

A SOURCE BOOK IN

*Indian
Philosophy*

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CHAPTER XVI

SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO (Arabinda Ghose, 1872–1950) was widely accepted as the great mystic-philosopher of present-day India. Attained by mystical insight and expressed in brilliant literary and rational form, the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo constitutes a point of view which he considers to be original Vedānta but which stands in strong opposition to the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara on several basic issues.

His synthetic doctrine is one which calls for the universal expression of the Absolute in, and the development of the Absolute through, a series of grades of reality from matter up to the absolute spirit. Sri Aurobindo rejects categorically what he considers to be the illusionism of Śaṅkara as untrue to Vedānta and as untrue to his own vision of reality. The descent of the Absolute into the finite, which would be inexplicable on the basis of Śaṅkara's negativistic interpretation, is necessitated in Sri Aurobindo's view as the inevitable expression of the essential power of *Brahman*.

There is no part of reality which is not in some degree infused with the absolute spirit. For this reason, evolution of lower forms into higher forms, as well as the reverse process of involution, is almost inevitable, although great effort is demanded on the part of man to rend the veil which seems to separate the Absolute from the finite. Man's task on earth is to achieve identity with the Absolute by passing beyond the realm of the mental through a supra-mental change; the mental level does not constitute the limit of man's progress because it does not constitute the limit of his fundamental nature. To achieve this identity, however, it is necessary for man to prepare himself for the leap by an elaborate discipline of *yoga*—called “integral *yoga*” by Sri Aurobindo because of its comprehensive and all-inclusive transformation of the state of mind and the life of the individual. As Sri Aurobindo says, “This illumination and change must take up and re-create the whole being, mind, life and body; it must be not only an inner experience of the Divinity, but a remoulding of both the inner and outer existence by its power.” Such preparation is however, not sufficient. Man must prepare himself, but the Supreme Being alone is capable of enabling man to achieve his ultimate destiny.

These are the basic principles of Sri Aurobindo's general point of view of reconciliation between matter and spirit, God and man, the finite world and absolute reality, and the one and the many.

Man must progress from mind to supermind and is to achieve the life of what Sri Aurobindo calls Gnostic Being or the divine life. This divine life, constituting, as already indicated, a remolding of both the inner and the outer existence of man, is to produce "a new order of beings and a new earth-life." The achievement of the divine life, among men on earth, is the goal which Sri Aurobindo wants man to achieve. From the larger point of view, not the individualistic, this means essentially that the mind-life of men must be prepared to receive the divine inner life on earth by a complete transition from the point of view of worldliness and materiality to a realization of their spiritual nature and by establishing the complete dominance of the spirit in the physical, vital, and mental life on earth. For Sri Aurobindo, as for most Indian thinkers, it is not enough to realize that this is the ultimate truth; for him, the truth must be lived—the truth of the spiritual essence of all reality must be made the motivating force of all life.

As said above, Sri Aurobindo is a mystic-philosopher. Part of the meaning of this characterization is that Sri Aurobindo has gained his enlightenment concerning the ultimate truth from his own intuitive mystic vision. He insists that all ultimate truth must be achieved in this way. Reason and science are limited in their perspectives and in their possibilities and cannot achieve the ultimate vision which transcends the physical, the vital, and the mental. Reason is significant in its own sphere, but truth of spirit transcends truth of life and can be achieved only by the direct experience of mystic insight. On the basis of his mystic vision, Sri Aurobindo formulates a philosophy which—like the rationally grounded philosophy of Radhakrishnan to be described in the next chapter—eliminates the alleged negativism and illusionism of traditional Indian philosophy and thus prepares the way for a more positive way of life for the Indian people and which makes possible a much greater mutual philosophical understanding of India and the West, and eventually—possibly—a significant synthesis of Eastern and Western thought. (C. A. M.)

Selections in this chapter are taken from *Arya* and from *The Life Divine*, American edition (New York: The Greystone Press, 1949). Now published by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

1. *The Value of Philosophical Thought*

There is no greater error than to suppose, as the "practical" man is wont to do, that thought is only a fine flower and ornament of life and that political, economic and personal interests are the important and effective motors of human action. We recognise that this is a world of life and action and developing organism; but the life that seeks to guide itself only by vital and material forces is a slow, dark and blundering growth. It is an attempt to approximate man to the

method of vegetable and animal existence. The earth is a world of life and matter but man is not a vegetable nor an animal; he is a spiritual and a thinking being who is set here to shape and use the animal mould for higher purposes, by higher motives, with a more divine instrumentation.

Therefore by his very nature, he serves the working of a Thought within him even when he is ignorant of it in his surface self. The practical man who ignores or despises the deeper life of the Idea, is yet serving that which he ignores or despises.

The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self, so that it shall re-embrace, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity.

Throughout the world there are plenty of movements inspired by the same drift, but there is room for an effort of thought which shall frankly acknowledge the problem in its integral complexity and not be restrained in the flexibility of its search by attachment to any cult, creed or extant system of philosophy.

The effort involves a quest for the truth that underlies existence and the fundamental law of its self-expression in the universe—the work of metaphysical philosophy and religious thought; the sounding and harmonising of the psychological methods of discipline by which man purifies and perfects himself—the work of psychology, not as it is understood in Europe, but the deeper practical psychology called in India *yoga*; and the application of our ideas to the problems of man's social and collective life.

Philosophy and religious thought must be the beginning and foundation of any such attempt; for they alone go behind appearances and processes to the truth of things. The attempt to get rid of their supremacy must always be vain. Man will always think and generalise and try to penetrate behind the apparent fact, for that is the imperative law of his awakened consciousness; man will always turn his generalisations into a religion, even though it be only a religion of

positivism or of material law. Philosophy is the intellectual search for the fundamental truth of things, religion is the attempt to make the truth dynamic in the soul of man. They are essential to each other; a religion that is not the expression of philosophic truth degenerates into superstition and obscurantism, and a philosophy which does not dynamise itself with the religious spirit is a barren light, for it cannot get itself practised.

Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely animal and economic life or the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument, so that man may develop his manhood into that true supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the spirit. (*Arya*, Aug. 15, 1915, pp. 2-9.)

All philosophy is concerned with the relations between two things, the fundamental truth of existence and the forms in which existence presents itself to our experience. The deepest experience shows that the fundamental truth is truth of the spirit; the other is the truth of life, truth of form and shaping force and living idea and action. Here the West and the East have followed divergent lines. The West has laid most emphasis on truth of life and for a time came to stake its whole existence on truth of life alone, to deny the existence of Spirit or to relegate it to the domain of the unknown and unknowable; from that exaggeration it is now beginning to return. The East has laid most emphasis on truth of the spirit and for a time came, at least in India, to stake its whole existence upon that truth alone, to neglect the possibilities of life or to limit it to a narrow development of a fixed status; the East too is beginning to return from this exaggeration. The West is reawaking to the truth of the spirit and the spiritual possibilities of life, the East is reawaking to the truth of life and tends towards a new application to it of its spiritual knowledge. Our view is that the antinomy created between them is an unreal one. Spirit being the fundamental truth of existence, life can be only its manifestation; Spirit must be not only the origin of life but its basis, its pervading reality and its highest and total result. But the forms of life as they appear to us are at once its disguises and its instruments of self-manifestation. Man has to grow in knowledge till they cease

to be disguises and grow in spiritual power and quality till they become in him its perfect instruments. To grow into the fulness of the divine is the true law of human life and to shape his earthly existence into its image is the meaning of his evolution. (*Arya*, July 15, 1918, pp. 764–5.)

2. *The Search for Reality through Aspiration, Senses, Reason, and Intuition*¹

The earliest preoccupation of man in his awakened thoughts and, as it seems, his inevitable and ultimate preoccupation,—for it survives the longest periods of scepticism and returns after every banishment,—is also the highest which his thought can envisage. It manifests itself in the divination of Godhead, the impulse towards perfection, the search after pure truth and unmixed bliss, the sense of a secret immortality. The ancient dawns of human knowledge have left us their witness to this constant aspiration; today we see a humanity satiated but not satisfied by victorious analysis of the externalities of Nature preparing to return to its primeval longings. The earliest formula of wisdom promises to be its last,—God, light, freedom, immortality. (*The Life Divine*, p. 3.)

... To know, possess and be the divine being in an animal and egoistic consciousness, to convert our twilit or obscure physical mentality into the plenary supramental illumination, to build peace and a self-existent bliss where there is only a stress of transitory satisfactions besieged by physical pain and emotional suffering, to establish an infinite freedom in a world which presents itself as a group of mechanical necessities, to discover and realise the immortal life in a body subjected to death and constant mutation,—this is offered to us as the manifestation of God in matter and the goal of Nature in her terrestrial evolution. To the ordinary material intellect which takes its present organisation of consciousness for the limit of its possibilities, the direct contradiction of the unrealised ideals with the realised fact is a final argument against their validity. But if we take a more deliberate view of the world's workings, that direct opposition appears rather as a part of Nature's profoundest method and the seal of her completest sanction. (*ibid.*, p. 4.)

We arrive at the conception and at the knowledge of a divine existence by exceeding the evidence of the senses and piercing beyond the walls of the physical mind. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 58.)

¹ This and following sectional headings are editorial additions.

... To correct the errors of the sense-mind by the use of reason is one of the most valuable powers developed by man and the chief cause of his superiority among terrestrial beings.

The complete use of pure reason brings us finally from physical to metaphysical knowledge. But the concepts of metaphysical knowledge do not in themselves fully satisfy the demand of our integral being. They are indeed entirely satisfactory to the pure reason itself, because they are the very stuff of its own existence. But our nature sees things through two eyes always, for it views them doubly as idea and as fact and therefore every concept is incomplete for us and to a part of our nature almost unreal until it becomes an experience. . . .

... In reality, all experience is in its secret nature knowledge by identity; but its true character is hidden from us because we have separated ourselves from the rest of the world by exclusion, by the distinction of ourself as subject and everything else as object, and we are compelled to develop processes and organs by which we may again enter into communion with all that we have excluded. We have to replace direct knowledge through conscious identity by an indirect knowledge which appears to be caused by physical contact and mental sympathy. This limitation is a fundamental creation of the ego and an instance of the manner in which it has proceeded throughout, starting from an original falsehood and covering over the truth of things by contingent falsehoods which become for us practical truths of relation.

From this nature of mental and sense knowledge as it is at present organised in us, it follows that there is no inevitable necessity in our existing limitations. They are the result of an evolution in which mind has accustomed itself to depend upon certain physiological functionings and their reactions as its normal means of entering into relation with the material universe. . . . It is possible for the mind—and it would be natural for it, if it could be persuaded to liberate itself from its consent to the domination of matter,—to take direct cognisance of the objects of sense without the aid of the sense-organs. This is what happens in experiments of hypnosis and cognate psychological phenomena. Because our waking consciousness is determined and limited by the balance between mind and matter worked out by life in its evolution, this direct cognisance is usually impossible in our ordinary waking state and has therefore to be brought about by throwing the waking mind into a state of sleep which liberates the true or subliminal mind. Mind is then able to assert its true character

as the one and all-sufficient sense and free to apply to the objects of sense its pure and sovereign instead of its mixed and dependent action. Nor is this extension of faculty really impossible but only more difficult in our waking state,—as is known to all who have been able to go far enough in certain paths of psychological experiment.

... It is possible, once we have entered by any of the senses into relation with an external object, so to apply the *manas* [mind] as to become aware of the contents of the object, for example, to receive or to perceive the thoughts or feelings of others without aid from their utterance, gesture, action or facial expressions and even in contradiction of these always partial and often misleading data. Finally, by an utilisation of the inner senses,—that is to say, of the sense-powers, in themselves, in their purely mental or subtle activity as distinguished from the physical which is only a selection for the purposes of outward life from their total and general action,—we are able to take cognition of sense-experiences, of appearances and images of things other than those which belong to the organisation of our material environment....

None of them [these extensions of faculty], however, leads to the aim we have in view, the psychological experience of those truths that are “beyond perception by the sense but seizable by the perceptions of the reason,” *buddhigrāhyam atīndriyam*.¹ They give us only a larger field of phenomena and more effective means for the observation of phenomena. The truth of things always escapes beyond the sense. Yet is it a sound rule inherent in the very constitution of universal existence that where there are truths attainable by the reason, there must be somewhere in the organism possessed of that reason a means of arriving at or verifying them by experience. The one means we have left in our mentality is an extension of that form of knowledge by identity which gives us the awareness of our own existence....

... We have to go beyond the mind and the reason. The reason active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and the superconscious All towards which we are impelled by that evolution. The subconscious and the superconscious are two different formulations of the same All. The master-word of the subconscious is Life, the master-word of the superconscious is Light. In the subconscious knowledge or consciousness is involved in action, for action

¹ *Bhagavad-gītā* vi.21.

is the essence of Life. In the superconscient action re-enters into Light and no longer contains involved knowledge but is itself contained in a supreme consciousness. Intuitional knowledge is that which is common between them and the foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known; it is that state of common self-existence in which the knower and the known are one through knowledge. But in the subconscious the intuition manifests itself in the action, in effectivity, and the knowledge or conscious identity is either entirely or more or less concealed in the action. In the superconscient, on the contrary, Light being the law and the principle, the intuition manifests itself in its true nature as knowledge emerging out of conscious identity, and effectivity of action is rather the accompaniment or necessary consequent and no longer masks as the primary fact. Between these two states reason and mind act as intermediaries which enable the being to liberate knowledge out of its imprisonment in the act and prepare it to resume its essential primacy. When the self-awareness in the mind applied, both to continent and content, to own-self and other-self, exalts itself into the luminous self-manifest identity, the reason also converts itself into the form of the self-luminous intuitional knowledge. This is the highest possible state of our knowledge when mind fulfils itself in the supramental. (*ibid.*, pp. 59–63.)

...Ancient Vedānta seized this message of the intuition and formulated it in the three great declarations of the Upaniṣads, “I am He,” “Thou art That, O Śvetaketu,” “All this is the *Brahman*; this Self is the *Brahman*.” (*ibid.*, p. 65.)

An unknowable which appears to us in many states and attributes of being, in many forms of consciousness, in many activities of energy, this is what Mind can ultimately say about the existence which we ourselves are and which we see in all that is presented to our thought and senses. It is in and through those states, those forms, those activities that we have to approach and know the Unknowable. But if in our haste to arrive at a unity that our mind can seize and hold, if in our insistence to confine the Infinite in our embrace we identify the reality with any one definable state of being however pure and eternal, with any particular attribute however general and comprehensive, with any fixed formulation of consciousness however vast in its scope, with any energy or activity however boundless its application, and if we exclude all the rest, then our thoughts sin against

Its unknowableness and arrive not at a true unity but at a division of the Indivisible. (*ibid.*, pp. 34–5.)

... Only, the positive and synthetic teaching of the Upaniṣads beheld *sat* [existence] and *asat* [non-existence] not as opposites destructive of each other, but as the last antinomy through which we look up to the Unknowable. And in the transactions of our positive consciousness, even unity has to make its account with multiplicity; for the many also are *Brahman*. It is by *vidyā*, the knowledge of the oneness, that we know God; without it *avidyā*, the relative and multiple consciousness, is a night of darkness and a disorder of ignorance. Yet if we exclude the field of that ignorance, if we get rid of *avidyā* as if it were a thing non-existent and unreal, then knowledge itself becomes a sort of obscurity and a source of imperfection. We become as men blinded by light so that we can no longer see the field which that light illumines. (*ibid.*, p. 35.)

3. *What is Reality? The One or the Many?*

... They [the ancient sages of the Upaniṣads] had the patience and strength to find and to know; they had also the clarity and humility to admit the limitation of our knowledge. They perceived the borders where it has to pass into something beyond itself. It was a later impatience of heart and mind, vehement attraction to an ultimate bliss or high masterfulness of pure experience and trenchant intelligence which sought the one to deny the many and because it had received the breath of the heights scorned or recoiled from the secret of the depths. But the steady eye of the ancient wisdom perceived that to know God really, it must know Him everywhere equally and without distinction, considering and valuing but not mastered by the oppositions through which He shines.

We will put aside then the trenchant distinctions of a partial logic which declares that because the One is the reality, the Many are an illusion, and because the Absolute is *sat*, the one existence, the relative is *asat* and non-existent. If in the many we pursue insistently the one, it is to return with the benediction and the revelation of the one confirming itself in the many.

We will guard ourselves also against the excessive importance that the mind attaches to particular points of view at which it arrives in its more powerful expansions and transitions. The perception of the spiritualised mind that the universe is an unreal dream can have no more absolute a value to us than the perception of the materialised

mind that God and the beyond are an illusory idea. In the one case the mind, habituated only to the evidence of the senses and associating reality with corporeal fact, is either unaccustomed to use other means of knowledge or unable to extend the notion of reality to a supraphysical experience. In the other case the same mind, passing beyond to the overwhelming experience of an incorporeal reality, simply transfers the same inability and the same consequent sense of dream or hallucination to the experience of the senses. But we perceive also the truth that these two conceptions disfigure. It is true that for this world of form in which we are set for our self-realisation, nothing is entirely valid until it has possessed itself of our physical consciousness and manifested on the lowest levels in harmony with its manifestation on the highest summits. It is equally true that form and matter asserting themselves as a self-existent reality are an illusion of ignorance. Form and matter can be valid only as shape and substance of manifestation for the incorporeal and immaterial. They are in their nature an act of divine consciousness, in their aim the representation of a status of the spirit.

In other words, if *Brahman* has entered into form and represented Its being in material substance, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness. *Brahman* is in this world to represent Itself in the values of Life. Life exists in *Brahman* in order to discover *Brahman* in itself. Therefore man's importance in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. To fulfil God in life is man's manhood. He starts from the animal vitality and its activities, but a divine existence is his objective.

But as in thought, so in life, the true rule of self-realisation is a progressive comprehension. *Brahman* expresses Itself in many successive forms of consciousness, successive in their relation even if coexistent in being or coeval in Time, and Life in its self-unfolding must also rise to ever-new provinces of its own being. But if in passing from one domain to another we renounce what has already been given us from eagerness for our new attainment, if in reaching the mental life we cast away or belittle the physical life which is our basis, or if we reject the mental and physical in our attraction to the spiritual, we do not fulfil God integrally, nor satisfy the conditions of His self-manifestation. We do not become perfect, but only shift the field of our imperfection or at most attain a limited altitude.

However high we may climb, even though it be to the non-being itself, we climb ill if we forget our base. Not to abandon the lower to itself, but to transfigure it in the light of the higher to which we have attained, is true divinity of nature. *Brahman* is integral and unifies many states of consciousness at a time; we also, manifesting the nature of *Brahman*, should become integral and all-embracing.

Besides the recoil from the physical life, there is another exaggeration of the ascetic impulse which this ideal of an integral manifestation corrects. The nodus of Life is the relation between three general forms of consciousness, the individual, the universal and the transcendent or supracosmic. In the ordinary distribution of life's activities the individual regards himself as a separate being included in the universe and both as dependent upon that which transcends alike the universe and the individual. It is to this transcendence that we give currently the name of God, who thus becomes to our conceptions not so much supracosmic as extra-cosmic. The belittling and degradation of both the individual and the universe is a natural consequence of this division: the cessation of both cosmos and individual by the attainment of the transcendence would be logically its supreme conclusion.

The integral view of the unity of *Brahman* avoids these consequences. Just as we need not give up the bodily life to attain to the mental and spiritual, so we can arrive at a point of view where the preservation of the individual activities is no longer inconsistent with our comprehension of the cosmic consciousness or our attainment to the transcendent and supracosmic. For the World-Transcendent embraces the universe, is one with it and does not exclude it, even as the universe is one with it and does not exclude it, even as the universe embraces the individual, is one with him and does not exclude him. The individual is a centre of the whole universal consciousness; the universe is a form and definition which is occupied by the entire immanence of the formless and indefinable.

This is always the true relation, veiled from us by our ignorance or our wrong consciousness of things. When we attain to knowledge or right consciousness, nothing essential in the eternal relation is changed, but only the inview and the outview from the individual centre is [*sic*] profoundly modified and consequently also the spirit and effect of its activity. The individual is still necessary to the action of the transcendent in the universe and that action in him does not cease to be possible by his illumination. On the contrary, since the

conscious manifestation of the transcendent in the individual is the means by which the collective, the universal is also to become conscious of itself, the continuation of the illumined individual in the action of the world is an imperative need of the world-play. If his inexorable removal through the very act of illumination is the law, then the world is condemned to remain eternally the scene of unredeemed darkness, death and suffering. And such a world can only be a ruthless ordeal or a mechanical illusion.

It is so that ascetic philosophy tends to conceive it. But individual salvation can have no real sense if existence in the cosmos is itself an illusion. In the monistic view the individual soul is one with the Supreme, its sense of separateness an ignorance, escape from the sense of separateness and identity with the Supreme its salvation. But who then profits by this escape? Not the supreme Self, for it is supposed to be always and inalienably free, still, silent, pure. Not the world, for that remains constantly in the bondage and is not freed by the escape of any individual soul from the universal illusion. It is the individual soul itself which effects its supreme good by escaping from the sorrow and the division into the peace and the bliss. There would seem then to be some kind of reality of the individual soul as distinct from the world and from the Supreme even in the event of freedom and illumination. But for the illusionist the individual soul is an illusion and non-existent except in the inexplicable mystery of *māyā*. Therefore we arrive at the escape of an illusory non-existent soul from an illusory non-existent bondage in an illusory non-existent world as the supreme good which that non-existent soul has to pursue! For this is the last word of the knowledge, "There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free." *Vidyā* turns out to be as much a part of the Phenomenal as *avidyā*; *māyā* meets us even in our escape and laughs at the triumphant logic which seemed to cut the knot of her mystery.

These things, it is said, cannot be explained; they are the initial and insoluble miracle. They are for us a practical fact and have to be accepted. We have to escape by a confusion out of a confusion. The individual soul can only cut the knot of ego by a supreme act of egoism, an exclusive attachment to its own individual salvation which amounts to an absolute assertion of its separate existence in *māyā*. We are led to regard other souls as if they were figments of our mind and their salvation unimportant, our soul alone as if it were entirely real and its salvation the one thing that matters. I come to

regard my personal escape from bondage as real while other souls who are equally myself remain behind in the bondage!

It is only when we put aside all irreconcilable antinomy between Self and the world that things fall into their place by a less paradoxical logic. We must accept the many-sidedness of the manifestation even while we assert the unity of the Manifested. And is not this after all the truth that pursues us wherever we cast our eyes, unless seeing we choose not to see? Is not this after all the perfectly natural and simple mystery of Conscious Being that It is bound neither by its unity nor by its multiplicity? It is "absolute" in the sense of being entirely free to include and arrange in its own way all possible terms of its self-expression. There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free,—for always That is a perfect freedom. It is so free that it is not even bound by its liberty. It can play at being bound without incurring a real bondage. Its chain is a self-imposed convention, its limitation in the ego a transitional device that it uses in order to repeat its transcendence and universality in the scheme of the individual *Brahman*.

The Transcendent, the Supracosmic is absolute and free in Itself beyond time and space and beyond the conceptual opposites of finite and infinite. But in cosmos It uses Its liberty of self-formation, Its *māyā*, to make a scheme of Itself in the complementary terms of unity and multiplicity, and this multiple unity It establishes in the three conditions of the subconscious, the conscient and the superconscient. For actually we see that the many objectivised in form in our material universe start with a subconscious unity which expresses itself openly enough in cosmic action and cosmic substance, but of which they are not themselves superficially aware. In the conscient the ego becomes the superficial point at which the awareness of unity can emerge; but it applies its perception of unity to the form and surface action and, a failing to take account of all that operates behind, fails also to realise that it is not only one in itself but one with others. This limitation of the universal "I" in the divided ego-sense constitutes our imperfect individualised personality. But when the ego transcends the personal consciousness, it begins to include and be overpowered by that which is to us superconscious; it becomes aware of the cosmic unity and enters into the Transcendent Self which here cosmos expresses by a multiple oneness.

The liberation of the individual soul is therefore the keynote of the definite divine action; it is the primary divine necessity and the

pivot on which all else turns. It is the point of light at which the intended complete self-manifestation in the many begins to emerge. But the liberated soul extends its perception of unity horizontally as well as vertically. Its unity with the transcendent one is incomplete without its unity with the cosmic many. And that lateral unity translates itself by multiplication, a reproduction of its own liberated state at other points in the multiplicity. The divine soul reproduces itself in similar liberated souls as the animal reproduces itself in similar bodies. Therefore, whenever even a single soul is liberated, there is a tendency to an extension and even to an outburst of the same divine self-consciousness in other individual souls of our terrestrial humanity and,—who knows?—perhaps even beyond the terrestrial consciousness. Where shall we fix the limit of that extension? Is it altogether a legend which says of the Buddha that as he stood on the threshold of *nirvāṇa*, of the non-being, his soul turned back and took the vow never to make the irrevocable crossing so long as there was a single being upon earth undelivered from the knot of the suffering, from the bondage of the ego?

But we can attain to the highest without blotting ourselves out from the cosmic extension. *Brahman* preserves always Its two terms of liberty within and of formation without, of expression and of freedom from the expression. We also, being That, can attain to the same divine self-possession. The harmony of the two tendencies is the condition of all life that aims at being really divine. Liberty pursued by exclusion of the thing exceeded leads along the path of negation to the refusal of that which God has accepted. Activity pursued by absorption in the act and the energy leads to an inferior affirmation and the denial of the Highest. But what God combines and synthetises, wherefore should man insist on divorcing? To be perfect as He is perfect is the condition of His integral attainment.

Through *avidyā*, the multiplicity, lies our path out of the transitional egoistic self-expression in which death and suffering predominate; through *vidyā* consenting with *avidyā* by the perfect sense of oneness even in that multiplicity, we enjoy integrally the immortality and the beatitude. By attaining to the Unborn beyond all becoming we are liberated from this lower birth and death; by accepting the becoming freely as the divine, we invade mortality with the immortal beatitude and become luminous centres of its conscious self-expression in humanity. (*ibid.*, pp. 35–41.)

4. *The Power of Illusion, Māyā*

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

At a certain point of this constant unrest and travail even the physical mind loses its conviction of objective certitude and enters into an agnosticism which questions all its own standards of life and knowledge, doubts whether all this is real or else whether all, even if real, is not futile; the vital mind, baffled by life and frustrated or else dissatisfied with all its satisfactions, overtaken by a deep disgust and disappointment, finds that all is vanity and vexation of spirit and is ready to reject life and existence as an unreality, all that it hunted after as an illusion, *māyā*; the thinking mind, unbuilding all its affirmations, discovers that all are mere mental constructions and there is no reality in them or else that the only reality is something beyond this existence, something that has not been made or constructed, something absolute and eternal,—all that is relative, all that is of time is a dream, a hallucination of the mind or a vast delirium, an immense cosmic illusion, a delusive figure of apparent existence. The principle of negation prevails over the principle of affirmation and becomes universal and absolute. Thence arise the great world-negating religions and philosophies; thence too a recoil of the life-motive from itself and a seeking after a life elsewhere flawless and eternal or a will to annul life itself in an immobile reality or an original non-existence. In India the philosophy of world-negation has been given formulations of supreme power and value by two of the greatest of her thinkers, Buddha and Śaṅkara. There have been, intermediate or later in time, other philosophies of considerable importance, some of them widely accepted, formulated with much acumen of thought by men of genius and spiritual insight, which disputed with more or less force and success the conclusions of these two great metaphysical systems, but none has been put forward with an equal force of presentation or drive of personality or had a similar massive effect. The spirit of these two remarkable spiritual philosophies—for Śaṅkara in the historical process of India's philosophical mind takes up, completes and replaces Buddha,—has weighed with a tremendous power on her thought, religion and general mentality: everywhere broods its mighty shadow, everywhere is the impress of the three

great formulas, the chain of *karma*, escape from the wheel of rebirth, *māyā*. It is necessary therefore to look afresh at the Idea or Truth behind the negation of cosmic existence and to consider, however briefly, what is the value of its main formulations or suggestions, on what reality they stand, how far they are imperative to the reason or to experience. For the present it will be enough to cast a glance on the principal ideas which are grouped around the conception of the great cosmic illusion, *māyā*, and to set against them those that are proper to our own line of thought and vision; for both proceed from the conception of the One Reality, but one line leads to a universal illusionism, the other to a universal realism,—an unreal or real-unreal universe reposing on a transcendent reality or a real universe reposing on a reality at once universal and transcendent or absolute.

In itself and by itself the vital being's aversion, the life-mind's recoil from life cannot be taken as valid or conclusive. Its strongest motive is a sense of disappointment and an acceptance of frustration which has no greater claim to conclusiveness than the idealist's opposite motive of invariable hope and his faith and will to realise. Nevertheless there is a certain validity in the mental support of this sense of frustration, in the perception at which the thinking mind arrives that there is an illusion behind all human effort and terrestrial endeavour, the illusion of his political and social gospels, the illusion of his ethical effort at perfection, the illusion of philanthropy and service, the illusion of works, the illusion of fame, power, success, the illusion of all achievement. Human, social and political endeavour turns always in a circle and leads nowhere; man's life and nature remain always the same, always imperfect, and neither laws nor institutions nor education nor philosophy nor morality nor religious teachings have succeeded in producing the perfect man, still less a perfect humanity,—straighten the tail of the dog as you will, it has been said, it always resumes its natural curve of crookedness. Altruism, philanthropy and service, Christian love or Buddhist compassion have not made the world a whit happier, they only give infinitesimal bits of momentary relief here and there, throw drops on the fire of the world's suffering. All aims are in the end transitory and futile, all achievements unsatisfying or evanescent; all works are so much labour of effort and success and failure which consummate nothing definitive: whatever changes are made in human life are of the form only and these forms pursue each other in a futile circle;

for the essence of life, its general character remains the same for ever. This view of things may be exaggerated, but it has an undeniable force; it is supported by the experience of man's centuries and it carries in itself a significance which at one time or another comes upon the mind with an overwhelming air of self-evidence. Not only so, but if it is true that the fundamental laws and values of terrestrial existence are fixed or that it must always turn in repeated cycles,—and this has been for long a very prevalent notion,—then this view of things in the end is hardly escapable. For imperfection, ignorance, frustration and suffering are a dominant factor of the existing world-order, the elements contrary to them, knowledge, happiness, success, perfection are constantly found to be deceptive or inconclusive: the two opposites are so inextricably mixed that, if this state of things is not a motion towards a greater fulfilment, if this is the permanent character of the world-order, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that all here is either the creation of an inconscient energy, which would account for the incapacity of an apparent consciousness to arrive at anything, or intentionally a world of ordeal and failure, the issue being not here but elsewhere, or even a vast and aimless cosmic illusion.

Among these alternative conclusions the second, as it is usually put before us, offers no ground for the philosophic reason, since we have no satisfying indication of the connection between the here and the elsewhere which are posited against each other but not explained in the inevitability of their relations, and there is no light cast on the necessity or fundamental significance of the ordeal and failure. It could only be intelligible,—except as the mysterious will of an arbitrary Creator,—if there was a choice by immortal spirits to try the adventure of the ignorance and a necessity for them to learn the nature of a world of ignorance in order that they might reject it. But such a creative motive, necessarily incidental and quite temporary in its incidence, with the earth as its casual field of experience, could hardly by itself account for the immense and enduring phenomenon of this complex universe. It can become an operative part of a satisfactory explanation if this world is the field for the working out of a greater creative motive, if it is a manifestation of a divine truth or a divine possibility in which under certain conditions, an initiating ignorance must intervene as a necessary factor, and if the arrangement of this universe contains in it a compulsion of the ignorance to move towards knowledge, of the imperfect manifestation to grow into

perfection, of the frustration to serve as steps towards a final victory, of the suffering to prepare an emergence of the divine delight of being. In that case the sense of disappointment, frustration, illusion and the vanity of all things would not be valid; for the aspects that seem to justify it would be only the natural circumstances of a difficult evolution: all the stress of struggle and effort, success and failure, joy and suffering, the mixture of ignorance and knowledge would be the experience needed for the soul, mind, life and physical part to grow into the full light of a spiritual perfected being. It would reveal itself as the process of an evolutionary manifestation; there would be no need to bring in the fiat of an arbitrary omnipotence or a cosmic illusion, a phantasy of meaningless *māyā*.

But there is too a higher mental and spiritual basis for the philosophy of world-negation and here we are on more solid ground: for it can be contended that the world is in its very nature an illusion and no reasoning from the features and circumstances of an illusion could justify it or raise it into a reality,—there is only one reality, the transcendent, the supracosmic: no divine fulfilment, even if our life were to grow into the life of gods, could nullify or cancel the original unreality which is its fundamental character; for that fulfilment would be only the bright side of an illusion. Or even if not absolutely an illusion, it would be a reality of an inferior order and must come to an end by the soul's recognition that the *Brahman* alone is true, that there is nothing but the transcendent and immutable Absolute. If this is the one truth, then all ground is cut away from under our feet; the divine manifestation, the victory of the soul in matter, its mastery over existence, the divine life in Nature would itself be a falsehood or at least something not altogether real imposed for a time on the sole true reality. But here all turns on the mind's conception or the mental being's experience of reality and how far that conception is valid or how far that experience is imperative,—even if it is a spiritual experience, how far it is absolutely conclusive, solely imperative.

The cosmic illusion is sometimes envisaged—though that is not the accepted position—as something that has the character of an unreal subjective experience; it is then—or may be—a figure of forms and movements that arises in some eternal sleep of things or in a dream-consciousness and is temporarily imposed on a pure and featureless self-aware existence; it is a dream that takes place in the Infinite. In the philosophies of the *Māyāvādins* [illusionists]—for there are several

systems alike in their basis but not altogether and at every point coincident with each other,—the analogy of dream is given, but as an analogy only, not as the intrinsic character of the world-illusion. . . .

Dream is felt to be unreal, first, because it ceases and has no further validity when we pass from one status of consciousness to another which is our normal status. But this is not by itself a sufficient reason: for it may well be that there are different states of consciousness each with its own realities; if the consciousness of one state of things fades back and its contents are lost or, even when caught in memory, seem to be illusory as soon as we pass into another state, that would be perfectly normal, but it would not prove the reality of the state in which we now are and the unreality of the other which we have left behind us. If earth circumstances begin to seem unreal to a soul passing into a different world or another plane of consciousness, that would not prove their unreality; similarly, the fact that world-existence seems unreal to us when we pass into the spiritual silence or into some *nirvāṇa*, does not of itself prove that the cosmos was all the time an illusion. The world is real to the consciousness dwelling in it, an unconditioned existence is real to the consciousness absorbed in *nirvāṇa*; that is all that is established. But the second reason for refusing credit to our sleep experience is that a dream is something evanescent without antecedents and without a sequel; ordinarily, too, it is without any sufficient coherence or any significance intelligible to our waking being. If our dreams wore like our waking life an aspect of coherence, each night taking up and carrying farther a past continuous and connected sleep experience as each day takes up again our waking world-experience, then dreams would assume to our mind quite another character. There is therefore no analogy between a dream and waking life; these are experiences quite different in their character, validity, order. . . . (*ibid.*, pp. 373–8.)

. . . It may be said, however, that our dreams are not themselves realities but only a transcript of reality, a system of symbol-images, and our waking experience of the universe is similarly not a reality but only a transcript of reality, a series or collection of symbol-images. It is quite true that primarily we see the physical universe only through a system of images impressed or imposed on our senses and so far the contention is justified; it may also be admitted that in a certain sense and from one view-point our experiences and activities can be considered as symbols of a truth which our lives are trying to express but at present only with a partial success and an

imperfect coherence. If that were all, life might be described as a dream experience of self and things in the consciousness of the Infinite. But although our primary evidence of the objects of the universe consists of a structure of sense images, these are completed, validated, set in order by an automatic intuition in the consciousness which immediately relates the image with the thing imaged and gets the tangible experience of the object, so that we are not merely regarding or reading a translation or sense-transcript of the reality but looking through the sense-image to the reality. This adequacy is amplified too by the action of a reason which fathoms and understands the law of things sensed and can observe scrupulously the sense-transcript and correct its errors. Therefore we may conclude that we experience a real universe through our imaged sense-transcript by the aid of the intuition and the reason,—an intuition which gives us the touch of things and a reason which investigates their truth by its conceptive knowledge. But we must note also that even if our image view of the universe, our sense-transcript, is a system of symbol images and not an exact reproduction or transcription, a literal translation, still a symbol is a notation of something that is, a transcript of realities. Even if our images are incorrect, what they endeavour to image are realities, not illusions; when we see a tree or a stone or an animal, it is not a non-existent figure, a hallucination that we are seeing; we may not be sure that the image is exact, we may concede that other-sense might very well see it otherwise, but still there is something there that justifies the image, something with which it has more or less correspondence. But in the theory of illusion the only reality is an indeterminable featureless pure Existence, *Brahman*, and there is no possibility of its being translated or mistranslated into a system of symbol-figures, for that could only be if this Existence had some determinate contents or some unmanifested truths of its being which could be transcribed into the forms or names given to them by our consciousness: a pure indeterminable cannot be rendered by a transcript, a multitude of representative differentiae, a crowd of symbols or images; for there is in it only a pure identity, there is nothing to transcribe, nothing to symbolize, nothing to image. Therefore the dream analogy fails us altogether and is better put out of the way; it can always be used as a vivid metaphor of a certain attitude our mind can take towards its experiences, but it has no value for a metaphysical enquiry into the reality and fundamental significances or the origin of existence. (*ibid.*, pp. 384–5.)

If we scrutinise other illustrations or analogies that are offered to us for a better understanding of the operation of *māyā*, we detect in all of them an inapplicability that deprives them of their force and value. The familiar instance of mother-of-pearl and silver turns also, like the rope and snake analogy, upon an error due to a resemblance between a present real and another and absent real; it can have no application to the imposition of a multiple and mutable unreality upon a sole and unique immutable Real. In the example of an optical illusion duplicating or multiplying a single object, as when we see two moons instead of one, there are two or more identical forms of the one object, one real, one—or the rest—an illusion: this does not illustrate the juxtaposition of world and *Brahman*; for in the operation of *māyā* there is a much more complex phenomenon,—there is indeed an illusory multiplication of the identical imposed upon its one and ever-unalterable identity, the one appearing as many but upon that is imposed an immense organised diversity in nature, a diversity of forms and movements which have nothing to do with the original Real. Dreams, visions, the imagination of the artist or poet can present such an organised diversity which is not real; but it is an imitation, a mimesis of a real and already existent organised diversity, or it starts from such a mimesis and even in the richest variation or wildest imagination some mimetic element is observable. There is here no such thing as the operation attributed to *māyā* in which there is no mimesis but a pure and radically original creation of unreal forms and movements that are non-existent anywhere and neither imitate nor reflect nor alter and develop anything discoverable in the reality. There is nothing in the operations of mind illusion that throws light upon this mystery; it is, as a stupendous cosmic illusion of this kind must be, *sui generis* without parallel. What we see in the universe is that a diversity of the identical is everywhere the fundamental operation of cosmic Nature; but here it presents itself, not as an illusion, but as a various real formation out of a one original substance. A reality of oneness manifesting itself in a reality of numberless forms and powers of its being is what we confront everywhere. There is no doubt in its process a mystery, even a magic, but there is nothing to show that it is a magic of the unreal and not a working of a consciousness and force of being of the omnipotent real, a self-creation operated by an eternal self-knowledge. (*ibid.*, pp. 387–8.)

Existence that acts and creates by the power and from the pure

delight of its conscious being is the reality that we are, the self of all our modes and moods, the cause, object and goal of all our doing, becoming and creating. As the poet, artist or musician when he creates does really nothing but develop some potentiality in his unmanifested self into a form of manifestation and as the thinker, statesman, mechanist only bring out into a shape of things that which lay hidden in themselves, was themselves, is still themselves when it is cast into form, so is it with the world and the Eternal. All creation or becoming is nothing but this self-manifestation. . . .

. . . Therefore whatever comes into the world, seeks nothing but this, to be, to arrive at the intended form, to enlarge its self-existence in that form, to develop, manifest, increase, realise infinitely the consciousness and the power that is in it, to have the delight of coming into manifestation, the delight of the form of being, the delight of the rhythm of consciousness, the delight of the play of force and to aggrandise and perfect that delight by whatever means is possible, in whatever direction, through whatever idea of itself may be suggested to it by the existence, the conscious-force, the delight active within its deepest being. (*ibid.*, pp. 105-6.)

. . . Infinite consciousness in its infinite action can produce only infinite results; to settle upon a fixed truth or order of truths and build a world in conformity with that which is fixed, demands a selective faculty of knowledge commissioned to shape finite appearance out of the infinite reality.

This power was known to the Vedic seers by the name of *māyā*. *Māyā* meant for them the power of infinite consciousness to comprehend, contain in itself and measure out, that is to say, to form—for form is delimitation—name and shape out of the vast illimitable truth of infinite existence. It is by *māyā* that static truth of essential being becomes ordered truth of active being,—or, to put it in more metaphysical language, out of the supreme being in which all is all without barrier of separative consciousness emerges the phenomenal being in which all is in each and each is in all for the play of existence with existence, consciousness with consciousness, force with force, delight with delight. This play of all in each and each in all is concealed at first from us by the mental play or the illusion of *māyā* which persuades each that he is in all but not all in him and that he is in all as a separated being not as a being always inseparably one with the rest of existence. Afterwards we have to emerge from this error into the supramental play or the truth of *māyā* where the “each”

and the "all" coexist in the inseparable unity of the one truth and the multiple symbol. The lower, present and deluding mental *māyā* has first to be embraced, then to be overcome; for it is God's play with division and darkness and limitation, desire and strife and suffering in which He subjects Himself to the force that has come out of Himself and by her obscure suffers Himself to be obscured. That other *māyā* concealed by this mental has to be overpassed, then embraced; for it is God's play of the infinities of existence, the splendours of knowledge, the glories of force mastered and the ecstasies of love illimitable where He emerges out of the hold of force, holds her instead and fulfils in her illumined that for which she went out from Him at the first.

This distinction between the lower and the higher *māyā* is the link in thought and in cosmic fact which the pessimistic and illusionist philosophies miss or neglect.... (*ibid.*, 108-9.)

5. *The Supermind or Truth-Consciousness*

Still, when we have found that all things are *Saccidānanda* [existence-consciousness-force-bliss], all has not yet been explained. We know the reality of the universe, we do not yet know the process by which that reality has turned itself into this phenomenon... For this existence, conscious-force, delight does not work directly or with a sovereign irresponsibility like a magician building up worlds and universes by the mere fiat of its word. We perceive a process, we are aware of a law.

... When we perceive that force is a self-expression of existence, we are bound to perceive also that this line which force has taken, corresponds to some self-truth of that existence which governs and determines its constant curve and destination. And since consciousness is the nature of the original existence and the essence of its force, this truth must be a self-perception in conscious-being and this determination of the line taken by force must result from a power of self-directive knowledge inherent in consciousness which enables it to guide its own force inevitably along the logical line of the original self-perception. It is then a self-determining power in universal consciousness, a capacity in self-awareness of infinite existence to perceive a certain truth in itself and direct its force of creation along the line of that truth, which has presided over the cosmic manifestation. (*ibid.*, p. 107.)

... A truth of conscious being supports these forms and expresses

itself in them, and the knowledge corresponding to the truth thus expressed reigns as a supramental truth-consciousness organising real ideas in a perfect harmony before they are cast into the mental-vital-material mould. Mind, life and body are an inferior consciousness and a partial expression which strives to arrive in the mould of a various evolution at that superior expression of itself already existent to the beyond-mind. That which is in the beyond-mind is the ideal which in its own conditions it is labouring to realise. . . .

Mind is not sufficient to explain existence in the universe. Infinite consciousness must first translate itself into infinite faculty of knowledge or, as we call it from our point of view, omniscience; but mind is not a faculty of knowledge nor an instrument of omniscience; it is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge, for expressing as much as it can gain of it in certain forms of a relative thought and for using it towards certain capacities of action. Even when it finds, it does not possess; it only keeps a certain fund of current coin of truth—not truth itself—in the bank of memory to draw upon according to its needs. For mind is that which does not know, which tries to know and which never knows except as in a glass darkly. It is the power which interprets truth of universal existence for the practical uses of a certain order of things; it is not the power which knows and guides that existence and therefore it cannot be the power which created or manifested it. (*ibid.*, pp. 109–10.)

A principle of active will and knowledge superior to mind and creatrix of the worlds is then the intermediary power and state of being between that self-possession of the one and this flux of the many. . . .

. . . But since this consciousness is creatrix of the world, it must be not only state of knowledge, but power of knowledge, and not only a will to light and vision, but a will to power and works. And since mind too is created out of it, mind must be a development by limitation out of this primal faculty and this mediatory act of the supreme consciousness and must therefore be capable of resolving itself back into it through a reverse development by expansion. For always mind must be identical with supermind, . . . however different or even contrary it may have become in its actual forms and settled modes of operation. . . . (*ibid.*, pp. 114–15.)

. . . This intermediary term is therefore the beginning and end of all creation and arrangement, . . . the starting-point of all differentiation, the instrument of all unification, originative, executive and

consummative of all realised or realisable harmonies. It has the knowledge of the One, but is able to draw out of the one its hidden multitudes; it manifests the many, but does not lose itself in their differentiations. And shall we not say that its very existence points back to something beyond our supreme perception of the ineffable unity,—something ineffable and mentally inconceivable not because of its unity and indivisibility, but because of its freedom from even these formulations of our mind,—something beyond both unity and multiplicity? That would be the utter Absolute and real which yet justifies to us both our knowledge of God and our knowledge of the world. (*ibid.*, pp. 117–18.)

In supermind being, consciousness of knowledge and consciousness of will are not divided as they seem to be in our mental operations; they are a trinity, one movement with three effective aspects. Each has its own effect. Being gives the effect of substance, consciousness the effect of knowledge, of the self-guiding and shaping idea, of comprehension and apprehension; will gives the effect of self-fulfilling force. But the idea is only the light of the reality illumining itself; it is not mental thought nor imagination, but effective self-awareness. It is real-idea.

In supermind knowledge in the idea is not divorced from will in the idea, but one with it—just as it is not different from being or substance, but is one with the being, luminous power of the substance. As the power of burning light is not different from the substance of the fire, so the power of the idea is not different from the substance of the being which works itself out in the idea and its development. (*ibid.*, p. 121.)

6. *The Ascending Series of Substance*

. . . if there is, as there must be in the nature of things, an ascending series in the scale of substance from matter to spirit, it must be marked by a progressive diminution of these capacities most characteristic of the physical principle and a progressive increase of the opposite characteristics which will lead us to the formula of pure spiritual self-extension. . . . Drawing away from durability of form, we draw towards eternity of essence; drawing away from our poise in the persistent separation and resistance of physical matter, we draw near to the highest divine poise in the infinity, unity and indivisibility of spirit. Between gross substance and pure spirit substance this must be the fundamental antinomy. In matter *cit* or conscious-force masses

itself more and more to resist and stand out against other masses of the same conscious-force; in substance of spirit pure consciousness images itself freely in its sense of itself with an essential indivisibility and a constant unifying interchange as the basic formula even of the most diversifying play of its own force. Between these two poles there is the possibility of an infinite gradation. (*ibid.*, p. 233.)

Even within the formula of the physical cosmos there is an ascending series in the scale of matter which leads us from the more to the less dense, from the less to the more subtle. Where we reach the highest term of that series, the most supra-ethereal subtlety of material substance or formulation of force, what lies beyond? Not a *nihil*, not a void; for there is no such thing as absolute void or real nullity and what we call by that name is simply something beyond the grasp of our sense, our mind or our most subtle consciousness. Nor is it true that there is nothing beyond, or that some ethereal substance of matter is the eternal beginning; for we know that matter and material force are only a last result of a pure substance and pure force in which consciousness is luminously self-aware and self-possessing and not as in matter lost to itself in an inconscient sleep and an inert motion. What then is there between this material substance and that pure substance? For we do not leap from the one to the other, we do not pass at once from the inconscient to absolute consciousness. There must be and there are grades between inconscient substance and utterly self-conscious self-extension, as between the principle of matter and the principle of spirit. (*ibid.*, pp. 234-5.)

In the next grade of substance the initial, dominating, determining fact is no longer substantial form and force, but life and conscious desire. Therefore the world beyond this material plane must be a world based upon a conscious cosmic vital energy, a force of vital seeking and a force of desire and their self-expression and not upon an inconscient or subconscious will taking the form of a material force and energy. All the forms, bodies, forces, life-movements, sense-movements, thought-movements, developments, culminations, self-fulfilments of that world must be dominated and determined by this initial fact of conscious-life to which matter and mind must subject themselves, must start from that, base themselves upon that, be limited or enlarged by its laws, powers, capacities, limitations; and if mind there seeks to develop yet higher possibilities, still it must then too take account of the original vital formula of desire-force, its purpose and its demand upon the divine manifestation.

So too with the higher gradations. The next in the series must be governed by the dominating and determining factor of mind. Substance there must be subtle and flexible enough to assume the shapes directly imposed upon it by mind, to obey its operations, to subordinate itself to its demand for self-expression and self-fulfilment. The relations of sense and substance too must have a corresponding subtlety and flexibility and must be determined, not by the relations of physical organ with physical object, but of mind with the subtler substance upon which it works. The life of such a world would be the servant of mind in a sense of which our weak mental operations and our limited, coarse and rebellious vital faculties can have no adequate conception. There mind dominates as the original formula, its purpose prevails, its demand overrides all others in the law of the divine manifestation. At a yet higher reach supermind—or, intermediately, principles touched by it—or, still higher, a pure bliss, a pure conscious Power or pure Being replace mind as the dominant principle, and we enter into those ranges of cosmic existence which to the old Vedic seers were the worlds of illuminated divine existence and the foundation of what they termed immortality. . . .

The principle which underlies this continually ascending experience and vision uplifted beyond the material formulation of things is that all cosmic existence is a complex harmony and does not finish with the limited range of consciousness in which the ordinary human mind and life is content to be imprisoned. Being, consciousness, force, substance descend and ascend a many-runged ladder on each step of which being has a vaster self-extension, consciousness a wider sense of its own range and largeness and joy, force a greater intensity and a more rapid and blissful capacity, substance gives a more subtle, plastic, buoyant and flexible rendering of its primal reality. For the more subtle is also the more powerful,—one might say, the more truly concrete; it is less bound than the gross, it has a greater permanence in its being along with a greater potentiality, plasticity and range in its becoming. Each plateau of the hill of being gives to our widening experience a higher plane of our consciousness and a richer world for our existence.

But how does this ascending series affect the possibilities of our material existence? It would not affect them at all if each plane of consciousness, each world of existence, each grade of substance, each degree of cosmic force were cut off entirely from that which precedes and that which follows it. But the opposite is the truth; the manifestation

of the spirit is a complex web and in the design and pattern of one principle all the others enter as elements of the spiritual whole. Our material world is the result of all the others, for the other principles have all descended into matter to create the physical universe, and every particle of what we call matter contains all of them implicit in itself; their secret action, as we have seen, is involved in every moment of its existence and every movement of its activity. And as matter is the last word of the descent, so it is also the first word of the ascent; as the powers of all these planes, worlds, grades, degrees are involved in the material existence, so are they all capable of evolution out of it. It is for this reason that material being does not begin and end with gases and chemical compounds and physical forces and movements, with nebulae and suns and earths, but evolves life, evolves mind, must evolve eventually supermind and the higher degrees of the spiritual existence. Evolution comes by the unceasing pressure of the supra-material planes on the material compelling it to deliver out of itself their principles and powers which might conceivably otherwise have slept imprisoned in the rigidity of the material formula. This would even so have been improbable, since their presence there implies a purpose of deliverance; but still this necessity from below is actually very much aided by a kindred superior pressure.

Nor can this evolution end with the first meagre formulation of life, mind, supermind, spirit conceded to these higher powers by the reluctant power of matter. For as they evolve, as they awake, as they become more active and avid of their own potentialities, the pressure on them of the superior planes, a pressure involved in the existence and close connection and interdependence of the worlds, must also increase in insistence, power and effectiveness. Not only must these principles manifest from below in a qualified and restricted emergence, but also from above they must descend in their characteristic power and full possible efflorescence into the material being; the material creature must open to a wider and wider play of their activities in matter, and all that is needed is a fit receptacle, medium, instrument. That is provided for in the body, life and consciousness of man.

Certainly, if that body, life and consciousness were limited to the possibilities of the gross body which are all that our physical senses and physical mentality accept, there would be a very narrow term for this evolution, and the human being could not hope to accomplish anything essentially greater than his present achievement. But this body, as ancient occult science discovered, is not the whole even

of our physical being; this gross density is not all of our substance. The oldest Vedāntic knowledge tells us of five degrees of our being, the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance, a sheath as it was called in the ancient figurative language. A later psychology found that these five sheaths of our substance were the material of three bodies, gross physical, subtle and causal, in all of which the soul actually and simultaneously dwells, although here and now we are superficially conscious only of the material vehicle. But it is possible to become conscious in our other bodies as well and it is in fact the opening up of the veil between them and consequently between our physical, psychical and ideal personalities which is the cause of those “psychic” and “occult” phenomena that are now beginning to be increasingly though yet too little and too clumsily examined, even while they are far too much exploited. . . .

Behind all these terms of ancient psycho-physical science lies the one great fact and law of our being that whatever be its temporary poise of form, consciousness, power in this material evolution, there must be behind it and there is a greater, a truer existence of which this is only the external result and physically sensible aspect. Our substance does not end with the physical body; that is only the earthly pedestal, the terrestrial base, the material starting-point. As there are behind our waking mentality vaster ranges of consciousness subconscious and superconscious to it of which we become sometimes abnormally aware, so there are behind our gross physical being other and subtler grades of substance with a finer law and a greater power which support the denser body and which can by our entering into the ranges of consciousness belonging to them be made to impose that law and power on our dense matter and substitute their purer, higher, intenser conditions of being for the grossness and limitation of our present physical life and impulses and habits. If that be so, then the evolution of a nobler physical existence not limited by the ordinary conditions of animal birth and life and death, of difficult alimentation and facility of disorder and disease and subjection to poor and unsatisfied vital cravings ceases to have the appearance of a dream and chimera and becomes a possibility founded upon a rational and philosophic truth which is in accordance with all the rest that we have hitherto known, experienced or been able to think out about the overt and secret truth of our existence.

So it should rationally be; for the uninterrupted series of the principles of our being and their close mutual connection is too evident for it to be possible that one of them should be condemned and cut off while the others are capable of a divine liberation. The ascent of man from the physical to the supramental must open out the possibility of a corresponding ascent in the grades of substance to that ideal of causal body which is proper to our supramental being, and the conquest of the lower principles by supermind and its liberation of them into a divine life and a divine mentality must also render possible a conquest of our physical limitations by the power and principle of supramental substance. And this means the evolution not only of an untrammelled consciousness, a mind and sense not shut up in the walls of the physical ego or limited to the poor basis of knowledge given by the physical organs of sense, but a life-power liberated more and more from its mortal limitations, a physical life fit for a divine inhabitant and,—in the sense not of attachment or of restriction to our present corporeal frame but an exceeding of the law of the physical body,—the conquest of death, an earthly immortality. For from the divine bliss, the original delight of existence, the Lord of immortality comes pouring the wine of that bliss, the mystic *Soma*, into these jars of mentalised living matter; eternal and beautiful, he enters into these sheaths of substance for the integral transformation of the being and nature. (*ibid.*, pp. 236–40.)

7. *The Gnostic Being and The Divine Life*

As there has been established on earth a mental consciousness and power which shapes a race of mental beings and takes up into itself all of earthly nature that is ready for the change, so now there will be established on earth a gnostic consciousness and power which will shape a race of gnostic spiritual beings and take up into itself all of earth-nature that is ready for this new transformation. It will also receive into itself from above, progressively, from its own domain of perfect light and power and beauty all that is ready to descend from that domain into terrestrial being. For the evolution proceeded in the past by the upsurging, at each critical stage, of a concealed power from its involution in the inconscience, but also by a descent from above, from its own plane, of that power already self-realised in its own higher natural province. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 859.)

A supramental or gnostic race of beings would not be a race made according to a single type, moulded in a single fixed pattern; for the

law of the supermind is unity fulfilled in diversity, and therefore there would be an infinite diversity in the manifestation of the gnostic consciousness although that consciousness would still be one in its basis, in its constitution, in its all-revealing and all-uniting order. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 862.)

The gnosis is the effective principle of the spirit, a highest dynamis of the spiritual existence. The gnostic individual would be the consummation of the spiritual man; his whole way of being, thinking, living, acting would be governed by the power of a vast universal spirituality. . . . All his existence would be fused into oneness with the transcendent and universal Self and Spirit; all his action would originate from and obey the supreme Self and Spirit's divine governance of Nature. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 863.)

The supramental being. . . would act in a universal awareness and a harmony of his individual self with the total self, of his individual will with the total will, of his individual action with the total action. For what we most suffer from in our outer life and its reactions upon our inner life is the imperfection of our relations with the world, our ignorance of others, our disharmony with the whole of things, our inability to equate our demand on the world with the world's demand on us. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 865.)

. . . Delight of the manifestation of the spirit in its truth of being would be the sense of the gnostic life. All its movements would be a formulation of the truth of the spirit, but also of the joy of the spirit,—an affirmation of spiritual existence, an affirmation of spiritual consciousness, an affirmation of spiritual delight of being. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 866.)

An evolution of gnostic consciousness brings with it a transformation of our world-consciousness and world-action: for it takes up into the new power of awareness not only the inner existence but our outer being and our world-being; there is a remaking of both, an integration of them in the sense and power of the spiritual existence. There must come upon us in the change at once a reversal and rejection of our present way of existence and a fulfilment of its inner trend and tendency. . . . (*ibid.*, pp. 867–8.)

. . . The peace of God within will be extended in the gnostic experience of the universe into a universal calm of equality not merely passive but dynamic, a calm of freedom in oneness dominating all that meets it, tranquillising all that enters into it, imposing its law of peace on the supramental being's relations with the world in which

he is living. Into all his acts the inner oneness, the inner communion will attend him and enter into his relations with others, who will not be to him others but selves of himself in the one existence, his own universal existence. It is this poise and freedom in the spirit that will enable him to take all life into himself while still remaining the spiritual self and to embrace even the world of the ignorance without himself entering into the ignorance. (*ibid.*, p. 869.)

. . . A gnostic being will possess not only a truth-conscious control of the realised spirit's power over its physical world, but also the full power of the mental and vital planes and the use of their greater forces for the perfection of the physical existence. This greater knowledge and wider hold of all existence will enormously increase the power of instrumentation of the gnostic being on his surroundings and on the world of physical Nature. (*ibid.*, p. 870.)

As a consequence of the total change and a reversal of consciousness establishing a new relation of spirit with mind and life and matter, and a new significance and perfection in the relation, there will be a reversal, a perfecting new significance also of the relations between the spirit and the body it inhabits. . . .

This new relation of the spirit and the body assumes—and makes possible—a free acceptance of the whole of material Nature in place of a rejection; the drawing back from her, the refusal of all identification or acceptance, which is the first normal necessity of the spiritual consciousness for its liberation, is no longer imperative. To cease to be identified with the body, to separate oneself from the body consciousness, is a recognised and necessary step whether towards spiritual liberation or towards spiritual perfection and mastery over Nature. But, this redemption once effected, the descent of the spiritual light and force can invade and take up the body also and there can be a new liberated and sovereign acceptance of material Nature. . . . (*ibid.*, pp. 874–6.)

There can undoubtedly be a spiritual life within, a kingdom of heaven within us which is not dependent on any outer manifestation or instrumentation or formula of external being. The inner life has a supreme spiritual importance and the outer has a value only in so far as it is expressive of the inner status. . . . but still, from the point of view of a spiritual evolution, this would be only an individual liberation and perfection in an unchanged environmental existence: for a greater dynamic change in earth-nature itself, a spiritual change of the whole principle and instrumentation of life and action, the

appearance of a new order of beings and a new earth-life must be envisaged in our idea of the total consummation, the divine issue. Here the gnostic change assumes a primary importance; all that precedes can be considered as an upbuilding and a preparation for this transmuting reversal of the whole nature. For it is a gnostic way of dynamic living that must be the fulfilled divine life on earth, a way of living that develops higher instruments of world-knowledge and world action for the dynamisation of consciousness in the physical existence and takes up and transforms the values of a world of material Nature. (*ibid.*, pp. 903–4.)

To be and to be fully is Nature's aim in us; but to be fully is to be wholly conscious of one's being: unconsciousness, half consciousness or deficient consciousness is a state of being not in possession of itself; it is existence, but not fullness of being. . . .

But also, since consciousness carries in itself the force of existence, to be fully is to have the intrinsic and integral force of one's being; it is to come into possession of all one's force of self and of all its use. . . .

Lastly, to be fully is to have the full delight of being. Being without delight of being, without an entire delight of itself and all things is something neutral or diminished; it is existence, but it is not fullness of being. This delight too must be intrinsic, self-existent, automatic; it cannot be dependent on things outside itself: whatever it delights in, it makes part of itself, has the joy of it as part of its universality. All undelight, all pain and suffering are a sign of imperfection, of incompleteness; they arise from a division of being, an incompleteness of consciousness of being, an incompleteness of the force of being. To become complete in being, in consciousness of being, in force of being, in delight of being and to live in this integrated completeness is the divine living. (*ibid.*, pp. 907–9.)

These things are impossible without an inward living; they cannot be reached by remaining in an external consciousness turned always outwards, active only or mainly on and from the surface. . . . If there is a being of the transcendence in us, it must be there in our secret self; on the surface there is only an ephemeral being of nature, made by limit and circumstance. If there is a self in us capable of largeness and universality, able to enter into a cosmic consciousness, that too must be within our inner being; the outer consciousness is a physical consciousness bound to its individual limits by the triple cord of mind, life and body: any external attempt at universality can only result

either in an aggrandisement of the ego or an effacement of the personality by its extinction in the mass or subjugation to the mass. It is only by an inner growth, movement, action that the individual can freely and effectively universalise and transcendentalise his being. . . . In men, says the Upaniṣad, the Self-Existent has cut the doors of consciousness outward, but a few turn the eye inward and it is these who see and know the Spirit and develop the spiritual being. Thus to look into ourselves and see and enter into ourselves and life within is the first necessity for transformation of nature and for the divine life. (*ibid.*, pp. 910–11.)

. . . The spiritual individual acts out of that sense of oneness which gives him immediate and direct perception of the demand of self on other self, the need of the life, the good, the work of love and sympathy that can truly be done. A realisation of spiritual unity, a dynamisation of the intimate consciousness of one-being, of one self in all beings, can alone found and govern by its truth the action of the divine life. (*ibid.*, p. 913.)

There is a reality, a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations; to find that truth and reality and live in it, achieve the most perfect manifestation and formation possible of it, must be the secret of perfection whether of individual or communal being. This reality is there within each thing and gives to each of its formations its power of being and value of being. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 929.)

. . . A perfected community also can exist only by the perfection of its individuals, and perfection can come only by the discovery and affirmation in life by each of his own spiritual being and the discovery by all of their spiritual unity and a resultant life unity. There can be no real perfection for us except by our inner self and truth of spiritual existence taking up all truth of the instrumental existence into itself and giving to it oneness, integration, harmony. As our only real freedom is the discovery and disengagement of the spiritual reality within us, so our only means of true perfection is the sovereignty and self-effectuation of the spiritual reality in all the elements of our nature. (*ibid.*, p. 931.)

It is almost universally supposed that spiritual life must necessarily be a life of ascetic spareness, a pushing away of all that is not absolutely needed for the bare maintenance of the body; and this is valid for a spiritual life which is in its nature and intention a life of withdrawal from life. Even apart from that ideal, it might be thought

that the spiritual turn must always make for an extreme simplicity, because all else would be a life of vital desire and physical self-indulgence. But from a wider standpoint this is a mental standard based on the law of the ignorance of which desire is the motive; to overcome the ignorance, to delete the ego, a total rejection not only of desire but of all the things that can satisfy desire may intervene as a valid principle. But this standard or any mental standard cannot be absolute nor can it be binding as a law on the consciousness that has arisen above desire; a complete purity and self-mastery would be in the very grain of its nature and that would remain the same in poverty or in riches: for if it could be shaken or sullied by either, it would not be real or would not be complete. The one rule of the gnostic life would be the self-expression of the Spirit, the will of the Divine Being; that will, that self-expression could manifest through extreme simplicity or through extreme complexity and opulence or in their natural balance,—for beauty and plenitude, a hidden sweetness and laughter in things, a sunshine and gladness of life are also powers and expressions of the Spirit. In all directions the spirit within determining the law of the nature would determine the frame of the life and its detail and circumstance. In all there would be the same plastic principle; a rigid standardisation, however necessary for the mind's arrangement of things, could not be the law of the spiritual life. A great diversity and liberty of self-expression based on an underlying unity might well become manifest; but everywhere there would be harmony and truth of order. (*ibid.*, pp. 944–5.)

If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key-terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. . . . (*ibid.*, p. 947.)¹

¹ Except for capitalization and Sanskrit transliteration, which have been modified to conform with the style used throughout this volume, the selections in this chapter follow the original texts literally—in spelling, hyphenation, and construction.