adapt these things into ceremonies, etc., and this becomes a business. If it were limited to mantras then these people would not use it to make money. In Sri Aurobindo's own life his younger brother Barin became ill with a bad fever and a Tantric cured him by giving him a glass of water after charging it with a mantra. So this is possible, but people use this to make money. Sri Aurobindo says we catch a truth but we turn it into human, material terms and motives.

This has always been, put into its most generalised terms, the normal range and character of other-worldly belief and experience in all periods of the past of the race; names and forms differ, but the general features have been strikingly similar in all countries and ages. What exact value are we to put upon these persistent beliefs or upon this mass of supernormal experience? It is not possible for anyone who has had these contacts with any intimacy and not only by scattered abnormal accidents, to put them aside as mere superstition or hallucination; for they are too insistent, real, effective, organic in their pressure, too constantly confirmed by their action and results to

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* be so flung aside: an appreciation, an interpretation, a mental organisation of this side of our capacity of experience is indispensable.

However the materialists and scientists may cry, people who are in contact with these worlds continue to believe in them, because in their experience these worlds are as real as this material world; they cannot be denied.

One explanation which can be put forward is that man himself creates the supraphysical worlds which he inhabits or thinks he inhabits after death, creates the gods, as ran the ancient phrase,—it is aimed even that God himself was created by man, was a myth of his consciousness, and has now been abolished by man! All these things then may be a sort of myth of the developing consciousness in which it is able to dwell, a captive in its own buildings, and by a kind of realising dynamisation maintain itself in its own imaginations. But pure imaginations they are not, they can only be so treated by us so long as the things they represent, however incorrectly, are not part of our own experience.

The argument is that these supraphysical worlds exist, but the next question is how have they been created.

Do they pre-exist humanity or they have been created by us? Oftentimes when we talk about hell and heaven, we wonder whether these worlds are really like they are described in the scriptures. If you see Jannat in the Muslim style it is full of wine, women and dance. If you see the paradise of Hindus or Christians it is completely different. It would seem that much imagination has gone into the creation of these worlds. So it could be that these

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supraphysical worlds have been created by humanity's imaginations.

Yet there may conceivably be myths and imaginations that are used by the power of the creative Consciousness-Force to materialise its own idea-forces; these potent images may take form and body, endure in some subtly materialised world of thought and react on their creator: if so, we might suppose that the other worlds are buildings of this character.

But if that were so, if a subjective consciousness can thus create worlds and beings, it might well be that the objective world also is a myth of Consciousness or even of our consciousness, or that Consciousness itself is a myth of the original Nescience.

I remember the Mother saying that human beings have powerfully imagined these heavens and hells and that when a Christian leaves his body he goes into these worlds because the imagination is so powerful that it creates this experience for the person. When Hindu or Muslim followers leave their body they don't go into the same kind of hell or heaven, because they imagine something different. So it can be based, at least in part, on human imagination and mental formation. Sri Aurobindo says

“these potent images may take form and body, endure in some subtly materialised world of thought and react on their creator.”

But still, there is a basic truth about these heavenly worlds. What is this basic truth? We know in the light of Sri Aurobindo that there are subtle-physical worlds, so some of these vital worlds could be called hell because they have dark evil beings who torture others and attempt to arrest the soul's progress. The next chapter will discuss

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the passage of the soul when it leaves the body and travels through these vital worlds, and some beings may try to stop its onward journey. These vital beings reflect our vital desires, so depending upon how much we are attached to our lusts, desires, passions etc., we may suffer in our passage, not because they are bad in themselves, but because they reflect the extent to which we are captive of these things here upon the earth when we are in the body. We may go through this vital world of hell in a minute, an hour, months, or years depending upon our consciousness on earth. These worlds can become hellish depending upon our level of consciousness when we are alive. Feelings of lust, anger, and hatred do not give any kind of quietness or peace, so while we are in the body itself we pass through a kind of hell because there is so much tension and worry. When we leave the body these things become more powerful because we do not have the protection and anchor of our physical body.

Sri Aurobindo says: “may conceivably be myths and imaginations that are used by the power of the creative Consciousness-Force to materialise its own idea-forces”.

This suggests that the divine Consciousness creates these forces but may sometimes use our human consciousness to materialise them, to make a kind of beautiful or ugly picture of them, but these pictures represent actual vital forces and beings in these worlds.

Thus, on this line of thinking, we swing back towards a view of the universe in which all things assume a certain hue of unreality except the all-productive Inconscience out of which they are created, the Ignorance which creates them and, it may be, a superconscient or inconscient impersonal Being into

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whose indifference all finally disappears or goes back and ceases there.

If people think supraphysical worlds do not exist, then this objective world could also be a myth. This is what Adi Shankaracharya told us, that this physical world is an illusion. If the other worlds do not exist, our world too might not truly exist. Even someone in the higher spiritual consciousness like Adi Shankaracharya experienced this world as a *mithya*, as unreal.

But we have no proof and there is no likelihood that man's mind can create in this way a world where none was before, create *in vacuo* without a substance to build in or build on, though it may well be that it can add something to a world already made. Mind is indeed a potent agency, more potent than we readily imagine; it can make formations which effectuate themselves in our own or others' consciousness and lives and even have an effect on inconscient Matter; but an entirely original creation in the void is beyond its possibilities. What we can rather hazard is that as it grows, man's mind enters into relation with new ranges of being and consciousness not at all created by him, new to him, already pre-existent in the All-Existence.

This is the central argument: "that the mind cannot create *in vacuo* without a substance to build in or build on." We may say that hell and heaven are built by our imagination, but the human mind cannot think of anything that does not exist in some form. Its creations or imaginations must already exist at some level or in some world. If it has created an Islamic heaven, Jannat with beautiful ladies giving wine and good food, somewhere

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* this must exist in some form. Hellish imaginations also exist somewhere, and many of these exist here on earth.

We transport all the good and beauty to heaven and all the dirty and ugly things to hell. The mind cannot create anything *in vacuo*. He says, “it can make formations which effectuate themselves in our own or others’ consciousness and lives and even have an effect on inconscient Matter, but an entirely original creation in the void is beyond its possibilities”. These subtle-physical worlds cannot be complete creations of the mind, because the mind does not create anything original. It is always an imitation.

In his increasing inner experience he opens up new planes of being in himself; as the secret centres of his consciousness dissolve their knots, he becomes able through them to conceive of those larger realms, to receive direct influences from them, to enter into them, to image them in his terrestrial mind and inner sense. He does create images, symbol-forms, reflective shapes of them with which his mind can deal; in this sense only he creates the Divine Image that he worships, creates the forms of the gods, creates new planes and worlds within him, and through these images the real worlds and powers that overtop our existence are able to take possession of the consciousness in the physical world, to pour into it their potencies, to transform it with the light of their higher being.

He says : “In his increasing inner experience he opens up new planes of being in himself”. Ancient religions created hells and heavens, but today’s minds may create something different. Human consciousness has changed or evolved. We are rising from consciousness

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to consciousness to the extent that now Sri Aurobindo has discovered the supramental level. Why was it not discovered five centuries ago? For the last 2000-3000

years we had Buddha, Christ, etc., but none of them discovered the supramental world. Sri Aurobindo did that now because the human

consciousness has come up to the level where he could discover those greater heights. At the time of the other Avatars, human consciousness was still very low. Every Avatar comes down and discovers one higher step. Sri Aurobindo discovered one higher step because humanity has come to a particular level in its evolution that we can go beyond. That is the way the mind develops. It creates new images, worships them, creates forms of gods, new planes and worlds within, and through these images, the real worlds and powers that overtop our existence can take possession of our consciousness.

But all this is not a creation of the higher worlds of being; it is a revelation of them to the consciousness of the soul on the material plane as it develops out of the Nescience. It is a creation of their forms here by a reception of their powers; there is an enlargement of our subjective life on this plane by the discovery of its true relation with higher planes of its own being from which it was separated by the veil of the material Nescience. This veil exists because the soul in the body has put behind it these greater possibilities in order that it might concentrate exclusively its consciousness and force upon its primary work in this physical world of being; but that primary work can have a sequel only by the veil being at least partially lifted or else made penetrable so that the higher planes of Mind, Life and Spirit may pour their significances into human existence.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is more or less the same idea. We are progressing in our mental consciousness and we keep receiving images and symbols of realities from higher levels of consciousness. Even our Vedas and Upanishads spoke of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, so we have spoken of these ideas, but today Sri Aurobindo speaks in greater detail because higher levels of consciousness have been achieved.

Someone said to Sri Aurobindo that you are not the first to speak of human unity or the new race, many people have spoken about it before, what is the big deal about it? He said the difference is that this time I have come to achieve it! Before it was only in ideas, now it is in action.

This he could do with the help of the supramental Force.

It is possible to suppose that these higher planes and worlds have been created subsequently to the manifestation of the material cosmos, to aid the evolution or in some sense as a result of it.

The first question we had taken up was whether these worlds were creations of the mind and it has been argued that the mind cannot conceive of something which does not at least have a basis in actual existence. The second question is whether the supraphysical worlds exist as part of involution or as a part of evolution. This is important because if they are part of evolution, they may have been created by the mind, but if they were created in the involution they would have preceded human beings.

This is a notion which the physical mind, starting in all its ideas from the material universe as the one thing which it knows, has analysed and can deal with in a beginning of mastery, might easily tend to accept, if obliged to admit a supraphysical existence; it could then keep the material, the Inconscience,

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as the starting-point and support of all being, as it is undoubtedly the starting-point for us of the evolutionary movement of which the material world is the scene.

It is possible to think that the creation of the supraphysical has taken place as part of evolution.

The materialist does not believe in the reality of the superconscient; for the materialist only the physical world is real. Or if he would accept that there are supraphysical worlds, he would say they have been created after this material world and as an extension of it. He would not accept the original independence of these worlds. He will not accept that anything pre-exists the physical universe.

Our mind could still keep matter and material force as the first existence,—so accepted and cherished by it because it is the first thing that it knows, the one thing that is always securely present and knowable,—

and maintain the spiritual and the supraphysical in a dependence upon the assured foundation in Matter*.

*Footnote: *There are certain expressions in the Rig Veda which seem to embody this view. Earth (the material principle) is spoken of as the foundation of all the worlds or the seven worlds are described as the seven planes of Earth.*

Materialists always keep matter as the first principle.

They get support from certain verses in the Rig Veda –

Earth is the foundation of all the worlds. But Rig Veda doesn't end with that, it is necessary to go deeper in our analysis of it.

But how then were these other worlds created, by what force, by what instrumentality? It might be the Life and Mind developing out of the Inconscient

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* which have at the same time developed these other worlds or planes in the subliminal consciousness of the living beings who appear in it. To the subliminal being in life and after death, – for it is the inner being that survives the death of the body, – these worlds might be real because sensible to its wider range of consciousness; it would move in them with that sense of reality, derivative perhaps but convincing, and it would send up its experience of them as belief and imagination to the surface being.

The existence of other worlds could be thought of as a post-creation of matter. We could ask, who contacts these worlds? It is not the animals, not the plants; they don't know about these worlds. It is only human beings. The materialist could say that it is the subliminal of human beings which contacts these worlds, so they must have been created after mankind was created. If we agree to all this, then the whole question of involution collapses.

Sri Aurobindo as a philosopher takes up all these views, puts them under the scanner and answers and clarifies each of them.

This is a possible account, if we accept Consciousness as the real creative Power or agent and all things as formations of consciousness; but it would not give to the supraphysical planes of being the unsubstantiality or less palpable reality which the physical mind would like to attach to them; they would have the same reality in themselves as the physical world or plane of physical experience has in its own order.

He concludes this point of view by saying that even if we accept this, it does not mean these supraphysical worlds are unreal. It would mean that they were created after the

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material creation, but it would not mean they are less real than this world itself.

If in this or some other way the higher worlds were developed subsequently to the creation of the material world the primary creation, by a larger secret evolution out of the Inconscient, it must have been done by some All-Soul in its emergence, by a process of which we can have no knowledge and for the purpose of the evolution here, as adjuncts to it or as its larger consequences, so that life and mind and spirit might be able to move in fields of a freer scope with a repercussion of these greater powers and experiences on the material self-expression. But against this hypothesis there stands the fact that we find these higher worlds in our vision and experience of them to be in no way based upon the material universe, in no way its results, but rather greater terms of being, larger and freer ranges of consciousness, and all the action of the material plane looks more like the result and not the origin of these greater terms, derivatory from them, even partly dependent on them in its evolutionary endeavour.

The argument which we have taken up is that these worlds have been created after the material world was created. If so then it means that these worlds are dependent upon this physical world. But, what does experience tell us? We have already seen that contrary to this argument the earth is

dependent upon these worlds. We discussed the world of music, the world of art, the world of sculpture, etc. All these are recreated here on earth and come from there. Even basic materials we use like chairs, tables, etc., are all imitations of objects in other worlds.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Plato had spoken about a world of original ideas. In a way, Plato was speaking about the real idea, the supramental world. It was a kind of intuition of the supramental world.

All that we see on earth is a copy, and as we know, usually a photocopy is not as good as the original, and if we take a photocopy, its quality becomes inferior. Similarly, ideas when they come into the artist's mind and then later when the final product is made, have some similarity to the original idea, but they lose much of their original quality.

Therefore our material physical world depends on the subtle-physical worlds, and this suggests that these worlds pre-exist the physical world.

Keeping in mind the same argument, we can say that we have a body, life, mind and the levels beyond mind, the Overmind and Supermind. Up until now, what was happening is that what we call the supraphysical worlds up to the Overmind have been influencing the mind, life, and the physical. The Overmind is the birthplace of the gods. Already this world is under the influences of all these levels. Now what Sri Aurobindo adds is that there are higher ranges above the Overmind which are ready to descend and influence life on earth.

Sri Aurobindo concludes that these worlds do pre-exist and influence the earth's life. At the proper evolutionary time, the supramental world also will manifest and influence our world. The last idea is very important:

“which is at the same time an evolution of all the powers of the Spirit”. Up until now, there has been only a partial influence; the overmental gods were not able to make this world a happy place. We have prayed, and we have been helped, but we have remained the same for the past five or ten thousand years. The supermind which

Sri Aurobindo realised and brought down its influence to the earth promises to bring a change on earth and human nature and fulfil them. It will make the mind a fulfilled mind, make the vital a fulfilled and beautiful expression of the Divine, and make the body an immortal body. The coming of the supermind will bring fulfillment of all the instruments of the spirit.

We have covered the first argument wherein Sri Aurobindo establishes with an analysis of different schools of thought the existence of the supraphysical worlds and their necessity. The second major argument is if these worlds exist then is there a hierarchy among them? If there is a hierarchy then the soul after it leaves its body and goes beyond. It would be able to ascend to higher levels of consciousness and could come closer to its own world, the psychic world.

After Sri Aurobindo establishes the hierarchy of levels, in the next chapter “Rebirth and Other Worlds”, which is the most interesting of all the three, he takes up karma and rebirth. As we have seen from the beginning of this chapter that there are three main points Sri Aurobindo argues in these three chapters: one is the necessity of a central being or spiritual soul, the second is the necessity of the existence of supraphysical worlds, and the third is the connection between rebirth and karma. All these points are necessary to establish Sri Aurobindo’s theory of rebirth.

We have seen that Sri Aurobindo’s theory of rebirth is quite different from that of Buddhists, Mayavadins, and materialists because the former is inalienably linked with the spiritual evolution of the world. If spiritual evolution

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is not accepted, then the entire theory of rebirth has no meaning whatsoever. Other religions and other doctrines have spoken about rebirth but those theories do not explain its necessity. It is only Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy that gives us the necessity of rebirth. If

rebirth is not there as a means for the spiritual evolution of the soul, then the possibility of the coming of the New Race or Superman cannot hold ground. That is why this theory of rebirth is of such great importance in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. Therefore, he gives us these three main chapters on this topic.

This character of the other worlds defeats all our attempts to give the premier importance to our own plane of being and to our own part in the mundane manifestation. We do not create God as a myth of our consciousness, but are instruments for a progressive manifestation of the Divine in the material being. We do not create the gods, his powers, but rather such divinity as we manifest is the partial reflection and shaping here of eternal godheads. We do not create the higher planes, but are intermediaries by which they reveal their light, power, beauty in whatever form and scope can be given to them by Nature-force on the material plane.

Sri Aurobindo says that it is not human imagination which has created these gods and supraphysical worlds.

It is a higher divine Power, what we call consciousness-force, which uses the imagination of mankind in the creation of these worlds. In fact, imagination itself is an instrument for the creation of the supraphysical worlds.

Our imagination and mind are like receivers of the Divine's power. When the Divine wants to reveal himself

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as light, power and beauty he finds forms including human beings who can receive this light and power and beauty. He needs some kind of receptivity from the human mind. Those artists, philosophers, and thinkers who can catch this divine element are used by the divine to express to the world a part of his own consciousness.

For example, Sri Aurobindo has spoken about the dance of Nataraja, that it is due to the intuition that artists got that image. The human mind catches the light and beauty and it manifests itself. Similarly, when we speak of hell

and heaven there may be a role of imagination, but at the same time, there is some truth in that too. What we need to understand is that the human mind is not an original creator but an intermediary which catches ideas and images of higher realities.

It is the pressure of the Life-world which enables life to evolve and develop here in the forms we already know; it is that increasing pressure which drives it to aspire in us to a greater revelation of itself and will one day deliver the mortal from his subjection to the narrow limitations of his present incompetent and restricting physicality. It is the pressure of the Mind-world which evolves and develops mind here and helps us to find a leverage for our mental self-uplifting and expansion, so that we may hope to enlarge continually our self of intelligence and even to break the prison-walls of our matter-bound physical mentality. It is the pressure of the supramental and spiritual worlds which is preparing to develop here the manifest power of the Spirit and by it open our being on the physical plane into the freedom and infinity of the superconscient Divine; that contact, that pressure can alone liberate from the apparent

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Inconscience, which was our starting-point, the all-conscient Godhead concealed in us.

We have seen that there is an involution or descent of consciousness from the Supermind down to the Inconscient, and from the Inconscient there has started an evolutionary process. In evolution, there was first the physical or material, then the vital, then the mind, and then other higher ranges of consciousness until the supermind. It is the same steps as the involution but in ascending order. What we need to understand here is that it is the pressure of these higher worlds that makes the evolutionary ascent possible. There are two things which are necessary, one is the pressure from below, which means for example that the animal consciousness had to mature enough before it could give rise to the mental consciousness, but the other thing necessary is the pressure of the mind planes on this animal consciousness to give birth to the mental consciousness. In evolution, both the pressure from below and the pressure from above are necessary.

Sri Aurobindo suggests here that the supramental consciousness is also putting pressure on the mind. The mind has come to a certain level of maturation through its activities, of which four types of activity are of great importance. They are religion, occultism, philosophy, and spiritual experiences. All these have uplifted the human consciousness and it has been prepared by these four elements. Now the mind is more or less ready to receive the higher consciousness and to go to the next stage of evolution. That higher stage will not come on its own; there is a pressure of the supramental consciousness on the mind. Therefore, we are bound to have superman in

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the centuries to come. But someone has to bring down the supramental and connect it to the earth and that is what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have done. They received the supramental force and linked it with this human mind. Supermind by itself and mind on its own level needed a bridge in the form of human personality i.e. the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. One of the connecting points was literature, especially the book *The Life Divine*.

He has brought the supramental consciousness on the rational and mental consciousness in *The Life Divine*, and that is why it is not just a book, it is a point of contact between the supramental consciousness and the mind.

Savitri represents a point of contact of the supramental consciousness with the psychic being.

At the same time there are some elements in our subliminal experience which raise a point of question against any invariable priority of the other worlds to the material existence. One such indication is that in the vision of after-death experience there is a persistent tradition of residence in conditions which seem to be a supraphysical prolongation of earth-conditions, earth-nature, earth-experience. Another is that, in the life-worlds especially, we find formulations which seem to resemble the inferior movements of earth-existence; here are already embodied the principles of darkness, falsehood, incapacity and evil which we have supposed to be consequent upon the evolution out of the material Inconscience.

When we speak about supraphysical worlds, including hell and heaven, there is the question of whether they were created prior to the material world. Some people think that the supraphysical worlds have come after the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* creation of the material world. This is supported by the fact that “in the vision of after-death experience there is a persistent tradition of residence in conditions which seem to be a supraphysical prolongation of earth-conditions.”

Even hell seems to be a certain prolongation or extension of earth conditions. All the suffering and sorrow that we have on earth seem to be gathered together in a place called hell. Hell is not seen as a place that exists in itself and is original, but rather that the sufferings of hell are an extension of what is experienced upon the earth.

This would suggest that hell has been created after the creation of human life. And what we call heaven seems to be made of the enjoyments we have upon earth but all packed together. Moreover, each religion has its own kind of heaven associated with its own definition of happiness and pleasure. This suggests they are an extension of human consciousness created after the birth of mankind.

The descent of Mind and Life into evolution need not have created any such untoward developments of the limitation of being and consciousness: for this descent is in its nature a limitation of knowledge; existence and cognition and delight of being confine themselves in a lesser truth and good and beauty and its inferior harmony, and move according to that law of a narrower light, but in such a movement darkness and suffering and evil are not obligatory phenomena.

When the mind plane puts pressure to release the mental principle in the evolving life, this mental consciousness is only a limited knowledge, not a perverted one; because after all mind is a delegate of supermind, it comes from a supramental origin. The difference is that omniscient knowledge becomes limited. Similarly, life is an expression

of Chit, of the infinite consciousness-force; in Chit force and delight are infinite, and in the evolution of life they become a limited force, pleasure and pain, and desire.

Human suffering has not come with the mind, it has come with the vital consciousness.

That is why when it comes to purification, the vital needs to be purified the most. The Buddha told us to get rid of desire because although human beings are ignorant, it is not as dangerous as falsehood which comes from the vital. For example, a man working as a carpenter may not be able to read *The Life Divine*, he is not bad because he cannot understand the English language, he is only ignorant of that language, but if he does something false, we call him a bad man. Evil, falsehood and suffering come from this vital consciousness and at the supraphysical levels also there are vital worlds which support and stimulate the problems we have upon earth – the violence, pain, perversion, and falsehood come primarily from the vital world.

Whatever human beings have imagined has some truth, because only what is in the higher worlds gets manifested in some form here on earth. As we have seen in *Savitri*, the vital worlds have many levels and ranges, and the vital physical is the darkest part. The higher vital worlds become purified and are the source of all our music and art and literary expression. This is the vital-mental plane which has the worlds of creation, poetry, art, etc. As we come down to the lower vital worlds perversion increases and we end up in falsehood.

If we find them existing in these worlds of other mind and other life, even though not pervading it but only occupying their separate province, we must

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* either conclude that they have come into existence by a projection out of the inferior evolution, upward from below,

by something in the subliminal parts of Nature bursting there into a larger formation of the evil created here, or that they were already created as part of a parallel gradation to the involutory descent, a gradation forming a stair for evolutionary ascension towards Spirit just as the involutory was a stair of the descent of the Spirit.

Here Sri Aurobindo is presenting his view in the most unbiased manner; as a philosopher, he takes each view and goes to the end of it and then logically he comes to his view.

These worlds of a larger Life would then hold in themselves both the more luminous and the darker formations of our world's life in a medium in which they could arrive freely at their independent expression, their own type's full freedom and natural completeness and harmony for good or for evil,—if indeed that distinction applies in these ranges,—a completeness and independence impossible here in our existence where all is mingled in the complex interaction necessary to the field of a many-sided evolution leading towards a final integration.

This discusses the existence of the dark and evil vital worlds and their influence on the human vital. In the involution these vital worlds also have been created by the same Brahman; Advaita Vedanta would not think that evil could be created by any other being such as Satan. Suffering, sorrow, delight, joy and everything else have been created by the same Brahman. We started with the question of whether these worlds were created

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in involution before the birth of human beings or in the evolution and afterwards. He has established that they were created in the process of involution. He says that in these dark vital worlds, “what we call false, dark or evil seems there to have a truth of its own and to be entirely content with its own type”. There is a concentration of evil, suffering and perversity, falsehood, etc., and the beings that live there have a full play of their vital nature.

When the vital beings of these worlds come in touch with human beings, they try to make us their fodder, they use human beings for their fulfilment.

The Mother has said that even though sex is a fulfilment of those forces, they use human beings to fulfil themselves. We think we are fulfilling our desires, but in reality, we are fulfilling those vital beings' desires. It is not just with sex, but also with anger, hatred, etc. When we become instruments of these beings they get their nourishment from our sorrows and pleasures.

When we counter these forces with our Guru's force; when the force which tries to come gets rejected, it will go to some other person and get its fulfilment somewhere else. For this we need spirituality. Sri Aurobindo says that here in our world there is an admixture of these forces with other higher forces, so they do not get their full play.

But they have complete fulfilment in their worlds. Every world has its own satisfaction and fulfilment. Like these lower vital worlds, there are beautiful higher vital worlds as well, like those of music, painting, art etc. We on earth are an admixture of all these worlds, so we don't receive their influences in full. They all want to manifest here on earth and make us instruments to fulfil their needs.

Man's heavens and hells or worlds of light and worlds

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of darkness, however imaginative in their building, proceed from a perception of these powers existing in their own principle and throwing their influences on him in life from a beyond-life which provides the elements of his evolutionary existence.

He concludes by saying:

These other worlds, then, are not evolutionary, but typical; but it is one thing though not the sole reason of their existence that they provide things that must arise in the involutory manifestation as well as things thrown up in the evolution with a field of satisfaction of their own significance where they can exist in their own right; this established condition is a base from which their functions and workings can be cast as elements into the complex process of evolutionary Nature.

The basic nature of these worlds is that they are typical, which means they are fixed in their own type, they do not progress and change, and there is no evolution. If there is a beautiful mental world, it is beautiful for eternity, if there is a dark and evil vital world it is like that for eternity.

It is only earth and mankind which is evolutionary.

Because it is evolutionary, one day it can become fully divine; the other worlds being typical can never become fully divine. Today, we may say the heavens are good and beautiful, but the earth will become better and more beautiful. Sri Aurobindo has written a poem called "The Life Heavens". In his spiritual ascent, he went into this region and it was so beautiful that even Sri Aurobindo halted to enjoy it, but then he heard the cry of the earth and continued on his inner journey. These life heavens are so beautiful that one is tempted to remain there, but

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they are as if images are permanently stuck on a wall. On the other hand, the earth is full of sorrow and suffering at this moment, but it is evolutionary. This is the reason why even the gods come down to earth and take a human form to evolve. The gods and angels don't have psychic beings, they are all envious of human beings. Human beings alone have a psychic being. We may be full of misery and suffering, but one day we will become divine whereas those worlds will be left behind. Those godheads will no more be required for the future of humanity. At present we are below these gods so we need their help, but once we reach the supermind we will no more need their help.

That is why the Mother and Sri Aurobindo said that the age of religion is over, it has no place in the future.

If we look from this point of view at man's traditional accounts of other-worldly existence, we shall find that mostly they point to worlds of a larger Life liberated from the restrictions and imperfections or incompletenesses of Life in earth-nature. These accounts are evidently built largely by imagination, but there is an element also of intuition and divination, a feeling of what Life can be and surely is in some domain of its manifested

or its realisable nature; there is also an element of true subliminal contact and experience.

We have already dealt with the idea that these worlds have completeness which we cannot get here. Even lovers say if we cannot meet here we will meet in the heavens.

In India, we have a tradition saying that marriage is a tie for seven lives. But the truth is that each soul takes up a body for a certain experience and when that experience is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* complete it looks for another, so its partner soul is likely to be different.

But, apart from these subtler Life-states, the traditional accounts of other-worldly existence contain, though as a rarer more elevated element not included in the popular notion of these things, a higher grade of states of existence which are clearly of a mental and not a vital character and others founded on some spiritual-mental principle; these higher principles are formulated in states of being into which our inner experience can rise or the soul enter. The principle of gradation we have accepted is therefore justified provided we recognise that it is one way of organising our experience and that other ways proceeding from other viewpoints are possible.

For a classification can always be valid from the principle and viewpoint adopted by it while from other principles and viewpoints another classification of the same things can be equally valid. But for our purpose the system we have chosen is of the greatest value because it is fundamental and answers to a truth of the manifestation which is of the utmost practical importance; it helps us to understand our own constituted existence and the course of the involution and the evolutionary motion of Nature.

This is more or less a continuation of the previous point.

He says, “The principle of gradation we have accepted is therefore justified”. The gradations that have been given by Sri Aurobindo –

Supermind, Overmind, Mind, Life and Matter – have some rational justification. We have constant communication with these worlds. We may not know or acknowledge it but we are being influenced by

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them. In our ignorance, we think that the ideas which come to us are our own, but in reality, they come from the universal mental consciousness. The only thing we have here is a different ability to tune into them, so we receive them accordingly like TV channels. This tuning is called education. Integral Education aims at the tuning of the whole being, physical, vital, and mental to the universal consciousness.

Let us resume with the third argument, that is, the importance of the existence of other worlds and their influence on earth.

The existence and influence of other worlds are a fact of primary importance for the possibilities and for the scope of our evolution in terrestrial Nature. For if the physical universe were the only field of manifestation of the infinite Reality and at the same time the field of its whole manifestation, we should have to suppose that, since all the principles of its being from Matter to Spirit are entirely involved in the apparently inconscient Force which is the basis of the first workings of this universe, they are being evolved by it here completely and here solely, without any other aid or pressure except that of the secret Superconscience within it. There would then be a system of things in which the principle of Matter must always remain the first principle, the essential and original determining condition of manifested existence. Spirit might indeed in the end arrive to a limited extent at its natural domination; it might make its basis of physical matter a more elastic instrument not altogether prohibitive of the action of its own highest law and nature or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* opposed to that action, as it now is in its inelastic resistance.

One of the arguments that Sri Aurobindo gives here concerns where souls go after leaving their physical bodies. If other worlds do not exist, perhaps there could be an immediate transmigration from one physical body to another like Pythagoras proposed, but that would be a journey without meaning. If souls simply transmigrate from one body to another there would be no question of evolution or progress for the soul. The soul would be tied to matter, like life and mind; it could not get free from the matter's dominance because it would constitute its very substance. Our body is under the dominance of matter which gives it rigidity and stability but also reluctance to change, but our minds are flexible, open, and can receive subtle ideas; they are not rigid like our bodies. Our minds and thoughts are not rigid; but if there were only matter and no intermediate regions then even the mind would be dominated by matter. Our mind is not just brain cells as the doctors say, it has a mental consciousness much different and far more subtle than matter. Matter by itself could not have expressed itself in art, philosophy, etc.

Sri Aurobindo says that if we imagine there is only Matter and Spirit, then the full manifestation of the Divine becomes impossible.

But, given the fact that the infinite Reality is free in the play of its consciousness, it is not bound to involve itself in the nescience of Matter before it can at all manifest. It is possible for it to create just the contrary order of things, a world in which the unity of spiritual being is the matrix and first condition of any formation or action, the Energy at work is a self-aware

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spiritual existence in movement, and all its names and forms are a self-conscious play of the spiritual unity.

Or it might be an order in which the Spirit's innate power of conscious Force or Will would realise freely and directly its own possibilities in itself and not, as here, through the restricting medium of the Life-Force in matter; that realisation would be at once the first principle of the manifestation and the object of all its free and blissful action. It might be an order, again, in which the free play of an infinite mutual self-delight in a multiplicity of

beings conscious not only of their concealed or underlying eternal unity but of their present joy of oneness would be the object; in such a system the action of the principle of self-existent Bliss would be the first principle and the universal condition. Again, it might be a world-order in which the Supermind would be the dominant principle from the beginning; the nature of the manifestation would then be a multiplicity of beings finding through the free and luminous play of their divine individuality all the manifold joy of their difference in oneness.

About this idea, Sri Aurobindo has not spoken earlier.

He says that spirit has involved itself in Matter and because it is there in the inconscient, it evolves, it gradually comes out and expresses itself freely. This is one possibility of the manifestation of the spirit, but there could be other options also. Sri Aurobindo says let us not think that creation had no other choice. The spirit could also have manifested in infinite self-aware Being, or in infinite conscious Force or Will, or in “infinite mutual self-delight” in a multiplicity of beings.

We could ask ourselves whether spirit in its involution

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* could have stopped at mind or life and not gone to the level of the inconscient. Why did it not do so? Why did it come down to the level of inconscient matter? Perhaps this world would have been better off if the involution had stopped at life or mind, but it plunged into Matter, the inconscient, but for what reason?

What gives individuality is form. If the supreme Divine wanted to be individualised, he had to take a firm form.

The forms of mind and emotions are flexible, but the physical body has a firm solidity. Matter was the best choice for Divine to become individualised. The Divine wanted to become an individual to express himself in the most infinitesimal form possible; the supreme Oneness wanted to become the very opposite, and that opposite is physical atomic particles.

Nor need the series stop here: for we observe that with us Mind is hampered by Life in Matter and finds all the difficulty possible in dominating the resistance of these two different powers and that Life itself is similarly restricted by the mortality, the inertia and the instability of Matter; but evidently there can be a world-order in which neither of these two disabilities forms part of the first conditions of existence.

We have discussed the same idea already, that there could be a world of mind, where the mind would not have been dragged down by tamas, inertia, of the physical. For example, if we have severe pain in one part of our body and we sit down to read *The Life Divine*, our mind may want to, but the pain in the body drags the focus of the mind back into the pain; we cannot concentrate to read, we are not free to do what the mind wants. That is why it

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is important to keep a fit body because it is the basis for the instruments of the mind and life energies to function.

So, to conclude, there is a necessity for the other worlds

– first of all for the journey of the soul once it leaves its body, and secondly, for the Divine to express himself freely on all the different levels without being hampered by Matter.

That could make no difference if all this were only a philosophical possibility or a potentiality in the being of Sachchidananda which it never realises or has not yet realised, or, if realised, has not brought within the scope of the consciousness of beings living in the physical universe. But all our spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness, brings us always a constant and, in its main principles, an invariable evidence of the existence of higher worlds, freer planes of existence. Not having bound ourselves down, like so much of modern thought, to the dogma that only physical experience or experience based upon the physical sense is true, the analysis of physical experience by the reason alone verifiable, and all else only result of physical experience and physical existence and anything

beyond this an error, self-delusion and hallucination, we are free to accept this evidence and to admit the reality of these planes.

We see that they are, practically, different harmonies from the harmony of the physical universe; they occupy, as the word “plane” suggests, a different level in the scale of being and adopt a different system and ordering of its principles. We need not inquire, for our present purpose, whether they coincide in time and space with our own world or move in a different field

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of space and in another stream of time,— in either case it is in a more subtle substance and with other movements. All that directly concerns us is to know whether they are different universes, each complete in itself and in no way meeting, intercrossing or affecting the others, or are rather different scales of one graded and interwoven system of being, parts therefore of one complex universal system.

Sri Aurobindo expresses a new idea here – “all our spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness” to these subtle physical worlds. Human beings, human experience, have borne perennial witness to their existence. This is not an argument, it’s an affirmation and confirmation; the existence of the subtle worlds is not just logical, but is confirmed through the spiritual experiences of many who have seen these worlds. Sri Aurobindo has contributed significantly to the description of the supraphysical worlds. No other religion or philosophy has given in such detail a graphic description of the supraphysical worlds as Sri Aurobindo has in *Savitri*.

This is one of the greatest gifts to us by Sri Aurobindo, he has shown the graded hierarchy of these worlds in *Savitri*. That is why he says that spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness. These worlds can be experienced and he himself has done so. Modern thought believes only in the reality of matter and looks for physical proof through physical means, through which these worlds cannot be found. They have to be experienced with their own instruments, not with physical tools. We can get knowledge of these higher planes through meditation and by going into the

subliminal consciousness. One of the important functions of the subliminal is that it connects us with the supraphysical worlds. Everything which we

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receive from the supraphysical worlds passes through the subliminal, and from there comes into our outer mind, life and body. We say they are my ideas or my feelings because we think they come from our mind and vital, but actually there is nothing that is mine, it is all borrowed and comes from the universal consciousness.

In other words, the higher worlds have not come into being by a pressure from the lower physical universe,—let us say, from Sachchidananda in the physical Inconscience, or else by the urge of his being as it emerges from the Inconscience into Life and Mind and Spirit and experiences the necessity of creating worlds or planes in which those principles shall have a freer play and in which the human soul may strengthen its vital, mental or spiritual tendencies.

Still less are they the creations of the human soul itself, whether its dreams or the result of the constant self-projections of mankind in its dynamic and creative being beyond the limits of the physical consciousness.

We have concluded that these supraphysical worlds are not the creations of the human mind, they are not creations of evolution; they are creations of involution itself. In the process of involution, these worlds have been created and our human mind simply reflects them. An artist paints what is coming from within, a poet writes what comes from within; these things are coming from the subliminal. Our minds cannot conceive of anything which has not been seen or experienced and much of that comes through the subliminal. Mind is only a reflector of the images of these planes.

These planes or systems are then at least coeval and

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* co-existent with that which presents itself to us as the physical universe.

The important terms here are “coeval and co-existent”; it means that all these worlds are part of the same creation as our physical universe.

We have been led to conclude that the development of Life, Mind and Spirit in the physical being presupposes their existence; for these powers are developed here by two co-operating forces, an upward-tending force from below, an upward-drawing and downward-pressing force from above.

We have seen this before: for evolution to proceed two forces are required: one from below and another from above. For example, when the mind was born, animal life had been prepared for millions of years and there was pressure from below to move further. At the same time, for this progress to occur there had to be a pressure from the mental plane from above.

A secret continuous action of the higher powers and principles from their own planes upon terrestrial being and nature through the subliminal self, which is itself a projection from those planes into the world born of the Inconscience, must have an effect and a significance. Its first effect has been the liberation of Life and Mind out of Matter; its last effect has been to assist the emergence of a spiritual consciousness, a spiritual will and spiritual sense of existence in the terrestrial being so that he is no longer solely preoccupied with his outermost life or with that and mental pursuits and interests, but has learned to look within, to discover his inner being, his spiritual self, to aspire to overpass earth and her limitations.

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Evolution has moved from Matter to Life to Mind and now we are moving toward the liberation of a spiritual will, a spiritual consciousness, which will end up in a supramental consciousness.

An action from within and an action from above can overcome the predominance of the material formula, diminish and finally put an end to the power of the Inconscience, reverse the order of the consciousness, substitute the Spirit for Matter as his conscious foundation of being and liberate its higher powers to their complete and characteristic expression in the life of the soul embodied in Nature.

This is how he concludes, all these pressures from below and from above will one day liberate the real spirit that is hidden in Matter. As we know, in Matter there is not only life and mind, but the higher levels are also hidden there.

One day they also will be liberated and we will have a new supramental world.

Lecture Notes

I. Introduction

a) An important question that has to be settled in connection with rebirth is that of the existence of other worlds or places besides this world and their connection with the evolutionary process.

II. A supposition of no other intermediary places a) It could be supposed that there is only the Absolute above and the Inconscient below.

b) The individual souls would descend precipitously into Inconscient and also return with an abrupt transit.

c) This concept seems too trenchant and simple.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* III. First Alternative hypothesis of creation

a) This creation is made out of an inexplicable desire of an All-Will. Consequently, this desire urged a collectivity of souls to plunge into the Inconscient.

b) The All-Soul itself plunged into the darkness of Inconscient carrying the individual souls with it to begin the evolutionary movement.

c) If the individual souls do not have a pre-existence, then they would be only temporary products of Prakriti.

d) These alternatives could difficult to maintain if it is subsequently found that there are other planes of existence.

e) However, in answer to the argument cancelling these alternatives it could be said that these other worlds were created subsequently in the evolutionary course of the souls.

IV. Second alternative of creation a) If the world has been created by the desire of the individual soul, then the mental

b) Individual and not the Transcendent Divinity is the creator.

c) But the world is too vast in its movement for such an account of its working to be credible. Only a cosmic Being can be the creator.

V. One and the Many

a) The Many was originally immanent in the One as one of the potentialities of the Transcendent. The individual souls depend upon the universal and the universal's origin is in the Transcendent.

b) Hence it is not the Many forced the One by their desire to descend into manifestation. That would

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be reverse altogether the true dependence of things.

The All-Soul must first accept the veil of inconscient Nature before the Individual souls can put on the veil of the Ignorance.

VI. Desire as such cannot be the principle of creation a) Desire as such is the result of incompleteness, of insufficiency. Hence, desire can have no place in the All-Will or the Supreme who seek for something that he already enjoy. He is the very delight of existence.

b) So, creation took place not because of a desire of the Supreme but that was a possibility of its self-creation or manifestation.

VII. Materialistic conception

a) According to this view, Matter is the original power and form of the manifested being and the spirit had no other choice.

b) In that case, there is then no separate plane of the Superconscience, for the Superconscient is here only, not elsewhere; there are no supraphysical

worlds according this view.

c) According to this view, even mind and life are therefore products of Matter or forms that arise as a result of an evolution from Inconscience to Superconscience.

d) But such an argument is not tenable because life and mind are too different from Matter they are in reality independent products of a spiritual energy and themselves powers of manifestation of the Spirit. Thus the idea of a sole material world become untenable.

There could be worlds of Mind and worlds of life founded on a subtler and more plastic substance.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* VIII. Three main questions:

a) Is there any evidence of the existence of such other worlds?

b) If such worlds exist, do they form any arising or descending order between Matter and Spirit?

c) If such worlds exist in any hierarchy, do they have any interaction with the world of Matter?

IX. Do such supraphysical worlds exist?

a) Right in the beginning of its existence, mankind believed in the existence of other worlds and the communication with them. But, with the advent of rationalism, such an idea has been rejected as a hallucination. Rationalists demand an objective and physical proof of the existence of such worlds.

b) In answer to this demand, we many counter say that such a demand is irrational and illogical, because if a supraphysical fact objectifies itself it is to a subtler sense in as and only derivatively on the outward physical sense.

c) Our physical mind is not the whole of us; reality cannot be restricted to a sole field of this narrowness.

X. The Subjective and the Objective a) The rationalist argues that the subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since there is no recognised method of verification.

b) But error is not the prerogative of the subjective or the subliminal parts; it exists in the physical mind and its methods and standards too.

c) On the contrary, our subjective being is the basis of our objective experience. And all such experiences have their validity according to their own law and by

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a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain.

XI. Influence of the Supraphysical realities a) On a closer scrutiny of the intimations of world-realities, we discover that there are higher planes of being and consciousness which penetrate and envelop the physical plane with their subtle influences.

b) Our experience of these planes could be purely subjective and objective. In the subjective experience we find that what exists on the life plane is pre-existent on these higher planes though in a more plastic range of possibilities,

c) The contact with these planes is normally done without our knowledge. Only by going inwards can we connect with these influences and we can reject or accept them consciously.

XII. Supraphysical worlds

a) The subjective experience of these supraphysical realities shows us that these are independent worlds which exist in themselves. They are inhabited by beings with a subtle substance tangible only to a subtle sense.

b) These beings enter into secret communication with earth - existence and act upon world's happenings and events. Some of them have a very positive

effect and we think to be divine forces, while others are harmful and destructive and we call them Titans etc.

c) In certain subliminal states of consciousness, it is possible to enter these worlds and know their secrets.

d) Those who have had contact with these worlds, cannot put them aside as mere superstition or hallucination for they are too real and effective in their pressure.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* XIII. Has Man created these Supraphysical worlds?

a) Are these supraphysical worlds the gods a creation of man's imaginations? If human subjective consciousness can create worlds and beings, then it could be said that this objective world is also a myth of the Consciousness-Force. Following these arguments one swings back towards the view that all things are unreal except the all productive Inconscience or the Superconscient.

b) However, there is no proof that man can create anything in vacuum, that create anything tangible without a substance to build with. It could at best make an impact on other's consciousness by its formations.

c) In his increasing inner consciousness he opens up new planes of being in himself and by this contact becomes capable of creating images and symbols to whom he gives value and also worships. Hence, it is not a creation of the higher worlds of being, but only a realisation of his own higher potential.

XIV. Are the supraphysical worlds dependent on the material cosmos or independent?

a) If our mind maintains Matter and the Inconscience as the assured foundation, then it would conclude that the supraphysical worlds have been created subsequently only to support farther evolution. Even if we accept

this argument, it does not mean that these worlds are unsubstantial; they would have the same reality in themselves as the physical world, b) These worlds have been created by the All-Soul by a process unknown to us so that life, mind and spirit might be able to move in a freer scope. Seen

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in this manner, the supraphysical worlds are in no way dependent upon the material universe, but they precede the physical world.

XV. Hierarchy of the Worlds:

a) Human consciousness has not created God, or the gods and his powers, nor the higher planes. It is only an intermediary of these higher power and light and beauty.

b) It is the pressure of the life-world, the mind-world and the spiritual worlds which enables life and mind and the infinity of the superconscient Divine. Human consciousness is only an instrument in the supreme purpose of evolutionary Nature.

XVI. Priority of the other worlds to the material existence?

a) One example of such a question, that the other worlds may be prior to the material existence, is that of the vision of after-death experience.

b) It is the evil powers of the vital being that bring in suffering to man. But these evil powers were not created by Mind and Life into the limitation of being and consciousness; they are either a projection out of inferior evolution or they were already created in the involutory process.

c) In the course of involution, there has been a gradual fading off of the Light of the Spirit. Hence, there are worlds where what we call false, dark or evil seems there to have a truth of its own. What is divine or demoniac, is in its own domain, normal to itself.

d) Man's perception of heaven and hell, proceed from a perception of these powers existing in their own level.

e) In the same manner, powers of Mind have in the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Mind-world their own field of fullness of self-nature and influence human existence.

f) All these other worlds are not evolutionary, but typical.

XVII. Man's traditional accounts of other-worldly existence.

a) These traditional accounts, though, largely imaginative, have an element of intuition and divination and subliminal experience.

b) The traditional accounts also speak of higher grades of states of existence which are founded on some spiritual-mental principle. These states of consciousness penetrate and envelope out material universe with their influences.

XVIII. Importance of the existence of other worlds and their influence on earth.

a) The existence of the other worlds is important because without these worlds, there would be only Spirit and Matter, and Spirit would be entirely dependent upon for its manifestation and there would be no other field.

b) Sachichidananda cannot be limited to the present kind of involution where Matter is the first principle.

The creation could have had other principles as the matrix, such as the spirit or the Force or Will, or Bliss itself. It could also have been that the Supermind could have been the dominant principle of the creation.

c) It could also be that Mind and Life be the matrix of creation. They could be the dominant principles free to work upon their respective substances without the hindrance of the encasing and disintegrating forces of Matter.

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XIX. Spiritual testimony of these other worlds.

a) All our spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness to the invariable evidence of the existence of other worlds. These worlds have different harmonies from the harmony of the physical universe.

b) These higher planes actually interact constantly upon our own plane of being. And we can become aware of this communication when we go back into our subliminal being or enlarge our waking consciousness.

c) This establishes the ancient traditional belief that our soul can sojourn in other worlds than the physical after the dissolution of the body.

XX. Conclusion:

a) The higher worlds have not come into existence by a pressure from the lower physical universe by a pressure from the lower physical universe. Nor are they creations of the human soul itself.

b) These planes are coeval and coexistent with that which presents itself to us as the physical universe.

c) Evolution takes place by two cooperating forces: an upward - tending force from below and an upward-drawing and downward pressing force from above.

And these two forces have firstly liberated life and mind out of Matter; and it is these two forces which will assist the emergence of a spiritual consciousness and further liberate higher powers to their complete expression in the life of the soul embodied in Nature.

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Chapter – XXII

Rebirth and Other Worlds;

Karma, the Soul and Immortality We start today with the most interesting chapter in this series. This chapter has three different parts: rebirth and

other worlds, karma and, the soul and immortality. These concepts are discussed in great detail in this chapter. Each concept helps to understand the successive idea.

Rebirth and other worlds

The very first paragraph raises some questions: Our first conclusion on the subject of reincarnation has been that the rebirth of the soul in successive terrestrial bodies is an inevitable consequence of the original significance and process of the manifestation in earth-nature; but this conclusion leads to farther problems and farther results which it is necessary to elucidate. There arises first the question of the process of rebirth; if that process is not quickly successive, birth immediately following death of the body so as to maintain an uninterrupted series of life of the same person, if there are intervals, that in its turn raises the question of the principle and process of the passage to other worlds, which must be the scene of these intervals, and the return to earth-life. A third question is the process of the spiritual evolution itself and the mutations which the soul undergoes in its passage from birth to birth through the stages of its adventure.

We will be dealing with three questions. What is the

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process of rebirth? We have already established the existence and immortality of the soul and that there are other worlds into which the soul travels once it leaves the body. The second question is – does every soul that leaves the body travel into these worlds? What are those worlds to which it travels? If there are intervals between lives, is there any particular principle or law by which the soul passes? And the third question, what are the spiritual changes, and mutations the soul undergoes in its passage?

Does the soul change in its internatal travel, and if so, what are the changes? These are questions that are related to the theory of karma. What is the truth of the theory of karma? In India, we believe in the theory of karma, but Sri Aurobindo will bring out here some fallacies in our beliefs.

He first takes up the question about the process of rebirth. He says,

If the physical universe were the sole manifested world, or if it were a quite separate world, rebirth as a part of the evolutionary process would be confined to a constant succession of direct transmigrations from one body to another...

We had discussed before that if only Spirit and Matter existed, the soul would have no choice but to transmigrate from one physical body to another. We have seen that it is not so because if there were only Matter and Spirit, The soul would have no freedom from Matter; it would be perpetually bound to its instrument, the body, and dependent on it for the continuity of its manifested existence. But we have found that there is a life on other planes after death and before the subsequent rebirth... Other planes co-exist with ours,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* are part of one complex system and act constantly upon the physical which is their own final and lowest term, receive its reactions, admit a secret communication and commerce.

Sri Aurobindo recapitulates a few ideas from the previous chapters: there are other planes and other supraphysical worlds. They not only exist, but they have a line of contact and communication with our world; there is a constant interaction. Then Sri Aurobindo says, Man can become conscious of these planes, can even in certain states project his conscious being into them, partly in life, presumably therefore with a full completeness after the dissolution of the. Such a possibility of projection into other worlds or planes of being becomes then sufficiently actual to necessitate practically its own realisation, immediately and perhaps invariably following on human earth-life if man is from the beginning endowed with such a power of self-transference, eventual if he only arrives at it by a gradual progression. For it is possible that at the beginning he would not be sufficiently developed to carry on his life or his mind into larger Life-worlds or Mind-worlds and would be compelled to accept an immediate transmigration from one earthly body to another as his only present possibility of persistence.

We have almost till now taken it for granted that each soul will go to its heavenly abode, or as we say, to the psychic world. The soul can go into

these worlds, but it needs to develop sufficiently. Sri Aurobindo says that it is possible that the soul at the beginning would not be sufficiently developed to travel to the “larger Life-worlds or Mind-worlds and would be compelled to accept an

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immediate transmigration”. That means if one is not sufficiently developed in mind or the vital one may not travel to those planes after death.

There is a necessity of the higher vital part in us. It has to be refined. We must develop a mental being which goes beyond the engagement with daily existence. The mind can be developed through philosophy, abstract thinking and meditation. The mind should be able to go beyond the attractions of physical. If we employ our mind only to earn money and become rich, we train it to become subservient to our desires and the world of Matter. Development of the mind is more a withdrawal, a renunciation of the material enclosure. A mind which can withdraw is developed. A highly developed mind knows that it does not know. It should grow to a point where it knows that it cannot any more guide his life or others.

It surrenders to higher consciousness, a higher power, willingly. When the mind realises its limitations, then it gets developed. If there is constant mental arrogance in which the mind thinks that it knows everything, it creates a rigid mental ego.

So, in this context, we can understand that if the soul is engrossed in material life, once it leaves the body, it cannot even venture into the vital and mental worlds. All its life, it has only lived on the physical plane. So once it leaves the body, it again goes to the subtle physical level.

It is not immediate, from one day to the next. There is an intermediary region, a domain of death, as the Mother would call it. Once the soul leaves the physical body, it goes to the nearest level, to the subtle physical body, which is the domain of death. Every soul has to go into this domain. The Mother has indicated that once a soul

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* leaves the physical body, the person's environment, room, office, and belongings should not be disturbed for a few days. The domain of death is very close to the physical, and the soul is there, hovering around.

The soul would likely visit his room, office or the place he was used or attached. If the room is disturbed, the soul may feel uneasy and try to search for his belongings. That is why it is said not to disturb the room of the departed for some time. The amount of time is not precisely mentioned, but some of us in the Ashram have practised it for a month. The soul may then go away from this domain of death to the higher levels.

Will it then go to the higher levels? It depends on the development of the person when alive. If it is only materialistic, then it will only go to the domain of death and then come back to a body. But if the soul has developed the vital and begun to purify it, it will travel to the level of the vital world. At the level of the vital, there are layers of desire that are wrapped around the soul. We may have a higher vital, developed aesthetic sense, an eye for beauty and paintings and music, but I think no one is beyond desires, and attachments. So it takes time for the soul to get rid of and cast off his layers of desires and attachments, which may take its own time depending on how much we are attached to people, to money, to property, etc. Some people have hoarded money, and if they suddenly leave the body, such worries and attachments will be carried on into the vital world. These attachments enmesh the soul for a long time. The soul at the level of the vital has to discard all these.

How does it do so? There are different ways of discarding. The vital being with its desires comes back

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to earth – not the soul, just the vital element – and gets into some animals. Because some animals are very open and receptive to these desires. Or sometimes, the vital elements come back as ghosts and live in a place or possess somebody and, through possessing that particular human being, fulfil his desires. Those unfulfilled desires are then satiated through another body.

The soul may also have developed its mental layer, not just the intellect, but to the extent to which it can surrender to the Divine, it will be individualised and come of use to humanity even after the person leaves his body. There is a beautiful example of a disciple in the Ashram. He was a great scholar living with Sri Aurobindo. His mind was tremendously developed, not from the point of intellect, but steeped in abstract philosophy, higher wisdom and knowledge, and quite detached. When he left the body, his mental being remained as an entity. If a mental or vital or physical being becomes organised around the psychic being, then it becomes an entity; it does not get dissolved.

The disciple was so engrossed in Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's thought and was surrendered to them that his mental being remained as an entity after his death. The Mother said he is around in the Ashram atmosphere helping those who aspire to understand Sri Aurobindo. So such a thing can also happen that when there is a mental being that is well-developed and surrendered to the Divine, it can stay back in the earth's atmosphere. For such a person, the soul can travel to the mental level, and then it can go onwards. Once it reaches the mental development, the soul is more or less capacitated to go beyond, but it depends on the stage it is in. If the mind is just a rational

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mind, these souls come back from the mental level itself.

The soul does not necessarily go beyond the mind.

I gave these examples only to explain the idea to which level the soul can travel at the beginning of its evolution.

If the physical, vital, and mental beings are not developed in one's lifetime, the soul, in its undeveloped stage, may have to accept almost "an immediate transmigration"

into another body. That makes it clear that what we do on earth matters a lot to what will happen to our souls'

journey after the body's death. That is why our earthly life becomes meaningful. Our life is not just for philandering or meandering and having fun. There is a meaning and a method of which most people are not aware. We are in utter ignorance. Sri Aurobindo gives us deep wisdom.

The necessity for an interregnum between birth and birth and a passage to other worlds arises from a double cause: there is an attraction of the other planes for the mental and the vital being in man's composite nature due to their affinity with these levels, and there is the utility or even the need of an interval for assimilation of the completed life-experience, a working out of what has to be discarded, a preparation for the new embodiment and the new terrestrial experience. But this need of a period of assimilation and this attraction of other worlds for kindred parts of our being may become effective only when the mental and vital individuality has been sufficiently developed in the half-animal physical man...

This chapter is of great importance because we are, for the first time, given the knowledge of the 'after death'. He explains why the soul travels into other worlds. First of all, there is an attraction to these worlds. The soul wants

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to go there once it leaves the body because the mental worlds and the vital worlds are beautiful; the mental and vital parts of the being have a natural affinity for them as they have the same nature. Secondly, it goes there for what Sri Aurobindo has called here "a period of assimilation ...

a working out of what has to be discarded, a preparation for the new embodiment..." If I can use the word, it is like a 'retreat' during which it looks back and evaluates its life on earth. Perhaps, it ruminates over the entire experience and then discards some of the useless things.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother tell us that most of our mental, vital, and physical activities do not sink into the soul. They remain parts of our surface experience only.

That is why sometimes we realise in life that most of our activities and thoughts are superficial. If we don't want them to be wasted, we can consciously offer them to the Divine. That is the process of surrender. That does not mean being inactive and surrendering only with emotion.

It would be a passive surrender which doesn't mean much and won't take us very far. It has to be a dynamic and conscious surrender of our thoughts, actions, and feelings; then, they can remain part of the psychic memory. In the period of assimilation after our death, our soul can say "I offered these thoughts, I offered these emotions". Based on this assimilation, the soul can discard what is not helpful and prepare for the new embodiment.

This internatal period is important, but somebody at the physical level may come back to the next body almost immediately, which means that it can hardly prepare itself for the next birth. The soul is almost rushed into another body because it has nowhere else to go except into another physical body. It doesn't even know if it is

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the right body, a good body, and whether it will have the suitable instruments for its progress.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

There can be, then, in the absence of such connections with other worlds, a theory of rebirth which admits only of a constant transmigration; Here the existence of other worlds and the sojourn of the soul in other planes are not an actual or at any stage a necessary part of the system. There can be another theory in which this passage is the obligatory rule for all and there is no immediate rebirth; The soul needs an interval of preparation for the new incarnation and new experience.

There are two theories of rebirth – one is immediate transmigration to another body, and the second is an internatal journey to other worlds where the soul can assimilate its experiences before taking another human birth. Sri Aurobindo says there may be a compromise between the two theories; transmigration may be the first rule prevailing while the soul is yet unripe,

and a passage to other planes the subsequent law for souls more developed. He then says,

There may even be a third stage, as is sometimes suggested, in which the soul is so powerfully developed, its natural parts so spiritually alive that it needs no interval, but can immediately resume birth for a more rapid evolution without the retardation of a period of intermittence.

Sri Aurobindo suggests that there could be a third possibility for advanced souls such as yogis, rishis, and saints. When the soul is so developed, it may not need any rest or assimilation process. It may come back

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immediately if it wants to but is not forced to take birth.

They come back by choice.

I remember one of the early disciples from the Ashram.

I often heard him say, “the moment I am dead, I will come back for the Mother’s work.” Some sadhaks were so much given to the Mother that for them, work for the Mother was the best rest. He would always say, I will come back immediately and take another birth to serve the Mother.

His only aspiration was to serve the Mother. There must have been many souls in the Ashram who were in love with the Mother, especially when she was there in the physical body, that they wanted to return to earth immediately to be with her. I had a guardian when I was in the hostel in my childhood. She had leukaemia, and when she was in the Jipmer Hospital, she very often told me, “Ananda, I will come back to the green group immediately”. “Green group” is the youngest group of physical education in the Ashram. This was one of her last wishes, and we will see later that these wishes also have their effect. It is not without purpose that Sri Krishna says that before one dies, if one thinks of what one wants to be in the next life, one could have such a birth. During these moments or weeks or months before we leave the body, if we start aspiring that in our next life we will be like this, it has its effect.

The soul takes its own decision, but these last wishes and prayers are not just mental; the soul comes forward and influences the mind.

The third possibility is that when the soul is well developed, it can choose to come back immediately, or it may choose never to come back. The Mother also speaks of realised souls who, when they leave, the earth, stay back, and may come only at the time of descent of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* an Avatar or a Vibhuti. Some such souls come to serve an Avatar. Swami Vivekananda was one of such realised souls.

Sri Ramakrishna said that he went up into those subtle worlds beyond existence and invited him to take birth. Sri Ramakrishna brought Swami Vivekananda for his work.

That is why perhaps Swamiji lived a short life, but he created a spiritual storm in the world. He had tremendous power, an intense consciousness which could impact the world with just two talks. It happened with Sri Aurobindo also. When he was fighting for the independence of India, many people in the jail with him were souls who had come down to work for Sri Aurobindo. That is why he could revolutionise the whole country within five years, from 1905 to 1910. And when he came to Pondicherry, again, some souls took birth to collaborate with him or follow him.

Next, Sri Aurobindo discusses ‘popular beliefs’ about reincarnation. He says,

In the popular ideas which derive from the religions that admit reincarnation, there is an inconsistency which, after the manner of popular beliefs, they have been at no pains to reconcile. On the one hand, there is the belief, vague enough but fairly general, that death is followed immediately or with something like immediateness by the assumption of another body.

On the other hand, there is the old religious dogma of a life after death in hells and heavens or, it may be, in other worlds or degree of being, which the soul has acquired or incurred by its merits or demerits in this physical existence; the return to earth intervenes only when that merit and demerit are exhausted and the being is ready for another terrestrial life.

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We have already dealt with transmigration, but another popular religious belief is that we go into hell or heaven after death, depending upon our merits and demerits. In Christianity, the soul stays there until the day of judgment and can come back to earth. In Hindu philosophy, too, we have similar beliefs in heaven and hell; until we exhaust our merits or demerits, we cannot return to the earth. He says that these two beliefs are inconsistent with each other.

This inconsistency would disappear if we admit a variable movement dependent on the stage of evolution which the soul has reached in its manifestation in Nature; all would then turn on the degree of its capacity for entering a higher status than the earthly lives. But in the ordinary notion of reincarnation the idea of a spiritual evolution is not explicit, it is only implied in the fact that the soul has to reach the point at which it becomes capable of transcending the necessity of rebirth and returning to its eternal source; but if there is no gradual or graded evolution, this point can be as well reached by a chaotic zigzag movement of which the law is not easily determinable.

In some religions, the soul goes into hell or heaven for perpetuity. That means in one life, whatever the soul has done, its acts are judged by that single life and then thrown forever into a state of hell or heaven. There is no question of spiritual evolution. To judge a soul by a single life, in which it has no control over the circumstances it is thrown into, is unfair; there is no justice in that.

Sri Aurobindo says that if we bring in the concept of spiritual evolution, then each soul may immediately come back into the physical or may go into the vital world for

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* some time or into the mental world, depending on its stage of evolution. The higher the soul goes, the longer the time for assimilation and preparation for its next birth. If we admit a spiritual evolution, then everything becomes much easier to understand. In such a philosophy, there is no judgment day; there is simply a continuity of growth.

Then he says,

A sort of half necessity for the life in other worlds, a dynamic and practical rather than an essential necessity, arises from the very fact that the different world-principles are interwoven with each other and in a way interdependent and the effect that this fact must have upon the process of our spiritual evolution. But this might be counteracted for a time by the greater pull or attraction of the earth or the preponderant physicality of the evolving nature. Our belief in the birth of an ascending soul into the human form and its repeated rebirth in that form, without which it cannot complete its human evolution, rests, from the point of view of the reasoning intelligence, on the basis that the progressive transit of the soul into higher and higher grades of the earthly existence and, once it has reached the human level, its repeated human birth compose a sequence necessary for the growth of the nature; one brief human life upon earth is evidently insufficient for the evolutionary purpose.

It might be thought that the soul has evolved from the level of plant and then to the animal and then to human life, and once having reached the human level, it would be unnecessary for the soul to come back because it has reached its target of conscious life and choice. On the contrary, Sri Aurobindo says that this birth into the

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human form is only the beginning of real progress towards the Divine. Until now, it has struggled through millions of births to come to the human level. But if it stops here with one human birth, it cannot complete its human possibilities, much less its spiritual possibilities. One brief life is not

sufficient. So the religions which claim that we have only one life after which we are posted in hell or heaven are inconsistent with this evolution.

In the early stages of a series of human reincarnations, during a period of rudimentary humanity, there is a certain possibility at first sight of an often repeated immediate transmigration... But what necessity of the evolutionary process would compel such a series of immediate rebirths?

We have accepted that one life is not sufficient for our spiritual evolution. But then the second question is why it should be necessary for the soul to take an immediate rebirth in the early stages. He says, Evidently, it could only be imperative so long as the psychic individuality,—not the secret soul-entity itself but the soul-formation in the natural being,—is little evolved...

Let us recapitulate what we did in the previous class.

What is the necessity of immediate rebirth? One reason is that the soul is stuck in the physical consciousness. It has not developed its vital or mental beings, so it rushes back into another body. Since it is not developed, it has no affinity with other realms. It is 'dependent' on the physical body. Therefore, the need to take birth immediately.

Sri Aurobindo writes that the soul

...unable as yet to persist in itself, discard its past

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mind-formation and life-formation and build after a useful interval new formations, it would be obliged to transfer at once its rudimentary crude personality for preservation to a new body.

Sri Aurobindo indicates that while this is possible, it would not be the normal procedure for human beings.

It is doubtful whether we should be justified in attributing any such entirely insufficient development to a being so strongly individualised that it has got as far as the human consciousness. Even at his lowest normality the human individual is still a soul acting through a distinct mental being, however ill-formed his mind may be, however limited and dwarfed, however engrossed and encased in the physical and vital consciousness and unable or unwilling to detach itself from its lower formations.

He then cites another reason why the soul may come back almost immediately after death: Or, again, the life-experience might be so brief and incomplete as to compel the soul to an immediate rebirth for its continuance.

The life experience may be very brief and incomplete.

For example, the child lives only for a few weeks or months or dies at a very young age – it has hardly any experience here, neither physical, vital, nor mental. For some reason, the child dies. At that time also, the soul may come back immediately because it has hardly gained anything.

The Mother gave an example when Auroville began, perhaps around 1968. There was a German and Swiss couple, I think, who had given birth to the first Auroville child, whom the Mother had named Auroson. It so

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happened that, unfortunately, the baby, when he was crawling, fell into a swimming pool and drowned. The parents were plunged in sorrow and went to the Mother.

The Mother said, well, I have kept the soul here on my shoulder; it will come back to you. Then there was the birth of the second child, and this very same soul went back to that family. The Mother transferred the soul. This was an almost immediate rebirth, just the time required for the conception, nine months, during which it was with the Mother, and then it went back to the parents.

For most children who die young, their souls come back immediately. It is not because it is a materialistic soul or undeveloped, but because it has had a brief and incomplete experience.

Sri Aurobindo says there is a third reason the soul may come back immediately:

Other needs, influences or causes there may be in the complexity of Nature-process, such as a strong of earthly desire pressing for fulfilment, which would enforce an immediate transmigration of the same persistent form of personality into a new body. But still the alternative process of a reincarnation, a rebirth of the Person not only into a new body but into a new formation of the personality, would be the normal line taken by the psychic entity once it had reached the human stage of its evolutionary cycle.

Another possibility is what Sri Aurobindo calls “a strong will of earthly desire pressing for fulfilment”. I will share an incident in the Ashram. A young person, my teacher at that time, died in a road accident. He was in his late twenties. At that time, there were no big hospitals here –

so he was taken to the General Hospital, and the best of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the doctors tried long to save him. The soul pleaded with the Mother to see that his body recovered because its life experience was incomplete. The man was brilliant; in fact, the Mother called him one of the pillars of the Ashram.

There was much potential in him. But this unfortunate accident happened, and the body could not be saved.

The Mother also tried to work on the body through the doctors, but unfortunately, the damage was too much.

The soul wanted to go back to the body, but the body was not ready to take it back. Then the Mother told the soul that it would get a new body in the

same family. And it so happened that another child was born in the family after some time, and the soul took that body.

When there is an immediate rebirth, the new body may carry some old impressions from the previous life.

There is a young lady in the Ashram who used to be a little senior to me, but we attended classes together. Her outer personality was a little tom-boyish, not very elegant or womanly. She didn't bother about that. We heard later that the Mother had said that in her previous life, she was a shepherdess. You can imagine a shepherdess wouldn't bother about the niceties of perfume, make-up, and dressing up. The influence of her previous life was carried over into this life also.

For the soul personality, as it develops, must get sufficient power over its own nature-formation and the sufficient self-expressive mental and vital individuality to persist without the support of the material body, as well as to overcome any excessive detaining attachment to the physical plane and the physical life: it would be sufficiently evolved to subsist in the subtle body which we know to be the characteristic case or

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sheath and the proper subtle- physical support of the inner being. It is the soul-person, the psychic being, that survives and carries mind and life with it on its journey, and it is in the subtle body that it passes out of its material lodging; both then must be sufficiently developed for the transit. But a transference to planes of Mind-existence or Life-existence implies also a mind and life sufficiently formed and developed to pass without disintegration and exist for a time on these higher levels.

The psychic being in the subtle body passes out of the material body and carries both the mind and vital with it; these latter individualities "then must be sufficiently developed for the transit". They must be "sufficiently evolved to subsist in the subtle body which we know to be the characteristic case or sheath and the proper subtle-physical support of the inner being". It is in the subtle body that the soul goes to its place of rest in the psychic world. It takes the subliminal mind, the subliminal vital and the subtle

physical with it, but these are left in their respective worlds. The gross physical body is left on earth and cremated or buried. When the soul returns, it picks up its subtle physical, vital, and mental baggage from the different levels. Why does it pick up this baggage? What happens to a great yogi after death, for he would have done much tapasya and gained something through meditation? Does everything go to waste? No.

These inner experiences are stored in the subliminal. If this personality which has worked so much on sadhana and spirituality, is left behind, the psychic being would have to do the whole work again. The psychic may have experienced something, but the psychic being is not here only for its own experience; it is also here for the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* transformation of the life and mind and physical. So when the psychic being comes back for rebirth, it brings back, from the subliminal, those aspects of its mental, vital and physical personalities that are useful for its continued growth, which will be a great advantage. That is why we sometimes say, “it is because of his past birth that a person is able to do something remarkable”. We have all seen great musicians, artists, and thinkers who are child prodigies. They may be hardly eight years old, but they are geniuses. It is because this personality was developed in their previous lives. This entire subliminal is prepared, and a few aspects of it come out into the outer life in the following birth.

The question is: who is the carrier of karma? The psychic being goes to its world; the body is burnt or buried in the earth. There must be some carrier which comes with the psychic being birth after birth, which is subliminal. In this way, what we do in this life is not wasted. Of course, all the bad things also have their effects. However, it is important that karma is carried by the subliminal. We have a real example in Mr N regarding this. He knew French but never wrote poetry in this language. But once, he wrote some poetic lines similar to those of a French poet.

Reading this, the Mother and Sri Aurobindo confirmed that he was a French poet in his past life, and this life carried that imprint.

As Sri Aurobindo says, “the soul-person, the psychic-being, that survives and carries mind and life with it on its journey”. It does not imply the outer mind and life but the subliminal mind and life. He continues, If these conditions were satisfied, a sufficiently developed psychic personality and subtle body and

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a sufficiently developed mental and vital personality, survival of the soul-person without an immediate new birth would be secured and the pull of the other worlds would become operative. But this, by itself would mean a return to earth with the same mental and the vital personality and there would be no free evolution in the new birth. There must be an individuation of the psychic person itself sufficient for it not to depend on its past mind and life formations any more than on its past body, but to shed them too in time and proceed to a new formation for new experience. For this discarding of the old and preparation of new forms the soul must dwell for sometime between two births somewhere else than on the entirely material plane in which we now move; for here there would be no abiding place for a disembodied spirit. A brief stay might indeed be possible if there are subtle envelopes of the earth-existence which belong to earth but are of a vital or mental character...

Sri Aurobindo says that if the soul does not go to the higher levels, if it is tied to its vital and mental personalities, then it would carry these back to its next life, which would then be just a continuation of the same experience, not a new start and development of new possibilities.

A survival of the material body by the personality implies a supraphysical existence, and this can only be in some plane of being proper to the evolutionary stage of the consciousness or, if there is no evolution, in a temporary second home of the spirit which would be its natural place of sojourn between life and life,

– unless indeed it is its original world from which it does not return into material Nature.

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Some people may commit suicide or have intense vital attachments; their souls get stuck in the vital level. It seems that once a young girl from the Ashram went to Mr N, and she is reported to have said that her mother had passed away ten years back, but even now, she comes very often in the girl's dreams and was weeping and unhappy.

Nolinida told her to come back later. After some time, she came back; he said I released your mother's soul from the vital world; she will not suffer anymore and will not come to your dreams again. Some great yogis can help this kind of soul stuck in a particular world. Even praying for the deceased helps this way. Praying for the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and their help in the departed soul's journey is of great help. The main point is that there are different possibilities for the transiting soul. There may be an immediate rebirth for reasons we have discussed – a strong earth pull or an incomplete development, or if there is not sufficient individuation, there may be a transit to the vital or mental worlds and a return from there, or the soul may continue its journey beyond the vital and mental planes.

Sri Aurobindo asks,

Where then would the temporary dwelling in the supraphysical take place? what would be the soul's other habitat? It might seem that it ought to be on a mental plane, in mental worlds, both because on man the mental being the attraction of that plane, already active in life, must prevail when there is not the obstacle of the attachment to the body, and because the mental plane should be, evidently, the native and proper habitat of a mental being.

One option for the soul to go would be the mental

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plane because human beings are supposed to be mental creatures. But he continues:

But this does not automatically follow, because of the complexity of man's being; he has a vital as well as a mental existence,—his vital part often

more powerful and prominent than the mental,—and behind the mental being is a soul of which it is the representative.

There are, besides, many planes or levels of world-existence and the soul has to pass through them to reach its natural home.

Man's nature is very complex. It has a vital, mental and subtle physical existence. So even before the soul can reach the mind or the mental level, it has to pass through others. He says,

In the physical plane itself or close to it, there are believed to be layers of greater and greater subtlety which may be regarded as sub-planes of the physical with a vital and a mental character; these are at once surrounding and penetrating strata through which the interchange between the higher worlds and the physical world takes place. It might then be possible for the mental being, so long as its mentality is not sufficiently developed, so long as it is restricted mainly to the more physical forms of mind and life activity, to be caught and delayed in these media.

If we are attached to the physical forms, to the attraction of the earth, then the soul may be caught in the layers of the subtle physical plane of existence. As I explained earlier, this is what the Mother called the domain of death.

It might even be obliged to rest there entirely between birth and birth; but this is not probable and could only happen if and in so far as its attachment

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* to the earth-forms of its activity was so great as to preclude or hamper the completion of the natural upward movement. For post-mortal state of the soul must correspond in some way to the development of the being on earth, since this after-life is not a free upward return from a temporary downward deviation into mortality, but a normal recurrent circumstance which intervenes to help out the process of difficult spiritual evolution in the physical existence.

He says the transit of the soul after death must correspond in some way to the development of the being

on earth.

There was a lady in the Ashram who was suffering physically. Later, it became a psychological suffering and turned into a deep depression. She lost faith even in the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Perhaps because of the extreme physical suffering, she thought that the Mother and Sri Aurobindo would relieve her from it and when nothing happened, she lost faith. We do not know for sure, but when she passed away, her soul was stuck in this domain of death. We can imagine that she had no higher thoughts of the spiritual, mental, or higher vital. The depression was so dark that her consciousness stayed very low, and when she left the body, she could not go beyond.

Sri Aurobindo released her soul from this domain. He says,

...this after-life is not a free upward return from a temporary downward deviation into mortality, but a normal recurrent circumstance which intervenes to help out the process of a difficult spiritual evolution in the physical existence. There is a relation which the human being in his evolution on earth develops with higher planes of existence, and that must have a

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predominant effect on his internatal dwelling in these planes; it must determine his direction after death and determine too the place, period and character of his self-experience there.

What happens after death depends on our individual evolution. There is a relation between our life here and the higher planes and this relation has a predominant effect on the soul's internatal passage. This is not to frighten us but to tell us how much this life is meant for spiritual life and that our passage after death depends on how I have lived here on this earth. Usually, we don't think of that.

As the Mother once told me, we tend to think of such things only after retirement. Before retirement, we have many other appointments to fulfil. But she also told me that spirituality must begin when we are young. And I don't know if one can become spiritual when one has aged much. What does it mean? It means that all our vital and mental efforts must be directed towards the Divine, and not just for the indulgence and satisfaction of the vital and mental as we usually do.

It may be also that he may linger for a time in one of those annexes of the other worlds created by his habitual beliefs or by the type of his aspirations in the mortal body. We know that he creates images of these superior planes, which are often mental translations of certain elements in them, and erects his images into a system, a form of actual worlds; he builds up also desire-worlds of many kinds to which he attaches a strong sense of inner reality: It is possible that these constructions may be so strong as to create of him an artificial post-mortal environment in which he may linger.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is extremely interesting! Here he explains the role of the religious heavens that human beings have imagined with beautiful images of beauty and comfort and where all our unfulfilled desires upon earth are fulfilled. We may also imagine hells. We may build such artificial worlds which we temporarily experience after death. But these are not real worlds; they are creations of our personal mind and vital and are only substantial enough for a kind of extended after-death dream. Then, we move into other more significant worlds.

It is interesting that human imagination can create something and that the soul may get arrested for some time. Somebody who is approaching death may even say,

“I can see heaven,” because they believed that all their life, this would happen. The Mother says we may go into that world for a while and linger there. Sri Aurobindo adds, For the image-making power of the human mind, its imagination, which is in his physical life only an indispensable aid to his acquisition of knowledge and his life-creation, may in a higher scale become a creative force which would enable the mental being to live for a

while amid its own images until they were dissolved by the soul's pressure. All these buildings are of the nature of larger Life-constructions; in them his mind translates some of the real conditions of the greater mental and vital worlds into terms of his physical experience magnified, prolonged, extended to a condition beyond physicality: he carries by this translation the vital joy and vital suffering of the physical being into supraphysical conditions in which they have a greater scope, fullness and endurance.

These heavens and hells are an extension of our vital

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joys and sufferings; in the physical world, they are limited, but in the supraphysical, they can take an extended form and intensity.

These constructive environments must therefore be considered, so far as they have any supraphysical habitat, as annexes of the vital or of the lower mental planes of existence.

We are discussing where the soul goes after the death of the body. It depends on our evolution on earth. There are various stations where it may linger for some time: one is the domain of death, which is in the subtle physical worlds; then there is hell and heaven, which are mental and vital constructions which may be partly based on real conditions in the vital and mental worlds, and which he says here may be considered as annexes of the vital or lower mental planes; then there is the proper vital and mental planes, and then there is the psychic plane where the soul goes for rest and assimilation of its previous life experiences and prepares for its next life.

Next, Sri Aurobindo describes the vital worlds.

But there are also the true vital worlds, – original constructions, organised developments, native habitats of the universal Life-principle, the cosmic vital Anima, acting in its own field and in its own nature. On his internatal journey he may be helped there for a period by force of the predominantly vital character of the influences which have shaped his earthly existence, – for these influences are native to the vital world and their hold on him would detain him for a while in their proper province: he may be kept in the

grasp of that which held him in its grasp even in the physical being. Any residence of the soul

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* in annexes or in its own constructions could be only a transitional stage of the consciousness in its passage from the physical to the supraphysical state; it must pass from these structures into the true worlds of supraphysical Nature. Beyond these subtle physical planes of experience and the life-worlds there are also mental or spiritual-mental planes to which the soul seems to have an internatal access and into which it may pursue its internatal journey.

The universal life-principle itself creates the vital worlds in the process of involution. These vital worlds have greatly affected the earth and human beings. Similarly, there are mental worlds and spiritual planes, and the soul may go into all these.

For these levels must normally be the highest the evolving being can internatally inhabit, since one who has not gone beyond the mental rung in the ladder of being would not be able to ascend to any supramental or overmental states; or if he had so developed as to overleap the mental level and could attain so far, it might not be possible for him to return so long as the physical evolution has not developed here an organisation of an overmental or supramental life in Matter.

For the mental being, the highest possible plane, it could go to is the spiritual level which is still below the Overmind and the Supermind. He says that if we had developed the consciousness so much as to go to those higher planes, we might not be able to return to earthly life until the physical evolution had attained those levels and organised an overmental or supramental life. We had read that when Sri Aurobindo left his body, the Mother

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asked him to come back, but Sri Aurobindo replied that he had purposely left his body and would not come back into it. Then he said that he would

return in a supramental body made in the supramental way. This connects with what he wrote that if one overleaps the Mind to reach the Overmind or Supermind, it might not be desirable for him to return so long as the physical evolution has not developed sufficiently to support that kind of existence in material life. We could apply the same thing to the Mother because both were harbingers of the supramental consciousness. Even before leaving this earth, she left a kind of prototype of a new body for Nature to follow.

But, even so, the mental worlds are not likely to be the last normal stage of the after-death passage; for man is not entirely mental; it is the soul, the psychic being, and not the mind, that is the traveller between death and birth, and the mental being is only a predominant element in the figure of its self-expression. There must then be a final resort to a plane of pure psychic existence in which the soul would await rebirth; there it could assimilate the energies of its past experience and life and prepare its future.

Ordinarily, the normally developed human being, who has risen to a sufficient power of mentality, might be expected to pass successively through all these planes, subtle physical, vital and mental, on his way to his psychic habitation.

When the soul leaves, it casts off its different sheaths –

the subtle physical in the subtle physical world, the vital in the vital world and the mind in the mental world. It depends on our evolution here because he says, “if the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* development of mind were insufficient, it is possible that it would not be able to go consciously beyond the vital”.

We now come to the next point: the role played by the higher planes in the earth’s evolution. What is the place, the role, and the necessity of these planes? We have seen that these are realms where the assimilation of life experiences takes place. But let us see what more he would tell us.

All this, however, is a matter of dynamic probability, and that, though amounting in practice to a necessity, though justified by certain facts of subliminal experience, is still for the reasoning mind not in itself quite conclusive. We have to ask whether there is any more essential necessity for these internatal intervals, or at least any of so great a dynamic power as to lead to an irresistible conclusion. We shall find one such necessity in the decisive part played by the higher planes in the earth-evolution and the relation that it has created between them and the evolving soul-consciousness. Our development takes place very largely by their superior but hidden action upon the earth-plane. All is contained in the inconscient or the subconscious, but in potentiality; it is the action from above that helps to compel an emergence.

One reason the soul should go into these higher levels is because of their importance *vis-à-vis* earth life. These worlds are constantly communicating and influencing human beings. There could be some negative influences, but in general, for evolution, they are continually pulling human aspiration towards their higher levels. The journey upward to the spiritual level is more or less a kind of pull upward – a magnetic pull of the higher levels

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upon humanity. Human beings interpret this magnetic pull towards the higher differently; it may not always be spiritual. If one aspires to earn million dollars, that is also a kind of higher aspiration, higher success, and greater wealth for humanity. Material prosperity is also important, but we should not think it is the only thing and the ultimate way of life. It is only a part of life, a phase and facet of life. If we understand it that way, we will not give it undue importance and spend all our life on this material prospect. If we suffer from poverty, it could be challenging to develop a higher life, unless one is a great ascetic and can leave the whole world and go to the forest.

But we are not asked to become ascetics; a material base is certainly required. Thus the vital worlds actually help in pulling up the human being.

Sri Aurobindo says, “All is contained in the inconscient or the subconscious, but in potentiality; it is the action from above that helps to compel an

emergence.” This is the crucial sentence that the unconscious and subconscious have all potentialities, but it is like the seed under the ground; it is the sunlight which draws the seed from below the earth, attracted by the sunlight, the seed bursts forth and becomes a plant. All our potentialities are like seeds within our subconscious. But what makes them grow are these higher worlds, aspirations, attractions, and the feeling to rise higher. That ‘higher’ is misunderstood or not completely understood because in the present day,

‘higher’ means success, more money, and a better job. We have defined ‘higher’ in terms of materiality. It is high time we understand that ‘higher’ means there is a spiritual hierarchy and that we have to go from the material towards the spiritual. This is the process of evolution.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo says,

This resort, the action of this veiled alliance, takes place principally in our subliminal being and not on the surface: it is from there that the active power of our consciousness emerges, and all that it realises it sends back constantly into the subliminal being to be stored up, developed and re-emerge in stronger forms hereafter. This interaction of our larger hidden being and our surface personality is the main secret of the rapid development that operates in man once he has passed beyond the lower stages of Mind immersed in Matter.

The influences, attractions, and inspirations from the higher planes come into our subliminal and not directly into the surface being. That means we do not realise the source of inspiration. These higher worlds penetrate our subliminal, and from there, they inspire us to be an artist, a poet, a businessman etc. And then, after I become a poet or a businessman, what I learn goes back into my subliminal and is stored up. Sri Aurobindo says, “This interaction of our larger hidden being and our surface personality is the main secret of the rapid development that operates in man...” Because of these subliminal influences, when the soul leaves the body, it is attracted and pulled up by these higher levels. But then, alas! Are we ready to climb up? Have we done something to climb up? I remember the Mother’s answer

to somebody who said, we want to go to Sri Aurobindo's room? She said, what have you done for the Lord to deserve to go to His room? Similarly, what have we done to deserve to go to the psychic world? When we show our capacity, there's an attraction and a visa to go there.

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Then Sri Aurobindo makes a new point: This resort must continue in the internatal stage; for a new birth, a new life is not a taking up of the development exactly where it stopped in the last, it does not merely repeat and continue our past surface personality and formation of nature. There is an assimilation, a discarding and strengthening and rearrangement of the old characters and motives, a new ordering of the developments of the past and a selection for the purposes of the future without which the new start cannot be fruitful or carry forward the evolution. For each birth is a new start; it develops indeed from the past, but is not its mechanical continuation; rebirth is not a constant reiteration but a progression, it is the machinery of an evolutionary process.

This is relevant to the next section, where we will deal with Karma. He says that in rebirth, "there is an assimilation, a discarding and strengthening and rearrangement of the old characters and motives" of the previous births. One of the fallacies of karma theory is that we think that if in the past life I was a saint, then I would be rewarded in this life, and I continue to remain on that high plane. If I were a sinner then, I would get the punishment in this life. But the soul does not decide the next life solely based on past lives. He says there is "a new ordering of the developments of the past and a selection for the purposes of the future". It has a kind of entire folder of memories. It has all these experiences of being a pauper, a philosopher, a saint etc., and all these experiences are gathered into its memory. Then the soul, in the next life, would like to experience a particular kind of personality. It may be

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* similar or different from the previous one, but in the new organisation of the personality what is important is what one wants to be in the future. All that has happened in the past will have some

weightage and influence, but the past does not dictate the next birth. He says, "For each birth is a new start; it develops indeed from the past but is not its mechanical continuation". Continuing, he says, Part of this rearrangement, the discarding especially of past strong vibrations of the personality, can only be effected by an exhaustion of the push of previous mental, vital, physical motives after death, and this internal liberation or lightening of impedimenta must be put through on the planes proper to the motives that are to be discarded or otherwise manipulated, those planes which are themselves of that nature; for it is only there that the soul can still continue the activities which have to be exhausted and rejected from the consciousness so that it can pass on to a new formation... The terrestrial gathering up and development of the materials thus prepared, their working out in the earth-life would be consequence of this internatal resort, and the new birth would be a field of the resultant activity, a new stadium or spiral curve in the individual evolution of the embodied Spirit.

One would need a certain amount of time to assimilate, discard, strengthen, and rearrange all one has experienced earlier. Secondly, each of these worlds – the subtle physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic – are realms where those specific layers are worked on. What does it mean? For example, when the soul goes to the vital world, the mental sheath is not absorbed; only the vital desires,

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attachments, and vital attractions get absorbed in this vital world and leave the mental sheath untouched. The mental vibrations are dissolved when the soul goes to the mental world. Each world has particular vibrations to dissolve the corresponding sheaths around the soul, so the soul has to pass through all these.

In fact we must accept the ancient idea that man has within him not only the physical soul or Purusha with its appropriate nature, but a vital, a mental, a psychic, a supramental, a supreme spiritual being; and either the whole or the greater presence or force of them is concealed in his subliminal or latent and unformulated in his superconscient parts. He has to bring forward their powers in his active consciousness and to awake to them in its knowledge.

But each of these powers of his being is in relation with its own proper plane of existence and all have their roots there.

He says that we do not create our vital and mental being on earth, “On the contrary, what it does is to manifest these principles of its spiritual entity under the conditions imposed by a world of physical and capital nature”. If we draw a diagram of the outer being with the mind, vital and the physical, and within that circle the subliminal nature with the subtle mind, vital, physical, and then inside the inner and the inmost being – we see a scheme of concentric circles. We have in the inner being the Manomaya Purusha or Mental Purusha, the Pranamaya or Vital Purusha, and the Annamaya Purusha or the Physical Purusha; the inmost is the psychic being and the soul.

These Purushas have to be brought forth to manifest in our life. Sri Aurobindo says, “He has to bring forward their

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* powers in his active consciousness and to awake to them in its knowledge.” In our lives, we must bring Manomaya Purusha into our mental activity; we must become open to this Purusha, to his influence and guidance. Those who have a spiritual mind or have developed their mental consciousness are open to the *manomaya* Purusha and are guided and inspired by it. Similarly, our vital consciousness can connect to *pranamaya* Purusha and physical consciousness to *annamaya* Purusha.

Our personality has two aspects – the outer being, Prakriti and the soul, the Purusha. There is the outer being or what we call Nature or Prakriti, and there is the soul, the Purusha aspect. Just as we see in the external world that all Nature is an expression of a Universal God, similarly, within us, there is the Purusha aspect which expresses itself through our outer nature. The deepest of these Purushas is the innermost – Chaitya Purusha, the psychic being. But apart from that, each aspect of our nature – mind, vital and physical – has its respective Purushas.

He says,

It is through them that there takes place the subliminal resort of the being to the shaping influences from above, a resort which may become more and more conscious as we develop. It is logical then that according to the development of their powers in our conscious evolution should be the internal resort which this nature of our birth here and its evolutionary object and process necessitates.

When this entire Purusha aspect starts influencing the outer nature, then we open to spirituality, not before.

Often when we come under the shadow of these Purushas

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we think we are experiencing the psychic being. It is not necessarily so. We may have just got the first glimpse of Manomaya Purusha or the Pranamaya Purusha. The psychic being works through the Manomaya Purusha and Pranamaya Purusha for a long time before it contacts the outer mind or vital directly. These are its delegates.

Sri Aurobindo says,

The circumstances and the stages of that resort must be complex and not of the crudely and trenchantly simple character which the popular religions imagine: but in itself it can be accepted as an inevitable consequence of the very origin and nature of the soul-life in the body. All is a closely woven web; an evolution and an interaction whose links have been forged by a Conscious-Force...

The whole beautiful structure of this inner human being is “forged by the Conscious-Force”, which means that the supreme Sachchidananda himself has become, even more than ‘designed’, this beautiful yet complex structure “following out the truth of its own motives according to a dynamic logic of these finite workings of the Infinite”. It is the logic of the infinite working in the finite; it is the Supreme Sachchidananda himself who has done it. It is not by random chance that the whole world is made. Human logic may not be able to gauge, but there is definitely a logic of the infinite.

Karma

Now we come to the discussion of Karma. Sri Aurobindo will connect karma and rebirth, and we will get more connections as we go. In the beginning, he gives us the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* general theory of karma and then brings in his own critical analysis. He says,

If this view of rebirth and the soul's temporary passage into other planes of existence is correct, both rebirth and the after-life assume a different significance from the colour put on them by the long-current belief about reincarnation and the after-death sojourn in worlds beyond us.

Reincarnation is commonly supposed to have two aspects, metaphysical and moral, an aspect of spiritual necessity, an aspect of cosmic justice and ethical discipline. The soul,—in this view or for this purpose supposed to have a real individual existence,—is on earth as a result of desire and ignorance; it has to remain on earth or return to it always so long as it has not wearied of desire and awakened to the fact of its ignorance and to the true knowledge. This desire compels it to return always to a new body; it must follow always the revolving wheel of birth till it is enlightened and liberated.

It does not, however, remain always on earth, but alternates between earth and other worlds, celestial and infernal, where it exhausts its accumulated store of merit or demerit due to the enactment of sin or virtue and then returns to the earth and to some kind of terrestrial body, sometimes human, sometimes animal, sometimes even vegetable.

This is a common understanding that our souls come to earth, and the reason for our continuous rebirth is our desire and ignorance. According to Buddhism, the root cause of our rebirth is desire. If we want to be liberated from rebirth, we must get liberated from desire – that is

the simple formula. Of course, Vedanta also says that we are reborn because of ignorance.

When we say 'we are in ignorance' it means we are still bound to this consciousness of the Many. When we begin to see the Supreme, the Divine, then we begin to have the consciousness of oneness. This consciousness increases gradually it cannot be attained overnight. It increases as we go above and beyond the levels of the mind. That is why we say there is an ascent of the mind to higher levels –

Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, Overmind.

The higher one goes, the greater the sense of oneness.

Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Ideal of Human Unity* that if humanity is to become one, it cannot come through an ideology or religion but only through the growth of consciousness. We can live together in a place like Auroville, which is trying to have a sense of oneness. Such oneness can be achieved only by rising above the mind.

As long as we are on the mental level, it is impossible to achieve oneness because it is the nature of the Mind to divide. Mind is not to be blamed for its weaknesses; it is its very nature.

This divided sense of many-ness is called ignorance, and because of this lack of sense of oneness and desire, we are reborn upon the earth again and again. But when the souls take a new birth – then it all depends on our previous lives because we have accrued merits and demerits; we have done some wrong actions and some good deeds. The soul alternates between earth and other worlds in all its lives. It is like an endless cycle. This cycle ends only when we get liberated after intense tapasya.

It is called liberation because we are liberated from this consciousness of ignorance, which means we have gained

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the consciousness of oneness. For that, we have to do certain practices, and each religion and philosophy has its own way. This is the common cycle we all must follow.

Now according to the traditional view in India, The nature of this new incarnation and its fortunes are determined automatically by the soul's past actions, Karma; if the sum of past actions was good, the birth is in the higher form, the life happy or successful or unaccountably fortunate; if bad, a lower form of Nature may house us or the life, if human, will be unhappy, unsuccessful, full of suffering and misfortune.

A very simple, straightforward mathematical formula –

if our credit balance is higher than the debit balance, if our merits are more than our demerits in this life, then next life, we will be happier, more successful, have more fame etc. But if our demerits are more in this life, then we may become an animal or a vegetable in the next life. Merits and demerits are the two simple criteria of the quality of life we might live. That is what our Indian theory of karma has told us. We are often reminded of the quality of our deeds on earth for fear of getting punished in the next life. Nobody explains that there is a philosophy about all this. We are only told about the consequences either we are condemned or rewarded. Such are the traditional beliefs about karma theory.

If our past actions and character were mixed, then Nature, like a good accountant, gives us, according to the pitch and values of our former conduct, a well-assorted payment of mixed happiness and suffering, success and failure, the rarest good luck and the severest ill-fortune. At the same time a strong personal

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will or desire in the past life may also determine our new avatar. A mathematical aspect is often given to these payments of Nature, for we are supposed to incur a precise penalty for our misdeeds, undergo or return the replica or equivalent of what we have inflicted or enacted; the inexorable rule of a tooth for a tooth is a frequent principle of the Karmic Law: for this

Law is an arithmetician with his abacus as well as a judge with his code of penalties for long-past crimes and misdemeanours.

This is a beautiful description of the common view of karma. But it is normally understood that we have a mixture of merits and debits; nobody can have 100 percent merits or 100 percent demerits. According to our mixture, we will have a mix of good and bad luck in the next life.

There could be ill fortune or good fortune.

And there is the belief that “a strong personal will or desire in the past life may also determine our new avatar”.

So if I desire a particular kind of birth in my next life, that also is taken into account. This idea is mentioned in the Gita that at the moment of death, whatever we wish our next life to be, we will be. However, usually, in the last moment of life we could be in tremendous pain, or in a coma, or suffering so much we can hardly think of the next life or aspire for anything. It means that we have to work towards it when we are in our full consciousness so that it becomes part of our living aspiration. If one wants to serve the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in one's next life, this aspiration should become a part of one's mental structure. Then in the last moment, even if he dies in pain or is unconscious, that wish stands true. It is not so easy

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* to ask for a great boon before one dies when one never thought of it or never worked for it in his life on earth.

The whole karma theory is like that. We say that karma is a mathematical formula and that we are supposed to incur a penalty for our misdeeds. God is the judge and will reward or punish us for what we have done, “undergo or return the replica or equivalent of what we have inflicted or enacted”. You see how crude the theory is! If I have harmed you by stealing your things, somebody will steal my things in my next life. If I have murdered someone in this life, in the next life, someone will murder me, a tooth for a tooth; this is a common understanding. We should not think that it is Sri

Aurobindo's view; it is the frequent understanding of the karmic law that he describes to us.

He says,

It is also to be noted that in this system there is a double punishment and a double reward for sin and virtue; for the sinner is first tortured in hell and afterwards afflicted for the same sins in another life here and the righteous or the puritan is rewarded with celestial joys and afterwards again pampered for the same virtues and good deeds in a new terrestrial existence.

In this idea of karma, there is even a double punishment.

If we steal somebody's possessions here, we go to hell and suffer there, but then in the next life here, we will also suffer. Does that make any logical sense? We have taken this karma theory without thinking and speaking about it so glibly. Nobody understands the deeper meaning of karma theory. It is understood only in the popular sense that karma is a punishment for what you have done either now or in a past life, or it is the reward for what you have

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done in the present or past life; it is simple mathematics.

Sri Aurobindo says that this looks very unfair and unreasonable.

These are very summary popular notions and offer no foothold to the philosophic reason and no answer to a search for the true significance of life. A vast world-system which exists only as a convenience for turning endlessly on a wheel of Ignorance with no issue except a final chance of stepping out of it, is not a world with any real reason for existence.

The philosopher Sri Aurobindo raises a few fundamental questions. If the meaning of our life is to quit this cycle of births, then why did the soul come to this earth? Why would a soul come back again and again only to seek a way out of it eternally? He says to go out of birth cannot be a satisfying reason for our birth on earth. Secondly, he says,

A world which serves only as a school of sin and virtue and consists of a system of rewards and whippings, does not make any better appeal to our intelligence.

Even students say, “why should I go to school? They only beat me or give me chocolates”. If our world is just a school of sin and virtue, is it worth living in a school like that?

The soul or spirit within us, if it is divine, immortal or celestial, cannot be sent here solely to be put to school for this kind of crude and primitive moral education; if it enters into the Ignorance, it must be because there is some larger principle or possibility of its being that has to be worked out through the Ignorance. If, on the other hand, it is a being from the Infinite plunged

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* for some cosmic purpose into the obscurity of Matter and growing to self-knowledge within it, its life here and the significance of that life must be something more than that of an infant coddled and whipped into virtuous ways; it must be a growth out of an assumed ignorance towards its own full spiritual stature with a final passage into an immortal consciousness, knowledge, strength, beauty, divine purity and power, and for such a spiritual growth this law of Karma is all too puerile. Even if the soul is something created, an infant being that has to learn from Nature and grow into immortality, it must be by a larger law of growth and not by some divine code of primitive and barbaric justice. This idea of Karma is a construction of the smaller part of the human vital mind concerned with its petty rules of life and its desires and joys and sorrows and erecting their puny standards into the law and aim of the cosmos.

This is an extreme criticism. This understanding of the law of karma is created by the human vital mind concerned with its petty rules of life and its desires and joys. Everything has to do with the vital being.

Sri Aurobindo says that it is the small mind of humanity which has created this karmic law. If it does not have anything deeper, it is not worth it if this

is the reason for the soul's rebirth. He says the true reason for the soul's rebirth cannot simply be to go through these punishments and rewards. However, it would make sense if it was "a growth out of an assumed ignorance towards its own full spiritual stature with a final passage into an immortal consciousness". The soul comes here, again and again, to grow towards its full spiritual stature. But there is one important phrase here, 'assumed ignorance', he says

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"it must be a growth out of an assumed ignorance". It is not that the soul itself is ignorant, but it comes into this world of ignorance to take back something towards that immortal consciousness and grow in its full spiritual stature. What is more important than these rewards and punishments is to see, based on my human efforts, to what level I have attained, to see whether I have conquered the vital level or the mental level or the psychic level. It is not just about being a king or a pauper, rich or poor, having a palace or a hut – that would only be about the satisfaction of the vital being; there is no spiritual growth. He says rebirth is to divinise the earth, to transform matter. In that process of divinisation, the soul evolves, and the more it evolves it eventually comes to the spiritual level. What the spiritual person brings to earth is of greater importance and consequence than all the riches put together. With all the billions of money, one can employ people or donate it, but the earth does not get transformed by that. It gets materially enriched, no doubt, but what one yogi does by bringing spiritual consciousness to humankind is incomparable with any money. That is why in India, we have always given credence and importance to a spiritual man and not to a rich man. All our kings and kingdoms had one *rishi* as the adviser because he was supposed to be of the greatest help. The *rishi*, or the yogi, has the vision to guide the world.

Unfortunately, we in India have lost that attitude. We no more seek guidance from our *rishis*. Sri Aurobindo perhaps reminds us that this also applies to the theory of karma. We have accepted it superficially without delving into its deeper meaning. He says, "These notions cannot be acceptable to the thinking mind; they have too

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* evidently the stamp of a construction fashioned by our human ignorance.”

This is one of the crucial chapters for our understanding; it is not metaphysics, but there are many misconceptions that Sri Aurobindo has clarified here. Most Indians suffer from these misconceptions of rebirth and karma.

Therefore, I am purposely taking time to read it through because we seldom find such clarity on these issues.

We have seen the popular belief about the law of karma, but Sri Aurobindo is taking us deeper into the philosophic basis of this popular belief. What is the truth behind this popular belief? He says,

But the same solution can be elevated to a higher level of reason and given a greater plausibility and the colour of a cosmic principle. For, first, it may be based on the unassailable ground that all energies in Nature must have their natural consequence; if any are without visible result in the present life, it may well be that the outcome is only delayed, not withheld ever.

Each being reaps the harvest of his works and deeds, the returns of the action put forth by the energies of his nature, and those which are not apparent in his present birth must be held over for a subsequent existence.

This is the cosmic principle behind the law of karma: “all energies in Nature must have their natural consequence”.

He will develop this sentence later. We need not put any moral label on the question of karma; the basic principle is that all energies in nature have their natural consequences.

That is, if we put forth mental energies, we will have consequences on the mental level. If we put forth vital

energies, we will have vital results and likewise for the physical. It is quite natural. For example, if a person keeps attempting to write poetry or a novel, he will become a writer; how famous and successful is a different matter.

We have come across many success stories of people in business who started very small, without help, and without a significant investment. After many failures and hurdles also, it continued to persist. This brought them the necessary faculties, resources and experience, which eventually led to the success of their business. In one life, one can succeed if one can persevere with that kind of energy. If we persevere – we can achieve.

The Mother would explain it in this manner if you put in energies on a particular plane – for example, a writer who sits every day at his table at the same time and attempts to write something, or a musician who plays his instruments every day – then over time these energies, whether vital or physical or mental –begin to come to the person. The repetition, the practice, connects the person to the music world and slowly, they begin to get intimations from those worlds. So is it with everything; we can also connect with the world of money or literature, but we must persevere.

In karmic theory, it is the same thing. But what is added here is that if there is no visible result in the present life, it may well be that the outcome is only delayed to a later life; it is not withheld. That is why Sri Krishna in the Gita says no energies are wasted. Especially when talking about spirituality, he says we can start yoga at any stage in our lives. Even if one has aged, it is not too late because the energies put forward for yoga in this life will be carried forward in the next.

Each being reaps the harvest of his works and deeds,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the returns of the action put forth by the energies of his nature, and those which are not apparent in his present birth must be held over for a subsequent existence. It is true that the result of the energies and actions of the individual may accrue not to himself but to others when he is gone; for that we see constantly happening,—it happens

indeed even during a man's lifetime that the fruits of his energies are reaped by others; but this is because there is a solidarity and continuity of life in Nature and the individual cannot altogether, even if he so wills, live for himself alone.

Sri Aurobindo extends the same idea here. A person who has persevered may achieve in this life or the next life, or at least his family members or community will benefit from his deeds. But the main point here is that nothing goes waste. Either we individually enjoy the fruits of our labour, or it is shared with our family, community, and country. Everyone who is doing intense work shares his deeds with the general humanity. He further writes: Man's being, nature, circumstances of life are the result of his own inner and outer activities, not something fortuitous and inexplicable; he is what he has made himself; the past man was the father of the man that now is, the present man is the father of the man that will be.

Mark these simple yet profound words – “he is what he has made himself”. We cannot blame the circumstances, saying I was not wealthy, my parents did not give me much money etc. These could be contributive factors, but as he says, you are the creator of yourself, and you are the creator also of your fate. So, everything revolves around the individual. He says, each being reaps what he

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sows: from what he does, he profits; from what he does, he suffers. Essentially, if we define karma in one brief sentence, it is – each being reaps what he sows. That is the fundamental law. But this cosmic law has been turned into a moral law.

This is the law and chain of Karma, of Action, of the work of Nature-Energy, and it gives a meaning to the total force of our existence, nature, character, action which is absent from other theories of life. It is evident on this principle that a man's past and present Karma must determine his future birth and its happenings and circumstances; for these too must be the fruit of his energies: all that he was and did in the past must be the creator of all that he now is and experiences in his present, and all that he is and is doing in the present must be the creator of what he will be and experience in the

future. Man is the creator of himself; he is the creator also of his fate. All this is perfectly rational and unexceptionable so far as it goes and the law of Karma may be accepted as a fact, as part of the cosmic machinery; for it is so evident, – rebirth once admitted, – as to be practically indisputable.

We see that Sri Aurobindo is not against the law of karma but rather the way it has been presented. The popular view is a creation of a small part of the human vital mind concerned only with happiness and joy and sorrow and suffering. But as a cosmic principle, karma is true, and the truth is that each being reaps what he sows. Without talking about rebirth, we see that what I have been doing in the past is the foundation of what I am today, even in the present life itself.

Here I will share a personal example. There were

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* many hurdles and difficulties when I set out to construct SACAR. But the Mother had blessed me in one of her letters and asked me to persevere. She also wrote that my future would be revealed to me as I go along. With faith in the Mother, I persevered. However, when SACAR has been built today, it is useful to many people. Many people have joined us as colleagues, volunteers and students. So, my karma, or the seed that I have sown, is being repeated by not only me but others. It has a double benefit – helping others and another in my sadhana. Whatever I have gained while making SACAR, the faith I developed will be carried to my next life. I may reap the spiritual benefits of the work done in dedication to the Mother in this life and the next life.

Sri Aurobindo emphasises, “Man is the creator himself; he is the creator also of his fate.” Then he says, “the law of karma may be accepted as a fact, as part of the cosmic machinery; for it is so evident... as to be practically indisputable.” He says the law of karma may be accepted, but there is one clause here that we should not overlook; it is “part of the cosmic machinery”. We in India have made karma into the ‘be all and end all of life’s actions.’

He says karma is a fact, but it is just one element in the cosmic machinery. It is not the only determinant of our life. This is where Sri Aurobindo would differ from others: many other factors account for our life and rebirth. For example, there is the cosmic being, the transcendental being, the psychic being, and the grace of our guru – all these elements can modify our life. Still, we continue to mistakenly put an entire and exclusive emphasis on karma.

Then Sri Aurobindo continues –

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There are, however, two riders to this first proposition which are less general and authentic and bring in a doubtful note; for though they may be true in part, they are overstated and create a wrong perspective, because they are put forward as the whole sense of Karma. The first is that as is the nature of the energies so must be the nature of the results, – the good must bring good result, the evil must bring evil results; the second is that the master word of Karma is justice and therefore good deeds must bear the fruit of happiness and good fortune and evil deeds must bear the fruit of sorrow, misery and ill-fortune. Since there must be cosmic justice which is looking on and controlling in some way the immediate and visible operations of nature in life, but is not apparent to us in the facts of life as seen by us, it must be present and evident in the totality of her unseen dealings; it must be the subtle and hardly visible, but strong and firm secret thread that holds together the otherwise incoherent details of her dealings with her creatures.

These are errors in our understanding of the principle of karma. We said that fundamentally all energies in nature have their natural consequence. To that extent, the law is good, objective and right. But morality has made a blunder because it says that good actions must bring good results and evil actions must bring dire consequences.

For example, I may put in emotional, vital energy; I may help a sad person and feel like helping him out. Maybe at the back of my mind, I think that if I do him some good, surely I will also accrue some good. There is a kind of

moral justification: if I do something good, I will get back something good – today or tomorrow, from him or

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* somebody else. But this is what Sri Aurobindo challenges.

It is not a mathematical equation.

I recently heard that a poor lady working in the house needed some money. Somebody gave her the money saying, well, we should be sympathetic; after all, she doesn't generally ask for money, and we should give her when she wants it. With that money, the poor lady bought liquor and got drunk. For the past five days, she drank so much that she was loitering on the streets. She has earned ill-fame for herself, lost the respect of her neighbours, and she may even lose her job. Did this so-called good help bring out the good? That is not the law of karma, that good brings out the good, and bad brings out bad. When a mother punishes her child, the act might look cruel, but it is for the child's benefit. So does that mean the mother will reap negative results for her act? No. Apparently, an evil act would yield a positive impact, in this case, for the mother.

Secondly, he says, "the master word of karma is justice, and therefore good deeds must bear the fruit of happiness, and good fortune and evil deeds must bear the fruit of sorrow, misery and ill-fortune". This is the same idea that karma means an absolute justice. Justice means that if we have done something good, it will be recorded in our history and bio-data, so in this life or the next, we will get something good. Sri Aurobindo says this is a wrong approach.

If it be asked why actions alone, good or bad deeds alone, should have result, it might be conceded that good or evil thoughts, feelings, actions have all their corresponding results, but since action is the greater part of life and the test and formulated power of

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man's values of being, since also he is not always responsible for his thoughts and feelings, as they are often involuntary, but is or must be held responsible for what he does, as that is subject to his choice, it is mainly his actions that construct his fate; they are the chief or the most forceful determinants of his being and his future.

The question is, why should it be only bad and good deeds that produce karma? It could also be the same law on the thought and emotional level. If I sit here and think ill of somebody, won't that affect the person? In Indian society, our elders always tell us not to think wrong of somebody; that will bring back to us something terrible.

Even on the thought level, if we harbour some ill will towards another person, it will return to us. Similarly, on the emotional level, if we pray for somebody or send goodwill and sympathy for somebody, that will also come back. Sri Aurobindo says, don't think only physical actions have karmic effects; thought and emotion also produce karma. Usually, people say that thoughts and feelings are not under our control; they are much influenced by others, whereas my deeds are completely under me.

Sometimes we may be in a bad mood; sometimes, in a good one, and we can't control this. Therefore, karmic law has focused on external deeds and physical actions rather than thoughts or emotions.

Sri Aurobindo has already said that karma is only one part of the cosmic law. He further adds, But we have first to observe that a law or chain of Karma is only an outward machinery and cannot be elevated to a greater position as the sole and absolute determinant of the life-workings of the cosmos, unless

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* the cosmos is itself entirely mechanical in its character.

It is indeed held by many that all is Law and Process and there is no conscious Being or Will in or behind the cosmos; if so, here is a Law and Process that satisfies our human reason and our mental standards of right

and justice and it has the beauty and truth of a perfect symmetry and a mathematical accuracy of working. But all is not Law and Process, there is also Being and Consciousness; there is not only a machinery but a Spirit in things, not only Nature and law of cosmos but a cosmic Spirit, not only a process of mind and life and body but a soul in the natural creature.

We should not think that there is only the chain or law of karma which exclusively determines our actions. That would make the world too mechanical. In this idea, the world is considered just like a mechanical machine. This is consistent with the mechanical, scientific, and materialist view, and I suppose that is why the west has taken to this law of karma so easily. This law of karma suits the attitude that everything runs like a machine, that there is no God, no Supreme Being. In Indian philosophy, we have the concept of Purusha along with Prakriti. If we speak of the law of karma as Nature or Prakriti or Energy, there has to be a Purusha, a Being or Brahman behind it. We have always had this balance that this law of karma is not the only force; there is something beyond. Beyond this law of karma, there is Grace. Sri Aurobindo has explained that beyond *karma*, there is *karuna* and *kripa* – compassion and grace. The law of karma is the lowest of the three.

If we employ energy, we will get a result of equal energy.

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This Newtonian law applies to the law of karma also. It's an indubitable fact. This law of physics is irrefutable. What Newton said is almost a law of karma put differently. But then, on the higher level, there is *karuna*, compassion. That corresponds to what we said about the being. Compassion comes from the universal being, which is like sunlight on everyone. Sunlight does not bother if it is a good or bad day, east or west; it is there every day in all parts of the world. Such is the universal cosmic being. But even beyond that, there is the grace, *kripa*, which is almost, if I can say, 'transcendent' but is a 'universal' working on the individual. *Kripa* is the highest force in this world; it is not like the sunlight shed on all equally, it is focused on a few.

That is what we call the Divine Mother's grace.

Buddha was an emblem of *karuna*. We have the story where he walks in the forest, and a pigeon falls at his feet. It was shot by an arrow and bleeding to death. The Buddha healed it. The Buddha dissuaded him when his attendant wanted to check who had shot the pigeon.

For him, who shot the pigeon was not important. It was necessary to attend to the suffering pigeon. He does not bother about the causes but about the effect. He did not address the why and how of humanity's suffering. Instead, he found a way to escape the suffering world. For this, he did intense tapasya for years and attained nirvana.

It was subsequently the compassion of the Buddha that developed into his eight-fold path.

Compassion is like balm on the wound; Grace ensures that there is no wound at all. That is the highest force.

Even before suffering comes, it is erased.

This is the idea Sri Aurobindo explains: behind the law of karma, there is "a Being and Consciousness; there

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is not only a machinery but a Spirit in things, not only Nature and law of cosmos but a cosmic Spirit, not only a process of mind and life and body but a soul in the natural creature". Fortunately, Indians always keep in mind the other elements of the Being and Consciousness, which on the day-to-day level has become the *guru kripa* because, for us, the *guru* is the representative of the Divine. We say things will be done with Mother's grace, not with Mother's compassion. She can eradicate suffering as part of our karma. The soul is not here just to be bothered with its good and evil, its comfort and discomfort, its money and poverty. It comes for a much higher purpose. The birth of our soul is not simply a part of moral machinery.

Grace can remove or eradicate our account of so-called ill effects, suffering, and sorrow before they come to us. That is why we pray to the Mother and call for her grace.

In the small booklet, *The Mother* Sri Aurobindo speaks of the need for the Divine Mother's grace and human effort. The grace will not come just by saying, "Mother, I want your grace". Sri Aurobindo wrote that we cannot have the Mother's grace unconditionally. One may receive her *karuna* or compassion but *kripa*, grace, is conditional.

Usually, we do not pay attention to these nuances. We think that just by working in a Sri Aurobindo centre or Ashram, one is eligible for the Mother's grace. Even if we don't meet the necessary conditions, she will shower her *kripa* on us! It is not so. Sri Aurobindo has been very clear on this point that we need to fulfil several conditions to receive grace; we must be inwardly turned to the Divine and be open and receptive. Unless and until we meet those conditions, we cannot expect the grace to descend.

Further, Sri Aurobindo writes:

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There is Law, but there is also spiritual freedom. Law and Process are one side of our existence and their reign is over our outer mind, life and body, for these are mostly subject to the mechanism of Nature.

We have discussed earlier that karma applies to our body, life and mind, for these are mainly subject to this physical world. If we don't exercise, eat oily food and sweets and grow fat, obviously, we will have health problems. It is a natural law! Similarly, on vital and mental levels, people may say, "I don't want to read Sri Aurobindo; I am a bhakta, and the Mother will give me knowledge".

All that is lotus-eating, an excuse for our laziness. The Mother will not open our minds and put the philosophy of *The Life Divine* into it. It is as simple as exercising to build our muscles; we cannot just lie down and say, the Mother will build my biceps and triceps. The practice, exercise, or applying energy at physical, vital, and mental levels is to develop that part of the

being. Then only it is trained well and can open to higher consciousness. Such is the karmic law on the physical level. Further, we see –

But even here their mechanical power is absolute only over body and matter; for Law becomes more complex and less rigid, Process more plastic and less mechanical when there comes in the phenomenon of life, and yet more is this so when mind intervenes with its subtlety; an inner freedom already begins to intervene and, the more we go within the soul's power of choice is increasingly felt: for Prakriti is the field of law and process, but the soul, the Purusha, is the giver of the sanction, *anumantā*, and even if ordinarily it chooses to remain a witness and concede an automatic sanction, it can be, if it wills, the master of its nature, Ishwara.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is a beautiful philosophic explanation. The mechanical law of nature applies only to the body, to Matter. As we go away from Matter, from the material, physical consciousness to the emotional, this law begins to change. On the emotional level, I am much freer, and at the thought level, I am still freer and more flexible. At the thought level, I can be in Berlin in a second, whereas for my body, I must book a ticket, go to an airport, and take a long flight to get there. And if we go to the level of the soul, the natural law will not affect us much because the soul is actually the Purusha, the *anumantā*, the one who gives the sanction. That is why if we want to be the lord of our nature, the master of our circumstances, we must be one with the soul. Then we can guide and influence all our circumstances; the *karmic* law does not apply there.

Then Sri Aurobindo brings in the idea of fate. He says, It is not conceivable that the Spirit within is an automaton in the hands of Karma, a slave in this life of its past actions; the truth must be less rigid and more plastic. If a certain amount of results of past Karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic being which presides over the new formation of its earth-experience and assents not merely to an outward compulsory process, but to a secret Will and Guidance. That secret Will is not mechanical, but spiritual; the guidance comes from an Intelligence

which may use mechanical process but is not their subject. Self-expression and experience are what the soul seeks by its birth into the body...

The important idea here is: “If a certain amount of results of past Karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic”. This is a very critical

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factor. Many people think that when we take the next birth, by the karmic law, whatever I have done in the present life is the only factor that determines my next birth; if I have been a good person, then in my next time I will be happier and more prosperous. We have already seen that this is a misunderstanding. Here, he says that whatever karma comes from the past life to the present or future lives comes with the consent of the psychic being. Everything that I do in this life doesn't need to have a karmic effect in the next life. My soul may choose a few particular karmas for the next birth because they may be helpful for new experiences, but others might be rejected. So karma is not carried over in its entirety. The psychic being selects and consents to what is brought to its next birth.

And then, Sri Aurobindo says that behind this psychic selection, there is a “secret Will and Guidance”. Jivatman is the source of that will and guidance behind the psychic being. We see that our birth and this world are not related randomly. Behind every act, every thought, there is a meaning to the sanction of Jivatman. We have seen many accounts where people have said things like, ‘I just came to South India, and by chance and then I came to Pondicherry’, or ‘I thought of just visiting for a day, and then I stayed back for a month in the Ashram’, or ‘I didn't want to see the Mother, but one day she called me, and that turned around my entire life.’ These things do not happen by chance; all is ordained, but this is not the same as fate.

In fact, in this very paragraph, Sri Aurobindo discusses the question of fate. What is meant by “secret will”?

That secret will is not mechanical, but spiritual; the guidance comes from an Intelligence which may

Deliberations on *The Life Divine* use mechanical process but is not their subject. Self-expression and experience are what the soul seeks by its birth into the body; whatever is necessary for the self-expression and experience of this life, whether it intervenes as an automatic outcome of past lives or as a free selection of results and a continuity or as a new development, whatever is a means of creation of the future, that will be formulated; for the principle is not the working out of a mechanism of Law, but the development of the nature through cosmic experience so that eventually it may grow out of Ignorance.

“Self-expression and experience are what the soul seeks by its birth into the body”. For the new experience, whatever is needed, whichever instrument is required, even some karmic factors, the soul puts everything into the bag and takes birth. It doesn't bother with morality or other laws. It is purely here for its own expression and experience. The exclusive attention of the psychic being is on what will help it in its next birth. It is entirely free.

What we have to understand is that the whole purpose of this life is a spiritual experience. Ninety-nine percent of humanity does not go into this spiritual experience; it is trapped in its materialistic experience. But through such experience, also spirituality has to be expressed.

At the deeper level, the primary concern of the psychic being is the development of the outer nature through cosmic experience so that, eventually, it may grow out of Ignorance. The whole purpose is self-experience, self-expression and the eventual divinisation of matter.

Each time it takes a body, it tries to inject some higher consciousness into Matter. This is its entire motive.

It is not the motive of the soul to become a popular or a

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famous man. Great souls do not bother about their names being written in the annals of history. There have been great souls who have taken quite an

unknown birth in this life. For example, all of you know the name of John the Baptist. This soul was later born in this Ashram, but he was a very ordinary sadhak. There was a famous king of Persia, and he was born almost as a beggar this time. They don't have big names; experience is important for the soul.

According to her narration, the Mother was a queen of Russia in her previous life, Catherine the Great. But the Mother said she decided in her last birth that she would be born as a common person in her next birth, unknown.

The point is that the soul is not bothered about greatness; if it achieves something, it gives it to humanity to reap the benefits.

There must therefore be two elements, Karma as an instrument, but also the secret Consciousness and Will within working through the mind, life and body as the user. Fate whether purely mechanical or created by ourselves, a chain of our own manufacture, is only one factor of existence; Being and its consciousness and its will are a still more important factor. In Indian astrology which considers all life-circumstances to be Karma, mostly predetermined or indicated in the graph of the stars, there is still provision made for the energy and force of the being which can change or cancel part or much of what is so written or even all but the most imperative and powerful bindings of Karma.

This is a good comment on astrology. We believe that man's life is determined by astrology. We go to astrologers, palmists, and those people on the streets with little parrots whom we think can tell our future. But even they, while

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* they are telling us we have this *nakshatra*, or we have been born under this star in this house, will accept the element of *kripa*, Grace, and that there is the possibility that all these effects will be erased because of the Grace of the Guru. This is precisely what Sri Aurobindo says – beyond karma, there is always the Being.

This is a reasonable account of the balance; but there is also to be added to the computation the fact that destiny is not simple but complex; the destiny which binds our physical being binds it so long or in so far as a greater law does not intervene. Action belongs to the physical part of us, it is the physical outcome of our being; but behind our surface is a freer Life-power, a freer Mind-power which has another energy and can create another destiny and bring it in to modify the primary plan, and when the soul and self emerges, when we become consciously spiritual beings, the change can cancel or wholly remodel the graph of our physical fate. Karma, then, – or at least any mechanical law of Karma, – cannot be accepted as the sole determinant of circumstances and the whole machinery of rebirth and of our future evolution.

The question of fate versus free will has been much debated. Is there free will, or is everything fated, is the nature of my life all due to my karma? It is not so easy to say if there is free will or not if there is determinism!

Sri Aurobindo says it is a complex affair – “the destiny which binds our physical being binds it so long or in so far as a greater law does not intervene.” We could say that there are different levels of destiny; on each level, destiny is complete, but it can be erased or influenced by a higher one. As Sri Aurobindo says, “so far as a greater law does

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not intervene”, the destiny on a particular level continues.

The Life-power and the Mind-power have another energy than the body and can create another destiny.

The Mother gave an example. Suppose somebody is walking on the street, and it is destined that a tile gets loose from the roof of a house and falls on his head, giving him a mortal injury. That would be his destiny on the physical level. However, if, at the same time, a yogi passes by and realises that this tile will fall upon this man, he can, with his spiritual power, stop the tile from falling on the man. The tile may fall near or behind him but does not injure the person. That is how a higher destiny can intervene in the lower destiny.

When we go to the spiritual level, our destiny may completely change. My body may be destined to have specific problems on the physical level because of my genetic factors and many other reasons. That is a physical destiny. But it may be that my spiritual destiny is different.

If we come to the Mother, a different spiritual destiny may intervene and change or cancel our physical destiny.

There was a poet here in the Ashram who came in the early times and wanted to join the ashram. The Mother or Sri Aurobindo told him that if he joined the Ashram and stayed here, he would have tremendous physical pain and suffering, but his spiritual destiny would be very high. He was given a choice to suffer or go away and suffer less. But this poet chooses to stay here. So his spiritual destiny intervened and changed his physical destiny, but in this case, it made him suffer physically. He flowered into one of the most beautiful poets of Bengal, and often his poetry is compared with Tagore's. Because he was under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* spiritual being flowered in him, but the body suffered.

To some other people, the Mother advised them not to leave the ashram, which would incur physical suffering.

Despite her warning, some people went and suffered. So we see that different destinies are working simultaneously.

Spiritually we may advance immensely, but physically we may be destitute. Mentally we may not be that developed, but spiritually we may prosper.

Champaklalji is another example. Except for the book *The Mother*, I don't think he read much, but his spiritual destiny was splendid! The first time he saw Sri Aurobindo, he realised him as Shiva. Sri Aurobindo came down to give him darshan and stood on the last step of the staircase in the Guest House. Champaklalji did a *sashtanga pranam* for one full hour. That was

the destiny of his spiritual being. Vitally he was like a lion. He would get angry if one wasted the Mother's time. In front of the Mother, he would chide away people and not allow them to waste her time.

He gave twenty-five years of service to Sri Aurobindo and twenty-five years of physical service to the Mother.

After that experience, he said that his ultimate impression of Sri Aurobindo was that he was the perfect example of surrender. His image of the Mother was that she was the perfect example of service to the Lord.

As long as we are not entirely surrendered to the Mother, we are victims of our destiny. We may not have erased our karma completely by coming to the Mother. But the more we surrender, the higher force takes us up, and this energy can create another destiny and modify the primary plan.

When the soul and higher Self emerge, when we become consciously spiritual beings, this change can cancel or wholly remodel the graph of our physical fate.

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If we want to get rid of bad karma, no amount of pujas will help. Indians usually indulge in rituals and ceremonies to cancel specific karmic effects. Two things alone can change our karma: one is the divine grace, and the other is our spiritual growth and realisation of the psychic being.

But we are so eager to get rid of the bad karma that we go to any extent to perform external rituals.

Next, we come to a straightforward equation which we have already discussed:

But this is not all; for the statement of the Law errs by an over-simplification and the arbitrary selection of a limited principle. Action is a resultant of the energy of the being, but this energy is not of one sole kind; the Consciousness-Force of the Spirit manifests itself in many kinds of energies: there are inner activities of mind, activities of life, of desire,

passion, impulse, character, activities of the senses and the body, a pursuit of truth and knowledge, a pursuit of beauty, a pursuit of ethical good or evil, a pursuit of power, love, joy, happiness, fortune, success, pleasure, self-satisfaction of all kinds, life-enlargement, a pursuit of individual or collective objects, a pursuit of the health, strength, capacity, satisfaction of the body. All this makes an exceedingly complex sum of the manifold experience and many-sided action of the Spirit in life, and its variety cannot be set aside in favour of a single principle, neither can it be hammered into so many sections of the single duality of ethical good and evil; ethics, the maintenance of human standards of morality, cannot, therefore, be the sole preoccupation of the cosmic Law or the sole principle of determination of the working of the Karma.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This is one of the most important criticisms that we have seen from Sri Aurobindo about popular beliefs on Karma, which is related only to good and evil, sorrow and suffering.

But is human life divided into these two things – good and evil and sorrow and suffering? We also have, as he says, the pursuit of truth, knowledge, beauty, ethics, success, love, joy, and power! Human expression is not always moralistic; there are multiple expressions of life. He says, If it is true that the nature of the energy put forth must determine the nature of the result or outcome, all these differences in the nature of the energy have to be taken into account and each must have its appropriate consequence. An energy of seeking for truth and knowledge must have as its natural outcome,—its reward or recompense, if you will,—a growth into truth, an increase in knowledge; an energy used for falsehood should result in an increase of falsehood in the nature and a deeper immersion in the Ignorance.

We will bear the fruits depending on the nature of the energy we put forth. If somebody pursues truth and knowledge and puts all his mental energy into that, the natural thing is that he will increase his knowledge. It will not increase his sense of beauty or his physical power. A bodybuilder or an athlete who trains seven days a week may eventually go to the Olympics and win a medal, but he will not gain any knowledge of truth and beauty.

The simple logic is that where we put in our effort, we will get the fruit on that level. Then he says, This is the ordinary disposition of things in Nature and, if justice be demanded of her, this surely is justice that the energy and capacity put forward should have in its own kind its fitting response from her. The

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prize of the race is assigned by her to the swift, the victory in battle to the brave and strong and skilful, the reward of knowledge to the capable intellect and the earnest seeker: these things she will not give to the good man who is sluggish or weak or skillless or stupid merely because he is righteous or respectable; if he covets these other powers of life, he must qualify for them and put forward the right kind of energy.

The same idea is put more forcefully. Sri Aurobindo gives us examples of how Nature rewards us in the direction where we employ our energies. An athlete alone can get the gold medal; the warrior's reward is victory.

Similarly, knowledge comes to the mental seeker. All these rewards are not interchangeable. We should not equate the results from one activity level to those from another.

Goodness is not the ultimate thing in life; there is beauty, justice, joy, ananda, consciousness, knowledge, etc.

If Nature did otherwise, she could well be accused of injustice; there is no reason to accuse her of injustice for this perfectly right and normal arrangement or to demand from her a rectification of the balance in a future life so that the good man may be given as a natural reward for his virtue a high post or a large bank-balance or a happy, easy and well-appointed life.

Sri Aurobindo clarifies that one should not think that if one does anything good in this life, he will become a rich man in the next life. Where is the logic in that? Goodness has no connection with riches or success. He says, There is indeed in our life a very large element of what we call luck or fortune, which baulks our effort of result or gives the prize without effort or

to an inferior energy: the secret cause of these caprices of Destiny,—or causes,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* for the roots of Fortune may be manifold, —must be no doubt partly sought for in our hidden past; but it is difficult to accept the simple solution that good luck is a return for a forgotten virtuous action in a past life and bad luck a return for a sin or crime.

If someone has good luck now, we immediately say he must have done something good in the past. We convert everything to good and evil, good luck and bad luck, as if God is only a judge deciding who is good and evil and has no other business! He adds,

If we see the righteous man suffering here, it is difficult to believe that this paragon of virtue was in the last life a scoundrel and is paying, even after his exemplary conversion by a new birth, for sins he then committed; not, if the wicked triumphs, can we easily suppose that he was in his last life a saint who has suddenly taken a wrong turn but continues to receive a cash-return for his previous virtue.

He says this reasoning is illogical and cannot be the true law of karma. Many times we see corrupt people having or earning billions of dollars, becoming successful and leading a comfortable life, whereas a simple and honest person may have to lead his life in poverty. We are unable to solve this equation and think that it must be their past karma which made them rich or poor in this life.

Sri Aurobindo says,

A total change of this kind between life and life is possible though not likely to be frequent, but to saddle the new opposite personality with the rewards or punishments of the old looks like a purposeless and purely mechanical procedure. This and many other difficulties arise, and the too simple logic of the

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correlation is not so strong as it claims to be; the idea of retribution of Karma as a compensation for the justice of life and Nature is a feeble basis for the theory, for it puts forward a shallow and superficial human feeling and standard as the sense of the cosmic Law and is based on an unsound reasoning; there must be some other and stronger foundation for the law of Karma.

What is the difference between the billionaire and the sadhak? The sadhak in the Ashram is gaining on the spiritual level and is getting the greatest reward, a reward that will last him lives together, whereas the corrupt man may have much comfort but, he is likely to be creating negative karma because if he has cheated somebody on the physical level, in the next life those negative energies may return to him. Therefore, let us not judge everything by its appearance, by comfort and discomfort, joy and sorrow. There are other levels of our being which are worth cherishing. Being happy with the way we are living is one of the ways to add positive karma to our lives.

Sri Aurobindo continues,

In the action attributed to the law of Karma two values are selected out of the many created by Nature, moral good and evil, sin and virtue, and vital-physical good and evil, outward happiness and suffering, outward good fortune and ill-fortune, and it is supposed that there must be an equation between them, the one must be the reward or punishment of the other, the final sanction which it received in the secret justice of Nature.

The common idea of karma is that it selects only those things that are good or evil, sinful or virtuous. In one of her conversations, the Mother explains that sometimes an

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* ordinary person may feel awed by the riches or success of another person. But it could be a curse for the other person. It often happens that one forgets the Divine when one has abundant money or towering success. It becomes a spiritual bankruptcy – a great

setback for his spiritual being! Let us not think that if a man has heaps of money, he is a respectable man, and we must bow down to him.

We, on our simple level, may have divine grace whereas that person may be bearing a curse. If we are moving towards a more spiritual life, which is the destiny of our soul in its succession of lives, then we are more graced than that man who is having all the wealth. The more money one has, the more he comes under the falsehood of money, power, and sex. Many of these powerful, moneyed people are victims of all three. If we have lots of money, we want power, and if we have power, we go towards vital satisfaction and indulge in sex and violence.

It is better to be simple. In fact, in one of the messages given by the Mother about the conflict between the local villagers and the so-called elite she said that the poorest of the farmers here are closer to God than the educated ones. There is an intellectual arrogance that says I am more cultured than these villagers; they are dirty and work on the farmland, and don't even know what a computer is.

But she said they are closer to God than the scholars or intellectuals. The value that we give to life is closeness to God, not richness. The Mother turned the whole value system upside down. We should not take pride in being intellectually more capable, for if it brings arrogance to the mind, it has no value. We should not value only external achievements, there are many other values and the greatest value is God himself which gives meaning to our life.

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Moving further, Sri Aurobindo writes: But the truly ethical being does not need a system of rewards and punishments to follow the path of good and shun the path of evil; virtue to him is its own reward, sin brings with it its own punishment in the suffering of a fall from his own law of nature: this is the true ethical standard.

We may all like to remember this sentence because ultimately it is the truth. We don't need any reward in this life or the next life; virtue is its "own reward". For example, if we do something kind, what is the reward we get?

It is a feeling of joy and satisfaction. We do not have to announce it through the newspaper and make it public! Joy is the real reward of all virtue; external rewards are of no value. We should not hunger for recognition, for it promotes ego. The joy I get out of a simple act is much more valuable. And if I do something wrong, “sin brings with it its own punishment in the suffering of a fall from his own law of nature”. These are extraordinary thoughts! Sin need not be punished with hell nor with bad luck. When we do something wrong, there is a fall in our consciousness. We feel uneasy; we know we have done something wrong. People feel this uneasiness many times but do not always attend to it. For most us, we see that if we do anything our psychic being prompts us that there is a fall in our consciousness. The real punishment for a seeker, a sadhak, a sensitive person is – this uneasiness, what we call a ‘guilt conscience’. We cannot live with that for long. It is this sense of uneasiness that controls or influences the action of a spiritual person. And further, Sri Aurobindo says there is “a fall from his own law of nature”. The punishment is that we move away from our

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* true self and our true swabhava, our true nature, from the way we are supposed to be, act and do in our life. This is the real tragedy of the soul.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Human beings have erected the rule of reward and punishment as a social necessity in order to restrain the doing of things harmful to the community and encourage what is helpful to it; but to erect this human device into general law of cosmic Nature or a law of the supreme Being or the supreme law of existence is a procedure of doubtful value. It is human, but also puerile, to impose the insufficient and narrow standards of our own Ignorance on the larger and more intricate operations of cosmic Nature.

Sri Aurobindo recognises that there is a social need for morality, but for a seeker, it has no value. Society in general will not understand very high philosophy, therefore we have made a general law that if we do good, we will get a reward, and if we do bad we will be punished. We punish the

guilty and the criminal and send them to jail. But for a seeker, fall from consciousness is itself a punishment. He continues,

If the soul is passing through an evolution by a many-sided and complex experience, any law of Karma or return to action and output of Energy if it is to fit itself into that experience, must also be complex and cannot be of a simple and exiguous texture or rigid and one-sided in its incidence.

The law of karma is complex, but Sri Aurobindo has critically analysed the different angles of karma, brought out its truths and fiction and now he will conclude with the entire doctrine of karma.

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At the same time, a partial truth of fact, not of fundamental or general principle, may be admitted for this doctrine; for although the lines of the action of energy are distinct and independent, they can act together and upon each other, though not by any rigidly fixed law of correspondence. It is possible that in the total method of the returns of Nature there intervenes a strand of connection or rather of interaction between vital-physical good and ill and ethical good and ill, a limited correspondence and meeting-point between divergent dualities not amounting to an inseparable coherence. Our own varying energies, desires, movements are mixed together in their working and can bring about a mixed result: our vital part does demand substantial and external rewards for virtue, for knowledge, for every intellectual, aesthetic, moral or physical effort; it believes firmly in punishment for sin and evil for ignorance. This may well either create or else reply to a corresponding cosmic action; for Nature takes us as we are and to some extent suits her movements to our need or our demands on her. If we accept the action of invisible Forces upon us, there may be also invisible Forces in Life-Nature that belong to the same plane of Consciousness-Force as this part of our being, Forces that move according to the same plane or the same power-motive as our lower vital nature.

He says, “It is possible that in the total method of the returns of Nature there intervenes a strand of connection or rather of interaction between vital-physical good and ill and ethical good and ill...” There could be a parallel between our human nature and nature as such.

Sri Aurobindo explains, “Our vital part does demand

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* substantial and external rewards for virtue, for knowledge, for every intellectual aesthetic, moral or physical effort”. It is the vital in us that demands reward and punishment.

The mind may not be that rigid, to insist on punishment, it may take a philanthropic attitude and choose to forgive a mistake. However, the vital part is not so forgiving; it may want to take revenge. If a person has done some ill, then he should be punished. On the intellectual level, there is greater flexibility and broadness, but the vital does not have this unless it is touched by the psychic.

He says,

It can be often observed that when a self-assertive vital egoism goes on trampling on its way without restraint or scruple all that opposes its will or desire, it raises a mass of reactions against itself, reactions of hatred, antagonism, unease in men which may have their result now or hereafter, and still more formidable adverse reactions in universal Nature...

When a despot tramples upon others without restraint or scruples, it causes a reaction. This means not only dictators on the political level, but they could be dictators on any level – running a company, a school or a college. It raises a mass of reactions against itself, reactions of hatred and antagonism. Such a person automatically creates karma of ill-will and antagonism from other people. This is part of the karmic law; as we said, if we send out energy for destruction, then we get back in return the similar energy. It creates antagonism, hatred and unease in others which may show their results sometime or other. Hitler might have gone away physically without having to face the nemesis of the world, but with the amount of hatred he accumulated from the entire world, he will not be in

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peace in heaven! In the recent past, we have had many such examples of dictators, despots and rulers who tortured their people and incurred tremendous ill-will against themselves. Sri Aurobindo clarifies, It is as if the patience of Nature, her willingness to be used were exhausted; the very forces that the ego of the strong vital man seized and bent to its purpose rebel and turn against him, those he had trampled on rise up and receive power for his downfall: the insolent vital force of Man strikes against the throne of Necessity and is dashed to pieces or the lame foot of Punishment reaches at last the successful offender.

This is an analysis which applies to everybody. He says one cannot for long torture humanity or others. Whether in the company or the school or even in the family, one cannot be a despot for too long; there is bound to be a revolt, an uprising. He puts it very beautifully, “the lame foot of Punishment reaches, at last, the successful offender.”

For some time Nature allows her power to be misused, but after a while, she restricts it by creating revolt. In France before the French Revolution, Louis XV and Louis XVI oppressed the common people. It was as if Nature endured and suffered to a point, but after reaching that boiling point, the French revolution took place and the common man became more powerful than the king.

This reaction to his energies may come upon him in another life and not at once, it may be a burden of consequence he takes up in his return to the field of these Forces; it may happen on a small as well as a large scale, to the small vital being and his small errors as well as in these larger instances.

This applies not only to big political despots but it can

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* happen to any one of us on a small scale. If we are a despot, if we are oppressing others, even in a small department, it may happen to us.

For the principle will be the same; the mental being in us seeking for success by a misuse of force which Nature admits but reacts in the end

against it, receives the adverse return in the guise of defeat and suffering and failure.

Wherever it is, however strong one may be, it is bound to return because this is Nature's own law of karma. It will not tolerate oppression for long. That is why most dictators have been avenged. People have thrown out their kings on the streets.

But the promotion of this minor line of causes and results to the status of an invariable absolute Law or the whole cosmic rule of action of a supreme Being is not valid; they belong to a middle region between the inmost or supreme Truth of things and the impartiality of material Nature. In any case the reactions of Nature are not in essence meant as reward or punishment...

This is a very important point that these reactions in nature are not meant as a reward or punishment, they are natural consequences of a particular action or series of actions.

If we touch fire, it burns, but there is no principle of punishment in this relation of cause and effect, it is a lesson of relation and a lesson of experience; so in all Nature's dealings with us there is a relation of things and there is a corresponding lesson of experience.

It is a purely mechanical law of cause and effect. If a king or a despot oppresses others, with the same strength

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the same forces will return and he will be thrown out. If we touch fire, it's bound to burn us. There is no question of punishment here. There is no moral attitude. Whether we are good or bad, a sannyasi or a rishi or a sinner or a beggar, if we put our hand in the fire, it is going to burn.

In all of Nature's dealings with us, there is a relation between things and a corresponding lesson of experience.

Sri Aurobindo suggests that it is just a question of learning lessons from the corresponding reactions. He says, The action of the cosmic Energy is

complex and the same Forces may act in different ways according to circumstances, to the need of the being, to the intention of the cosmic Power in its action; our life is affected not only by its own energies but by the energies of others and by universal Forces and all this vast interplay cannot be determined in its results solely by the one factor of an all-governing moral law and its exclusive attention to the merits and demerits, the sins and virtues of individual human beings. Nor can good fortune or evil fortune, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery and suffering be taken as if they existed merely as incentives and deterrents to the natural being in its choice of good and evil.

We have seen that the popular notion of karma is narrow and thinks only of good or ill fortune resulting from good or evil actions as if our entire life is guided by a single moral law. In contrast to this view, he writes, It is for experience, for growth of the individual being that the soul enters into rebirth; joy and grief, pain and suffering, fortune and misfortune are parts of that experience, means of that growth: even the soul may of itself accept or choose poverty, misfortune and suffering as helpful to its growth, stimulants of a rapid

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* development, and reject riches and prosperity and success as dangerous and conducive to a relaxation of its spiritual effort.

Rebirth is not meant for going from comfort to comfort, success to success, or pleasure to more pleasure. This is a narrow, low interpretation of karma. For the soul, the entire emphasis is on hastening its growth towards the Divine. If it will help it to grow faster, the soul will take to poverty, it will willingly take to suffering or pain. We should not think the poor are far away from the Divine.

We never know, in poverty the soul may grow a hundred times faster than for the richest billionaire who never thinks of the Divine! Christianity emphasises that – it is for the poor that the doors of heaven are open. Having excessive money can be a curse, whereas living in poverty can make us think of the Divine, and can make us approach the Divine for all

kinds of help. For the soul what is important is to think of the Divine, not to think of comforts. Along this line, Sri Aurobindo has said that the soul may “reject riches and prosperity and success as dangerous and conducive to a relaxation of its spiritual effort.” It is a beautiful phrase – “conducive to a relaxation of its spiritual effort”. Ramprasad has a song, if I remember correctly, which says, “do not make me a king, just see, oh mother, that I have two meals a day and some coarse cloth on my body.” It is a beautiful song in Bengali. The poet does not want to become a king because the comforts of life may slacken his spiritual effort. Such has been the tendency of the eastern psyche. Today, we have lost those values, we all want to be kings.

I have seen those who are so-called wealthy also go to temples. But I am afraid it is more out of fear, only to pay lip service, not out of devotion to the Divine. It's more that

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they want to keep up the tradition and are afraid that if they don't do that they may lose their wealth. It is a kind of bartering. But when we do not have much, we have nothing to lose, neither name nor money. As I mentioned recently, the Mother had said that the poorest in India are closer to God than the intellectuals and elites of the West.

Sri Aurobindo says,

Happiness and success bringing happiness are, no doubt, a legitimate demand of humanity; it is an attempt of Life and Matter to catch a pale reflection or a gross image of felicity: but a superficial happiness and material success, however desirable to our vital nature, are not the main object of our existence; if that had been the intention, life would have been otherwise arranged in the cosmic ordinance of things.

All the secret of the circumstances of rebirth centres around the one capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience; that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory.

For Sri Aurobindo there's nothing more important in life than the inner spiritual growth of the soul; all else is an accessory. If it is there, well and good; if it is not there, no problem! But today we have reversed the whole value system. The accessory has become the primary and the primary has become the accessory. He says that it is legitimate that we look for happiness because it is innately an image or reflection of that original felicity of the Divine. As Vedanta says, it is out of delight that we are born, it is in delight that we exist, and it is to delight that we return. Because there is continuous Ananda behind all creation, we are all seeking that felicity, that Ananda.

But we pursue only a gross image of it, often a perverted,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* distorted image. We have the right to say we want to be happy because happiness and delight are the essence of creation, but for the soul, the first need is its own growth because that alone will bring Ananda its purity.

Sri Aurobindo says that if happiness were the only important thing in life, life would have been otherwise arranged in the cosmic ordinance of things. Happiness alone is not the aim of life; if it were so, the whole life rhythm would have been arranged differently by the Divine.

What is the aim around which the Divine has arranged this life? It is the soul's need to grow and experience. All our sorrows and sufferings and pains and difficulties come only to hasten the growth of the soul. If we do not grow then pain and suffering continue to come in a greater measure because we have not taken the right direction when it came for the first time. The Mother said, all the circumstances and difficulties are meant for our growth if we can take them rightly. Unfortunately, we soon forget them and come back to the same old path and the next time we are met with greater pain and suffering.

In one of her conversations, the Mother said that each of us is put in a particular circumstance in life – meaning our country, family, environment, and education – according to the need of our soul. We are not randomly

born in a particular country or a family. The soul chooses the best circumstances to grow. I remember that when the Mother gave any work to ashramites or newcomers in the Ashram, she had their soul's growth as the primary criterion.

Whatever work helped them grow faster towards the Divine would be chosen for them by her. Someone might have a PhD in Philosophy and she might have given them

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the work of cleaning the floors in the Dining Room. Or someone may a great scholar in literature and put to work in the furniture department. People were amazed at the Mother's decisions. At times there were reactions by the sadhaks, but then they ultimately understood that it was really the best place for their soul's growth. Everything in life is meant for the soul's growth, if only we understand that. But as Sri Aurobindo says, we have our vital needs, we have our vital demands. We forget the main line of action. He continues:

Cosmic existence is not a vast administrative system of universal justice with a cosmic Law of recompense and retribution as its machinery or a divine Legislator and Judge at its centre. It is seen by us first as a great automatic movement of energy of Nature, and in it emerges a self-developing movement of consciousness, a movement therefore of Spirit working out its own being in the motion of energy of Nature. In this motion takes place the cycle of rebirth, and in that cycle the soul, the psychic being, prepares for itself,—or the Divine Wisdom or the cosmic Consciousness-Force prepares for it and through its action,—whatever is needed for the next step in its evolution, the next formation of personality, the coming nexus of necessary experiences constantly provided and organised out of the continuous flux of past, present and future energies for each new birth, for each new state of the Spirit backward or forward or else still in a circle, but always a step in the growth of the being towards its destined self-unfolding in Nature.

First, let's forget this old idea that cosmic existence

“is a vast administrative system of universal justice with

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* a cosmic law of recompense and retribution”. This has been given to us right from ancient times that God is a judge. But it is a wrong interpretation. He is not just a cosmic law. We have a lot of literature, poetry and art describing the heavens and God as a judge. He has been famously presented in art holding a scale weighing exactly the things that people have done. In contrast to this view, Sri Aurobindo says, “it is seen by us first as a great automatic movement of energy of Nature”. Sri Aurobindo tells us that the entire creation is a vast movement of Shakti, of energy deploying itself only to fulfil what is there in the Divine. It is a perennial movement of self-expression of the Divine. When the soul comes to take birth upon this earth it utilises this energy for whatever is required for its growth, energy which may come from the past or the present.

For example, in this class on *The Life Divine* I have to explain certain things and to do this I go back in my memory to remember related things that I have read from Sri Aurobindo or the Mother. The past is useful for the present. Sometimes on the spur of the moment, I may get intuitions or new ideas and use those. Similarly, when the soul takes a new birth it chooses energies that it can use from its past development. We should not strictly bind the soul to some arithmetic administration of energies. There is simply the utilisation of past energies for the present and the present for the future. In simple words, karma is the soul’s utilisation of the flux of past, present and future energies for its new birth.

There is a misconception that Sri Aurobindo clarifies before he further explains the new personality. He says, This brings us to another element of the ordinary

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conception of rebirth which is not acceptable, since it is an obvious error of the physical mind, — the idea of the soul itself as a limited personality which survives unchanged from one birth to another.

In this idea, the soul takes on new births but it does not change, it does not grow. It is a portion of the one ocean of divinity and takes birth after birth, but does not change.

Soul and Immortality

We have already discussed a little about the soul and its immortality in our previous class. This section primarily deals with the destiny of the soul and immortality of the body. Sri Aurobindo says,

This too simple and superficial idea of the soul and personality is born of the physical mind's inability to look beyond its own apparent self-formation in this single existence. In its conception, what returns in the reincarnation must be not only the same spiritual being, the same psychic entity, but the same formation of nature that inhabited the body of the last birth; the body changes, the circumstances are different, but the form of the being, the mind, the character, the disposition, temperament, tendencies are the same: John Smith in his new life is the same John Smith that he was in his last avatar. But if that were so, there would be no spiritual utility or meaning at all in rebirth; for there would be the repetition of the same little personality, the same small mental and vital formation to the end of Time.

This is again a misconception that there is no change or growth in the personality or the soul. What is the fun of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* rebirth if the same person keeps coming again and again without any growth?

For the growth of the embodied being towards the full stature of its reality, not only a new experience, but a new personality is indispensable; to repeat the same personality would only be helpful if something had been incomplete in its formation of its experience which needed to be worked out in the same cadre of self, in the same building of mind and with the same formed capacity of energy. But normally this would be quite otiose: the soul that has been John Smith cannot gain anything or fulfill itself by remaining John Smith for ever; it cannot achieve growth or perfection by repeating the same character, interests, occupations, types of inner and outer movements for ever.

If in every birth there is a repetition of the same personality, there would be no evolution. But there may be exceptions where repetition is useful. For example, if Mr X by some misfortune had an accidental death and the soul wanted to have a particular kind of experience, it may come back with the same personality in a new body to complete that experience. It had already prepared the subtle physical body, mind, and life, but because the connection with the physical body got cut, the experience could not be continued. In such circumstances, the soul can bring back the entire subtle physical personality and take a new body and continue to have the experience to complete what it wanted in the previous birth. This may happen in some rare cases, otherwise, normally, such a return of the same personality is otiose, without purpose.

Normally there is a new personality with new interests and new occupations. I had mentioned earlier a case in the

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Ashram where the person meets with an accident but the soul wanted to go back to the body. This could not happen as the body got shattered beyond repair. The Mother kept the soul with her and then put it into a child born into the same family. I knew both persons; the person who died was my captain and when the soul came back into the new child I knew him also — the outer personality was entirely different. So it was not that the soul whose body died in the accident wanted to continue with the same experience.

These two personalities were such a contrast! What we want to clarify in our understanding is that there need not be a fixed sequential order in the successive births.

We should not think, because someone was like this in the last life, he must be like that in the next life.

Personality is only a temporary mental, vital, physical formation which the being, the real Person, the psychic entity, puts forward on the surface,—it is not the self in its abiding reality. In each return to earth the Person, the Purusha, makes a new formation, builds a new personal quantum suitable

for a new experience, for a new growth of its being. When it passes from its body, it keeps still the same vital and mental form for a time, but the forms or sheaths dissolve and what is kept is only the essential elements of the past quantum, of which some will but some may not be used in the next incarnation.

The essential form of the past personality may remain as one element among many, one personality among many personalities of the same Person, but in the background, in the subliminal behind the veil of the surface mind and life and body, contributing from there whatever is needed of itself to the new formation; but it will not itself be the whole formation or build anew the old unchanged type of nature.

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“The essential form of the past personalities may remain as one element among many”; if someone has been a poet, the essential experience of a poet is there in the treasure of the soul’s experience, and it may contribute to the personality of the new birth. I had given the example of Mr X who suddenly started writing poetry in French and it was revealed that he had been a poet in one of his past lives.

The essence of the poet was there, which worked in his life and he started writing poetry. Similarly, in others, we may notice a new personality coming forward due to past birth achievements. Sometimes, through many past births, if the soul has experienced multiple strong personalities, in this life all of them can manifest in some measure of the other.

One may be an artist, a sportsman and a businessman at the same time in one life. Many complexities can come in, it is not just the personality of the last life that shapes the present. The past personalities are there as if in a storehouse, and various ones may be influencing the person in the present life. Sri Aurobindo says, All the past is indeed there, with its accelerated impetus and potentialities for the formation of the future, but all of it is not ostensibly present and active. The greater the variety of formation that have existed in the past and can be utilised, the more rich and multitudinous and

accumulated buildings of experience, the more their essential result of capacity for knowledge, power, action, character, manifold response to the universe can be brought forward and harmonised in the new birth, the more numerous the veiled personalities mental, vital, subtle-physical that combine to enrich the new personality on the surface, the greater and more opulent will be that personality and the nearer to the possible

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transition out of the completed mental stage of evolution to something beyond it.

Two personalities with this character are Leonardo da Vinci and Sri Aurobindo. In their previous births, they had developed personalities with great achievements, for example, as a poet, an artist, and an architect, and these various influences were harmonised in the new birth. We are aware of the multifaceted personality of Leonardo da Vinci. He was the best painter, the best architect, the best engineer, and the best scientist of his time. How could one man in one life achieve such greatness in all these fields?

It is because he brought the essence of his achievements of past births into the present. We see this again in the life of Sri Aurobindo – he is such a multi-dimensional personality – as a poet, a dramatist, a philosopher, a yogi and the list goes on! All these successful personalities emerge and harmonise in the new personality, which as he says, is “greater and more opulent”.

Such complexity and gathering up of many personalities in one person can be a sign of a very advanced stage of the individual’s evolution when there is a strong central being that holds all together and works towards harmonisation and integration of the whole many-sided movement of nature.

An integrated complex personality can be a sign of an advanced stage of an individual’s evolution.

But, this opulent taking up of the past would not be a repetition of a personality; it would be a new formation and large consummation. It is not

as a machinery for the persistent renewal or prolongation of an unchanging personality that rebirth exists, but as a means for the evolution of the spiritual being in Nature.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* We should not think in our haste that the personalities of Julius Caesar, Shakespeare, and Leonardo da Vinci were reborn in Sri Aurobindo; it is not a rebirth of those personalities but something of them has combined and come together in a new personality for a new evolution.

There may be elements of these personalities but it is not a repetition, they are used for the next step in the evolution.

Sri Aurobindo used these different personalities this time to get the supramental consciousness. He brought them together to take a greater leap into the next level of consciousness. This kind of multiplicity of personality shows the richness and the opulence of the soul. A simple soul that perhaps has not taken too many births, or has not developed many personalities, may have a simpler personality that excels in just one area, as a housewife, a gardener, or an engineer.

I have met with a lot of people in India and abroad who have spoken about their memory of past lives. Some people say they have had a flash of their past lives, or that they know who they were in their most recent past life.

Some people have spoken about their personalities in the past life. What does this mean and how far is it true?

It becomes at once evident that in this plan of rebirth the false importance which our mind attaches to the memory of past lives disappears altogether.

He starts by referring to the 'false importance' that our mind attaches to the memory of past lives. Some psychologists work on this issue of past lives, and some of them work on the theory that if we can awaken to the memory of our past life, it will help in curing our present illnesses. But how much is this valid and how much should it be done? Sri Aurobindo clarifies,

If indeed rebirth were governed by a system of rewards and punishments, if life's whole intention were to teach the embodied spirit to be good and moral, – supposing that that is the intention in the dispensation of Karma and it is not what it looks like in this presentation of it, a mechanical law of recompense and retribution without any reformatory meaning or purpose, – then there is evidently a great stupidity and injustice in denying to the mind in its new incarnation all memory of its past births and actions.

If the reason for rebirth is that we are supposed to grow morally, then obviously we should be given the memory of our past lives. Suppose a teacher punishes a child for a mistake he committed a day before. But if the student has no memory of the day and the mischief, he will feel unfair to be punished. If he remembers it, then he may learn from his mistakes and will try to avoid repeating them. Similarly, if one has to evolve only morally, then one has to remember the past births, only then the present life, its rewards and punishments, will have validity. Otherwise, why should it be punished in this life for something it cannot remember doing? God then would be unjust and unfair.

Sri Aurobindo explains,

For it deprives the reborn being of all chance to realise why he is rewarded or punished or to get any advantage from the lesson of the profitableness of virtue and the unprofitableness of sin vouchsafed to him or inflicted on him. Even since life seems often to teach the opposite lesson,—for he sees the good suffer for their goodness and the wicked prosper by their wickedness,—he is rather likely to conclude in this perverse sense, because he has not the memory

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* of an assured and constant result of experience which would show him that the suffering of the good man who due to his past wickedness and the prosperity of the sinner due to the splendour of his past virtues, so that virtue is the best policy in the long run

for any reasonable and prudent soul entering into this dispensation of Nature.

If this memory is not there the person will find this life to be a perverse game in which he is being punished for something he has not done. The whole life becomes clumsy, unfair, and mystifying. Sri Aurobindo continues, It might be said that the psychic being within remembers; but such a secret memory would seem to have little effect or value on the surface. Or it might be said that it realises what has happened and learns its lessons when it reviews and assimilates its experiences after issuing from the body: but this intermittent memory does not very apparently help in the next birth; for most of us persist in sin or error and show no tangible signs of having profited by the teaching of our past experience.

A very strong argument! If I have done something bad in my past life, if I have done something violent and my soul learned its lesson after leaving the body, then I would not have repeated the same act now; therefore it is not evident that our psychic being remembers and learns its lesson even though the surface consciousness does not remember. By getting burnt if we learn not to put our hands in the fire, we do not ever repeat that mistake. But it seems we continue to repeat our errors from our past lives, therefore it seems that “such a secret memory would seem to have little effect or value on the surface”. Sri Aurobindo says that psychic being remembers their past lives and

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carries their gains and then makes a package of those for the new personality. But the new personality has no memory of those past lives. It may benefit from the good deeds and suffer due to the bad deeds that it has done in its past lives, not as a reward or punishment, but simply because it continues to carry the same tendencies into the present life. He says,

But if a constant development of being by a developing cosmic experience is the meaning and the building of a new personality in a new birth is the method, then any persistent or complete memory of the past life or lives might be a chain and a serious obstacle: it would be a force for prolonging the old temperament, character, preoccupations, and a tremendous burden

hampering the free development of the new personality and its formulations of new experience.

Why doesn't the psychic being bring forward its memory of past lives into the present life? Because if it did so, it would become an impediment, an obstacle to the formation of a new personality and a new set of life experiences by which it can grow. It would become stuck in the past with the old character and the old preoccupations, and it aims to move forward into a personality with new experiences and new growth. Even now in our present life if we have done something wrong in the past, that guilt weighs on our present consciousness. If in my past life I did something extremely violent, my memory of that would block me from developing a new personality in this life, it would be an impediment. By forgetting the whole memory of the past the new personality can grow independently.

In the Ashram, many people asked the Mother about

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* who they were or what they were like in their past lives, including me. To some, she answered and to others she just kept quiet. My letter was never answered. If the Mother had told me about my past births, then I would have been under its influence and the false or suffering ego might dominate my present consciousness. Normally it is better not to have the drag of the memory of past lives. Sri Aurobindo says,

A clear and detailed memory of past lives, hatreds, rancours, attachments, connections would be equally a stupendous inconvenience; for it would bind the reborn being to a useless repetition or a compulsory continuation of his surface past and stand heavily in the way of his bringing out new possibilities from the depths of the spirit.

A marvellous and simple logical answer! Imagine if we remembered all our “hatreds, rancors, attachments, connections”; how would that affect your present life?

All this, he says, would be a “stupendous inconvenience”.

We already have enough attachments and connections and problems in this life, if we added those from previous lives, And importantly, as Sri Aurobindo says, it would “stand heavily in the way of bringing out the new possibilities from the depths of the spirit” in this life. The whole meaning and purpose of rebirth would be lost. Sri Aurobindo cites an example, “John Smith in his new life is the same John Smith that he was in his last avatar” then “...it cannot achieve growth or perfection by repeating the same character, interests, occupations, types of inner and outer movements forever.” This is why the psychic does not bring forth the memories. Some people may glorify themselves, ‘in the past life, I was this, but this is a hindrance for the present. Sri Aurobindo and

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the Mother previously had great births, but they did not much talk about them, though I am sure, they had full memory of the entire range of their past births. It was only sometimes in conversations that the Mother brought out some hints of her past births, it was not a recurring thing, and it never weighed on her present consciousness.

If we have a memory of a glorious past birth we become attached to it. Then it would interfere with our present life. Sri Aurobindo continues,

If, indeed, a mental learning of things were the heart of the matter, if that were the process of our development, memory would have a great importance: but what happens is a growth of the soul-personality and a growth of the nature by an assimilation into our substance of being, a creative and effective absorption of the essential results of past energies; in this process a conscious memory is of no importance. As the tree grows by a subconscious or unconscious assimilation of action of sun and rain and wind and absorption of earth-elements, so the being grows by a subliminal or intra-conscious assimilation and absorption of its results of past becoming and an output of potentialities of future becoming.

This clinches the whole issue. As the tree grows by its roots in the earth, the soul draws from the subconscious energies of the past, but it requires the present experiences to blossom, just like the tree needs sunlight and rain to grow. If the past weighed on us too much we cannot flower into a new

personality. The seed is there under the ground, but it is only the rain and sunlight that brings it out.

Sri Aurobindo says,

The law that deprives us of the memory of past lives

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* is a law of cosmic Wisdom and serves, not diserves its evolutionary purpose.

A cosmic Wisdom has arranged our rebirths so that we are not much disturbed or pulled back by the past. He continues,

The absence of any memory of past existence is wrongly and very ignorantly taken as a disproof of the actuality of rebirth; for if even in this life it is difficult to keep all the memories of our past, if they often fade into the background or fade out altogether, if no recollection remains of our infancy, and yet with all this hiatus of memory we can grow and be, if the mind is even capable of total loss of memory of past events and its own identity and yet it is the same being who is there and the lost memory can one day be recovered, it is evident that so radical a change as a transition to other worlds followed by new birth in a new body ought normally to obliterate altogether the surface or mental memory, and yet that would not annul the identity of the soul or the growth of the nature.

What a masterful explanation! Even our present life is so arranged that we keep forgetting the past so that it is not a burden on the present. If we keep bringing up the past and making a heap on the present, we can never grow. Sometimes one says, "I am forgetting about the past!" It is often good to forget about the past, otherwise, it becomes a tremendous burden – emotionally, mentally, and psychologically. Many people constantly keep digging the past achievements or sad experiences. It is unfortunate to live in the past because it is a tremendous burden; we have to go towards the future, we have to unburden ourselves of the good or bad things of the past,

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otherwise, the present can never be fulfilled. Similarly, when our psychic being takes a new birth, it cuts off the memories of the past life. It is better not to bring back its old memories so that it can have a fast fulfilment of its present purpose of rebirth. He continues, This obliteration of the surface mental memory is all the more certain and quite inevitable if there is a new personality of the same being and a new instrumentation which takes the place of the old, a new mind, a new life, a new body: the new brain cannot be expected to carry in itself the images held by the old brain; the new life or mind cannot be summoned to keep the deleted impressions of the old mind and life that have been dissolved and exists no more.

How do we expect to have memories of the past life, when we don't even remember much of what has happened in the present life? When the psychic being takes a new birth, it comes with a new body, mind, and life; they have all come fresh. So it is natural that we have no memory of our past lives. Sri Aurobindo further explains, There is, no doubt, the subliminal being which may remember since it does not suffer from the disabilities of the surface; but the surface mind is cut off from the subliminal memory which alone might retain some clear recollection or distinct impression of past lives.

Sri Aurobindo says that the subliminal in us may remember past lives because it does not suffer from the disabilities of our surface mind and life. Fortunately or unfortunately, the surface mind is cut off from the subliminal memory which might retain some clear recollection of the past. If we are not connected with our subliminal consciousness, or with our psychic being,

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* then we will have no memory of past lives. The more we connect with our subliminal and psychic being, we may start recollecting our past births. But the Mother would say, once we contact our psychic being, we would not be interested in knowing our past – that is the whole beauty.

Once we have the experience of the psychic, the past is of no importance, it doesn't attract us because the future has greater possibilities.

Next Sri Aurobindo says,

This separation is necessary because the new personality has to be built up on the surface without conscious reference to what is within; as with all the rest of the superficial being, so our surface personality too is indeed formed by an action from within, but of that action it is not conscious, it seems to itself to be self-formed or ready-made or formed by some ill-understood action of universal Nature. And yet fragmentary recollections of past births do sometimes remain in spite of these almost insuperable obstacles; there are even a very few cases of astonishingly exact and full memory in the child-mind.

Sri Aurobindo agrees that there are some exceptions to the absence of memory of past lives, particularly in children. We have heard of some unique cases of children who could recollect their past with exact details and precise locations. It is not impossible, but it is uncommon.

Finally, at a certain stage of development of the being when the inner begins to predominate over the outer and comes to the front, past-life memory does sometimes begin to emerge as if from some submerged layer, but more readily in the shape of a perception of the stuff and power of past personalities

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that are effective in the composition of the being in the present life than in any precise and accurate detail of event and circumstance, although this too can recur in parts or be recovered by concentration from the subliminal vision, from some secret memory or from our inner conscious-substance. But this detailed memory is of minor importance to Nature in her normal work and she makes small or no provision for it: it is the shaping of the future evolution of the being with which she is concerned; the past is put back, kept behind the veil and used only as an occult source of materials for the present and future.

He says that when we connect with the psychic being, then past life memories sometimes come in, but as he says, “more readily in the shape of a perception of the stuff and power of past personalities that are effective in

the composition of the being in the present life”. Even if we connect with the psychic being now, it may reveal some memories of the general nature of those personalities which have contributed to the present life, not the details of all the past births. Those too may be recovered by a special concentration of the subliminal consciousness, but that is not easy, and it is of minor importance in Nature.

Usually, everything is kept behind the veil and used only as an occult source. The Mother explained that the past is kept in a place, in a world which looks like a honeycomb, and in each cell, there are memories of certain past births, so one has only to access the desired cell to know the details of the past birth. The past is not obliterated. A simple example nowadays is the computer, with one click we open a file which may have hundreds of pages of information. Now it can be all compressed into a single dot on a microchip.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* This conception of the Person and Personality, if accepted, must modify at the same time our current ideas about the immortality of the soul; for, normally, when we insist on the soul’s undying existence, what is meant is the survival after death of a definite unchanging personality which was and will always remain the same throughout eternity. It is the very imperfect superficial “I” of the moment, evidently regarded by Nature as a temporary form and not worth preservation, for which we demand this stupendous right to survival and immortality.

We tend to think of immortality as the continuation of the same personality or even of the body, but this is a mistake.

But the demand is extravagant and cannot be conceded; the “I” of the moment can only merit survival if it consents to change, to be no longer itself but something else, greater, better, more luminous in knowledge, more moulded in the image of the eternal inner beauty, more and more progressive towards the divinity of the secret Spirit. It is that secret Spirit or divinity of Self in us which is imperishable, because it is unborn and eternal.

This is the extravagant demand of human beings that this body should be immortal. It could become immortal if it is ready to change, to be no longer itself but something else, greater, more luminous in knowledge, moulded in the image of the eternal inner beauty. Its change must reflect the immortality of the soul. The more it starts becoming transparent to the soul the more it has chances of becoming immortal. Remaining what it is, it has no

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chance. If it can change into the image of the psychic being, it could become immortal.

The psychic entity within, its representative, the spiritual individual in us, is the Person that we are; but the “I” of this moment, the “I” of this life is only a formation, a temporary personality of this inner Person: it is one step of the many steps of our evolutionary change, and it serves its true purpose only when we pass beyond it to a farther step leading near to a higher degree of consciousness and being.

It is the inner Person that survives death, even as it pre-exists before birth; for this constant survival is a rendering of the eternity of our timeless Spirit into the terms of Time.

The true person is the psychic being; the temporary person is the outer being. At present, the outer personality is evolving but later on, in the future, we can hope that the outer personality will also have immortality depending on how much it changes.

What our normal demand of survival asks for is a similar survival of our mind, our life, even our body; the dogma of the resurrection of the body attests to this last demand, - even as it has been the root of the age-long effort of man to discover the elixir of immortality or any means magical, alchemic or scientific to conquer physically the death of the body.

The first paragraph of *The Life Divine* said that man’s immemorial quest has been for God, Light, Freedom, Immortality. Immortality has been an aspiration of man right from the beginning of civilisation. It has been

expressed in occult things, medical science, mythologies, stories, and epics such as Gilgamesh etc. This has been a

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* constant pursuit from the earliest times of our awakened consciousness.

There are certain circumstances in which the survival of the outer mental personality representative of the inner mental Purusha could be possible. It could happen if our mental being came to be so powerfully individualised on the surface and so much one with the inner mind and inner mental Purusha and at the same time so open plastically to the progressive action of the Infinite that the soul no longer needed to dissolve the old form of mind and create a new one to progress.

It is possible that the mind could be immortal if it is individualised and becomes one with the inner mental Purusha. This is a mind that is given to the service of the Divine, is in contact with the psychic being and is reflected in the Manomaya Purusha. A mind dedicated to the Divine, reflecting the Divine Consciousness, and being obedient to Manomaya Purusha, may become immortal.

We have cited a wonderful example of Mr A about whom the Mother spoke. She said that his mind Stayed back, and the rest of the outer being got dissolved. His mind was so much imbued with Sri Aurobindo's consciousness that it remained as an entity. The Mother said that this mind is there wanting to help others to understand Sri Aurobindo.

Such minds can become immortal formations in the mental world, they don't have to dissolve.

A similar individualisation, integration and openness of the vital being on the surface would alone make possible a similar survival of the life-part in us, the outer vital personality representative of the inner life-being, the vital Purusha.

Similarly, if the vital being is dedicated to the Divine,

it could also become immortal. For example, if it is dedicated to the Mother, dedicated to Sri Aurobindo, and imbued with their consciousness, it also might become immortal. There are people in the Ashram who have been great singers, and great poets, reflecting the consciousness of the Mother not only from the intellectual level but also from the emotional level. Whatever is integrated with the inner Purusha becomes immortal – be it the mind which has realised Manomaya Purusha or the vital realising Pranamaya, or the physical realising Annamaya Purusha.

We have seen examples of a sadhak who dedicated his mind to the Divine, individualised it by connecting with the psychic being, and left it for earth consciousness. In future also when such minds are formed, they will not dissolve. Thus, our mental and life personality would then subsist without dissolution from birth to birth. They would be, in this sense immortal, persistently surviving, and continuing in their sense of identity. This would be an immense victory of soul and mind and life over the Inconscience and the limitations of material Nature.

In the last paragraph of this chapter, Sri Aurobindo speaks about physical immortality. He writes –

But such a survival could only persist in the subtle body; the being would still have to discard its physical form, pass to other worlds and in its return put on a new body. The awakened mental Purusha and vital Purusha, preserving the mind-sheath and the life-sheath of the subtle body which are usually discarded, would return with them into a new birth and keep a vivid and sustained sense of a permanent being of

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* mind and life constituted by the past and continuing into the present and future;

The advantage of this immortalised mind and vital is that when the psychic being returns to earth, it picks up its

“immortal mind” and vital again because it has achieved in that mind what it needed to do. That means, the mind itself has got connected, emerged merged with the *manomaya purusha*; similarly, even the vital got connected and merged with *pranamaya purusha*. So, this soul gets its readymade, not fully divinised perhaps, but divinely imbued mind. Then he says – “The physical being could only endure, if by some means its physical causes of decay and disruption could be overcome...” Here Sri Aurobindo brings the idea of physical immortality. We said the subtle physical can be immortalised but now he takes up the gross physical. Now one of the important points here is to examine if its causes of “decay and disruption could be overcome”. There is a foot-note –

Even if Science – physical Science or occult Science

– were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being.

Perhaps this footnote was added much later. Science claims to achieve physical immortality or prolong life indefinitely. But Sri Aurobindo says even if our life is prolonged, the soul can reject the body. We are aware of the experiments of Science, genetic mutations, cell

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manipulation etc. We have also heard about scientists who have been trying to artificially create immortal bodies; cloning is one such idea.

But Sri Aurobindo says that even if Science, makes a body deathless – still the soul can find a means to reject it if the body does not fulfil its spiritual evolution. A body may be deathless; but if it does not absorb the consciousness of the soul, if it does not obey its needs, the soul could

discard it. A deathless body is not an immortal body. These are two different things. What science is trying to create is a deathless body. But what Sri Aurobindo is wanting to create is an immortal body. Because “immortal” is that which has the consciousness of the immortal, the psychic being. Deathlessness is related to genetics. A deathless body without a new consciousness is not useful for the soul. So, Sri Aurobindo explains –

The physical being could only endure, if by some means its physical causes of decay and disruption could be overcome and at the same time it could be made so plastic and progressive in its structure and its functioning that it would answer to each change demanded of it by the progress of the inner Person; it must be able to keep pace with the soul in its formation of self-expressive personality, its long unfolding of a secret spiritual divinity and the slow transformation of the mental into the divine mental or spiritual existence. This consummation of a triple immortality, – immortality of the nature completing the essential immortality of the spirit and the psychic survival of death, – might be the crown of rebirth and a momentous indication of the conquest of the material Inconscience and Ignorance even in the very foundation of the reign of Matter. But the true immortality would still be the eternity of the spirit; the

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* physical survival could only be relative, terminable at will, a temporal sign of the spirit’s victory here over Death and Matter.

The last sentence of this chapter makes things clear that there could be a possibility of prolonged physical survival, as the deathless body, but true immortality is always the eternity of the psychic being, of the Spirit. And if the physical survival, the deathless body created by occult or physical science could only be “relative terminable at will”, then it could be “a temporal sign of the spirit’s victory here over Death and Matter”. If we want to have a deathless body, there could be one in the future. But such a body will not “still be the eternity of the spirit.” A truly immortal body which house the spirit will be the one which will be plastic and receptive to the higher consciousness. It will be supple enough to change according to the demands of the consciousness inhabiting it.

Until there is the birth of such an immortal body, we cannot escape the process of the rebirth of the psychic being. An evolutionary process of rebirth will lead to the birth of the supramental body as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Lecture Notes

I. Three Questions:

- a) What is the process of rebirth?
- b) If there is an interval, what is the principle and process of the passage to other worlds?
- c) What changes does the soul undergo in its passage from birth to birth?

II. What is the process of rebirth?

- a) It has been established that other supra-physical

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planes co-exist with ours and the soul, once it rejects the physical body, could travel into these worlds.

- b) If the soul is not sufficiently developed to carry on his life or his mind into larger life-worlds or mind-worlds, it would be compelled to accept an immediate transmigration.

III. The necessity for an interregnum.

- a) It becomes necessary to have an internatal interval because the soul has to assimilate the completed life-experience.
- b) But such a departure to higher worlds is possible only when the mental and vital individuality has been sufficiently developed in the physical man. Or else, the life-experiences may be too simple or elementary.
- c) Another theory suggests that this passage to other worlds is the obligatory rule for all.

But a compromise between the two is possible.

d) A third theory says that if a soul is powerfully developed, it could immediately resume birth for a more rapid evolution.

IV. Popular beliefs based on religion.

a) The soul takes immediately a new body after the death of the present body.

b) The soul has to spend time after death in hells or heavens and it is only when its demerits / merits are exhausted it can return to earth.

c) In none of the two beliefs is there the idea of a spiritual evolution explicit; however, rebirth means progression of the soul to the point when it need not take rebirth again for it reaches its external source.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* V. What evolutionary process compels immediate rebirth?

a) It has been explained that the birth of an ascending soul into the human form after its repeated rebirth in that form, needs a rebirth because one brief human life upon earth is evidently inefficient for the evolutionary purpose.

b) But what compels the immediate rebirth is explained away by the argument that the psychic individuality developed so as to require the constant help of the mental, vital and physical individuality.

c) But, we have to consider that the very fact the soul has reached the level of human birth indicates that it is sufficiently strong and it does not need the support of mind, life and body for survival after death.

d) It is only when the downward attachment or the earthly desire are pressing upon it, that it would enforce an immediate transmigration of the same persistent form of personality into a new body.

e) If the mental and vital personalities are sufficiently developed and formed, then the soul-person and the subtle body could travel into other

worlds. This may imply that the soul returns to earth with the same vital and mental personalities.

f) But if a sufficient individuation of the psychic person, it need not depend on its past life and mind formation.

g) In this discarding of the old and preparation into new forms, the soul requires the intermediary worlds proper to the evolutionary stage of the consciousness.

VI. Where could be the temporary dwelling place for the disembodied soul?

a) Could it be the mental planes because man is supposed to be a mental creature? It need not be so because

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man is a complex being with other parts often more powerful.

b) There are in the physical plane itself layers of greater subtlety which could be considered as sub-planes of the physical with a vital and mental character. And the soul in its journey could be caught in these media.

c) There are also relations which the human being in his evolution on earth develops with higher planes of existence, and that could have a predominant effect on the internatal dwelling on these planes.

d) The soul may linger on in one of those annexes of the other worlds created by his habitual beliefs or some desire-world fashioned in his earthly existence.

The image making powers of man may enforce the mental being to lie for a while amid its own images until they are dissolved by the soul's pressure.

VII. The Vital Worlds

a) The soul on its internal journey may be held up for a period in the vital worlds created by the universal life principle.

b) Beyond the subtle physical planes, the soul may pass on to spiritual mental planes but it depends upon the soul's sufficient mental or soul development in this life.

c) But as man is basically a mental being, it is the soul or psychic being that travels ultimately to a plane of pure psychic existence beyond the mental plane where it could wait for its rebirth.

d) At each stage the soul casts off his mind sheath & life sheath, but the essence of the personality would remain in latent memory.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* VIII. The role played by the higher planes in the earth-evolution.

a) It is the higher planes that compel us to progress.

Their action is not felt by the outer being but by the subliminal being.

b) The lightening of impedimenta of the mental, vital, physical takes place in the higher worlds for it is only there that the soul can still continue the activities which have to be exhausted and rejected from the consciousness so that it can pass on to a new formation.

c) Man has within him not only the soul but he has to bring forward the other involved principles in the subliminal through a frontal personality.

d) The circumstances and the stages of that resort must be complex and not of the trenchant character which the popular religions imagine.

IX. The aspects of reincarnation.

a) Metaphysical - an aspect of spiritual necessity b) Moral— an aspect of cosmic justice and ethical discipline

X. Metaphysical Necessity

a) The soul is on earth as a result of desire and ignorance and until it regains knowledge of the eternal Self it has to return to earth again and again. It may even alternate between earth & other worlds and when it exhausts its merits and demerits it comes to earth in a terrestrial body.

XI. Moral necessity

a) The nature of the new incarnation of the soul is determined by the soul's past karma.

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b) Also, a strong personal will or desire in the past life may also determine the new birth.

c) In this system, there is a double punishment. First the sinner is punished in hell and also in the next life.

XII. Critical view of the moral theory of Karma.

a) A world which serves only as a school of sin and virtue, consisting of rewards and whippings cannot appeal to our intelligence.

b) If the soul is divine & immortal, it comes into ignorance because of a larger possibility of its being and there must be a greater significance of life. It must be for a growth out of an assured ignorance towards a final passage into an immortal consciousness.

XIII. The popular law of Karma.

a) Each being reaps the harvest of his works either in the present birth or a subsequent one. Often times results of the individual actions are accrued by others too because man does not live for himself.

b) Thus man is the creator of himself; he is the creator also of his fate.

XIV. Critical analysis of the popular belief of Karma a) Good actions produce good results and evil ones produce evil results.

b) Good deeds are rewarded by happiness and bad ones by misery and ill-fortune.

c) It can be questioned why only deeds are taken into account and not thoughts and feelings.

XV. The Cosmic Being beyond the law of Karma.

a) The chain of Karma is only an outward machinery; beyond it there is a Cosmic Being. Hence, it is our spiritual being, the soul, which determines its own

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* evolution and Karma is only a process for that purpose.

b) Law and process are absolute on the physical level but as we ascend to life; to mind and beyond, the law and process become more flexible and less mechanical.

c) Prakriti is the field of law and process but the soul, the Purusha is the master of its nature, Ishvara.

XVI. Karma and Fate.

a) Karma is basically accepted by the psychic being which seeks whatever is necessary for its new development.

There is behind the consent of the Psychic being, a secret will and guidance.

b) Fate is only one factor of existence; being and its consciousness are a still more important factor.

c) Destiny which binds our physical being, binds it so long or in so far as a greater law does not intervene.

XVII. Nature of energy accounts for the result.

a) There are different kinds of energy and the results of actions depend upon the source and nature of the particular energy set into motion.

b) For example, an energy of seeking truth and knowledge results in a growth into Truth and increase in knowledge. Similar is the case for those following beauty, or ethics or a physical culture.

c) Nature does not give results of another effort; for it is her justice that the energy and capacity put forward should have in its own kind its fitting response from her. If Nature did otherwise, she could well be accused of injustice.

XVIII. Good luck and bad luck.

a) We cannot really explain good luck or bad luck on

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the basis of an action in the past life. The idea of retribution of Karma is a feeble basis for it is based on an unsound reasoning.

b) The error in this argument comes in by attributing the law of Karma to i) moral good and evil ii) vital physical good and evil.

c) Truly speaking, virtue is its own reward and brings with it its own punishment in the suffering of a fall from his own law of nature.

d) The rule of reward and punishment as a social necessity; but to erect this as a general law of cosmic Nature is erroneous.

XIX. The Truth of the Doctrine of Karma.

a) There could be a limited meeting-point between vital- physical good and ill and ethical good and ill, for often Nature takes us as we are and to some extent suits her movements to our need or our demands on her.

b) But those who misuse the force of Nature may get an adverse return in the form of a mass of reactions of hatred, antagonism, defeat and suffering.

This reaction may come on him in another life too. These should be taken as Nature's reactions and not as punishment and reward.

c) In all Nature's dealings with us there is a relation of things and there is a corresponding lesson of experience.

d) Our life is affected not only by its own energies but by the energies of others and by universal forces and all this interplay is too complex to be determined solely by the law of Karma.

e) The soul chooses rebirth for its own growth and for

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* that it may accept happiness and success or poverty and misfortune. Whatever is needed for the next step in its evolution is taken up by the soul.

XX. The soul is a limited and unchanging personality: a misconception.

a) It is believed that when there is reincarnation, it is the same psychic entity with the same formation of nature that inhabited the body of the last birth.

b) But of this is the understanding then our life and rebirth would be always the same recurring decimal; it would not be an evolution but the meaningless continuity of an eternal repetition.

c) In each birth, there is a new personality that is put forward on the surface, suitable for a new growth of its being. The essence of the past personality may remain in the background contributing to the new formation. All the past is indeed there, but all of it is not ostensibly present and active.

d) Sometimes, some of these personalities from the past could be brought forward and harmonised as a manifold personality in the new birth.

XXI. Memory of past lives.

a) The theory of the system of rewards and punishment is untenable because it then seems that the whole intention were to teach the embodied spirit to be good and moral.

b) The reborn psychic being does not even remember the past life, how can it understand for what deeds it is being punished or rewarded?

c) There is a need for the psychic being to forget its past for otherwise it could become a serious obstacle in the development of the new personality. In this

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process of the growth of the soul conscious memory of the past is of no importance.

XXII. Can the absence of any memory disprove rebirth?

a) Even in the present life, we do not remember much of our past and yet with such a total loss of memory, the being continues to grow. Similarly, when the psychic being is taking up a new personality, a new instrumentation, a new mind life and body, it is not expected that the new brain can carry all the old memories.

b) The subliminal being may keep memories of the past, but it is cut off from the surface mind.

c) When the inner being begins to dominate outer personality, then the psychic being could get back past-life memory. Still, such a gaining of memory is not of great importance in the shaping of the future evolution of the being.

XXIII. The sense of immortality.

a) Normally, when we speak of immortality, we think of the survival after death of a definite unchanging personality, but the demand is extravagant and cannot be conceded.

b) The self within is imperishable and the psychic entity is its representative and it is the true individual in us and it survives death even as it pre-exists before birth.

c) Similarly, man demands the survival of even the body after the death. Therefore man has been in search of the elixir of immortality. This can happen only if the mind, life or body could put on something of the divinity of the spirit.

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Deliberations on *The Life Divine* d) The physical being could endure if by some means its physical causes of decay could be overcome and at the same time made so plastic and progressive in its structure and its functioning that it would answer to each change.

It must also be able to keep pace with the soul in its formation of self-expressive personality.

“But the true immortality would still be the eternity of the spirit; the physical survival could only be relative, terminable at will, a temporal sign of the spirit's victory here over Death and Matter.”

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