

MOTHER INDIA

MONTHLY REVIEW OF CULTURE

Vol. LXIV

No. 8

“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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Manoj Das

SRI AUROBINDO: LIFE AND TIMES OF THE MAHAYOGI

CHAPTER V: 15 AUGUST 1872

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The First Great Realisation

A NOTE

Writing in 1945 to correct certain errors in a narrative of his life regarding the period after his release from Alipore, Sri Aurobindo said:

There have been hints or statements about Sri Aurobindo taking or asking for initiation from certain quarters about this time. Those who spread these legends seem to be ignorant that at this time he was not a spiritual novice or in need of any initiation or spiritual direction by anybody. Sri Aurobindo had already realised in full two of the four great realisations on which his yoga and his spiritual philosophy are founded. The first he had gained while meditating with the Maharashtrian Yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele, at Baroda in January 1908; it was the realisation of the silent spaceless and timeless Brahman gained after a complete and abiding stillness of the whole consciousness and attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world, though this feeling disappeared after his second realisation which was that of the cosmic consciousness and of the Divine as all beings and all that is, which happened in the Alipore jail and of which he has spoken in his speech at Uttarpara. To the other two realisations, that of the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind, he was already on his way in his meditations in Alipore jail. Moreover, he had accepted from Lele as the principle of his sadhana to rely wholly on the Divine and his guidance alone both for his sadhana and for his outward actions. After that it was impossible for him to put himself under any other guidance and unnecessary to seek help from anyone. In fact Sri Aurobindo never took any formal initiation from anyone; he started his Sadhana on his own account by the practice of pranayama and never asked for help except from Lele.

(Autobiographical Notes, CWSA, Vol. 36, pp. 94-95)

This issue of *Mother India* is essentially an exploration of Nirvana, that “overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world” to which Sri Aurobindo has referred in several contexts. The readers will bear in mind the passages included here were written at different times and for different purposes and that a compilation like this one, with its snippets and overlaps and repetitions, cannot do full justice to the theme.

Due to constraints of space, the Mother’s comments on Nirvana will appear in the next issue.

The source of the passages is indicated thus:

- M** — *Collected Works of the Mother*, 2nd Edition (CWM)
S — *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL)
C — *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA)
N — *Nirodbaran's Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo*: The complete set
E — *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* as recorded by A. B. Purani, 4th edition

Ex. (S 22: 95-96) would mean SABCL, Volume 22, pages 95-96

These are the volumes used:

CWM

Vol. 12: *On Education*

SABCL

Vol. 22: *Letters on Yoga*

Vol. 23: *Letters on Yoga*

Vol. 24: *Letters on Yoga*

CWSA

Vol. 2: *Collected Poems*

Vol. 12: *Essays Divine and Human*

Vol. 13: *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*

Vol. 17: *Isha Upanishad*

Vol. 18: *Kena and Other Upanishads*

Vol. 20: *The Renaissance in India*

Vol. 21: *The Life Divine*

Vol. 22: *The Life Divine*

Vol. 23: *The Synthesis of Yoga*

Vol. 24: *The Synthesis of Yoga*

Vol. 27: *Letters on Poetry and Art*

Vol. 34: *Savitri*

Vol. 35: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*

Vol. 36: *Autobiographical Notes*

SRI AUROBINDO DOES NOT BELONG TO HISTORY

Sri Aurobindo does not belong to history; he is outside and beyond history.

Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centred on past figures, and they were showing as “the goal” the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either

— a life *in* this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly, or

— an escape *into* another world, heaven, nirvana, moksha. . . .

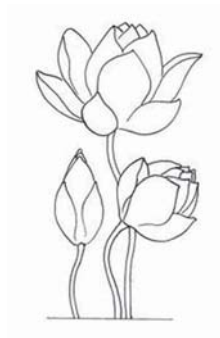
Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country.

True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than Matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere. . . . That is why she still has a message to preserve and deliver to the world. But at present she is splashing and floundering in the muddle.

Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but in remaining *in* it, to *transform it, divinise it*, so that the Divine can manifest **HERE**, in this **PHYSICAL WORLD**.

(M 12: 210-11)



INTO THE SILENCE

Nirvana

All is abolished but the mute Alone.
The mind from thought released, the heart from grief
Grow inexistent now beyond belief;
There is no I, no Nature, known-unknown.
The city, a shadow picture without tone,
Floats, quivers unreal; forms without relief
Flow, a cinema's vacant shapes; like a reef
Foundering in shoreless gulfs the world is done.

Only the illimitable Permanent
Is here. A Peace stupendous, featureless, still,
Replaces all, — what once was I, in It
A silent unnamed emptiness content
Either to fade in the Unknowable
Or thrill with the luminous seas of the Infinite.

(C 2: 561)

About the poem 'Nirvana'

. . . *Nirvana* was as close a transcription of a major experience as could be given in language coined by the human mind of a realisation in which the mind was entirely silent and into which no intellectual conception could at all enter. One has to use words and images in order to convey to the mind some perception, some figure of that which is beyond thought. (C 27: 315)

*

As to the Nirvana poem, I have said that the poem announces no metaphysical philosophy but is only the description of a spiritual experience. So how can any metaphysics be derived from it true or false — if you mean truly or falsely derived?
(C 27: 330)

*

Is *Nirvana* for instance an esoteric poem? There is no veil or symbol there — it tries to state the experience as precisely and overtly as possible. . . . I rather think, however, the term “esoteric poem” is a misnomer and some other phraseology would be more accurate. (C 27: 87)

Yoga for action not Sannyasa and Nirvana

Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being — the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele’s answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, “It should be easy for you as you are a poet.” (C 27: 716)

Meeting with Vishnu Bhaskar Lele

In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law. (C 35: 242)

Express train speed

. . . a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic, intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a sadhana or in the first years or for many

years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years after my first pre-Yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost — though there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements. (C 35: 240-41)

Decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana

. . . it was on the top storey of his [a Baroda Sardar, Mazumdar] house by the way that I sat with Lele in Jan. 1908 and had a decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana. (C 35: 15)

Nirvana is not without its uses

I have never said that things (in life) are harmonious now — on the contrary, with the human consciousness as it is harmony is impossible. It is always what I have told you, that the human consciousness is defective and simply impossible — and that is why I strive for a higher consciousness to come and set right the disturbed balance. I am glad you are getting converted to silence, and even Nirvana is not without its uses — in my case it was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the sadhana; but as to the positive way to get these things, I don't know if your mind is quite ready to proceed with it. There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. "Sit down," I was told, "look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back." I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don't know how many people can do. One (not a disciple — I had no disciples in those days) asked me how to do Yoga. I said: "Make your mind quiet first." He did and his mind became quite silent and empty. Then he rushed to me saying: "My brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think. I am becoming an idiot." He did not pause to look and see where these thoughts he uttered were coming from! Nor did he realise that one who is already an idiot cannot become one. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and I dropped him and let him lose his miraculously achieved silence.

The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to *call down* the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body. (C 35: 247)

No spirituality?

You had Nirvana in three days. Still you say there was no spirituality in you?

None, before I took up Yoga. (N: 206)

First complete realisation of Nirvana

One may be aware of the silent static self without relation to the play of the cosmos. Again, one may be aware of the universal static self omnipresent in everything without being supra-sensuously awake to the movement of the dynamic *viśvaprakṛti*. The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world. (C 35: 255)

Impediments on the Way

It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every sadhaka entering this Way has to get over similar impediments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real Way, even though the Divine help was with me all the time, and even then it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten more years of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to find *the* Way — and that was because I had my past and the world's Past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future. (C 35: 239)

An accident?

I think you have made too much play with my phrase “an accident” [*in the preceding letter*], ignoring the important qualification, “it *seemed* to come by an accident”. After four years of *prāṇāyāma* and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a bhakta with a limited mind but some experience and evocative power. We sat together

and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he never intended — for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta — and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will, a principle or rather a seed-force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or system or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase “it seemed to come by an accident”? But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like that of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we do. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicāriṇī bhakti* (one-pointed adoration). (C 35: 239-40)

Getting the blessed Nirvana

No aspiration, no nothing — says your teaching.

Never taught anything of the kind. I got the blessed Nirvana without even wanting it. Aspiration is first or usual means, that is all. (C 35: 257)

Nirvana walked into me

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles — at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples. दुर्गं पथस्तत् may be generally true and certainly the path of laya or nirvana is difficult in the extreme to most (although in

my case I walked into nirvana without intending it or rather nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path *need* not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it *is* so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these, if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking — for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to come. I have seen some astonishing instances here recently of this typhonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence. (C 35: 256-57)

Experience of Nirvana and knowledge of overhead spiritual planes

I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities — the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business, but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure “I” nor even of any self, impersonal or other, — there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That;* one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but not more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana. Well, then what becomes of your pure “I” and lower “I” in all that? Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an “I” of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something real but ineffable. You may say that there must have been a consciousness aware of some perceiving existence, if not of a pure “I”, but, if so, it was something for which these names seem inadequate. (S 22: 273-74)

*Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.

A radical and overwhelming experience

. . . my first major experience — radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive — came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought — there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete

consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms, but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential and impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names. (S 22: 176)

Emptiness

Is what I feel really yogic emptiness or has my mind misunderstood it? It has lasted for a long time. In other people, I believe, it only lasts for a day or two.

When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness and I could at any time withdraw from the activity into the pure silent peace.

*

You write: "When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness. . . ." In my case, I do not see anything coming in. It remains always the same, or grows. But of course it may be preparing the nature for a higher descent.

I had the sheer emptiness with nothing in it for many months together. It is not emptiness really — for there is no such thing as emptiness — but the pure experience of the Self. Your mind accustomed to all sorts of movements looks at it in a negative way, that is all. (C 35: 260)

First radical result of Sri Aurobindo's own Yoga

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world — only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental

realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above, — no abstraction, — it was positive, the only positive reality, — although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me, — (the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards), — but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion* is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always, with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now, that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and to do my work in it, yet it came — without even a “May I come in” or a “By your leave”. It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self. How then could I accept Mayavada or persuade myself to pit against the Truth imposed on me from above the logic of Shankara? . . . (S 22: 49-50)

*In fact it is not an illusion in the sense of an imposition of something baseless and unreal on the consciousness, but a misinterpretation by the conscious mind and sense and a falsifying misuse of manifested existence.

Experiences of the quietistic sadhana

I believe I have as many hours of hard external work to do as almost anyone in the

Asram and I am not aware that I have any leisure or spend even the very short time I have for concentration in a blissful quietism communing with the silent Brahman. Even my concentration is of the nature of action and it is not an airy quietistic contemplation as your informants seem to imagine.

I may add that I have not spent my life shouting down the quietistic ideal and sadhana without knowing why they followed it. All the experiences that the quietistic sadhana can give, I have had, the realisation of the featureless Parabrahman, Maya, Sunya, the illusoriness of the world, the Akshara Purusha. I know also perfectly well why they turned away from the world and have gone through all the million difficulties which they did not care to face. None of the difficulties of which you enumerate one or two are strange to me — only I did not put the blame of them on anybody or on the Yoga and I overcame them.

Anybody can do the quietistic Yoga, who wants to do it. But if anyone imagines that they [*the quietistic yogas*] are easy and that these difficulties do not occur there or that the sadhakas of these paths are all of them perfected saints free from the human passions and defects which you see here among the sadhakas, he is labouring under a great delusion. No path of Yoga is easy and to imagine that by leaving the world and plunging inside oneself one automatically shuffles off the vital and external nature is an illusion. If I ask you to develop equanimity and egolessness by work done with opening to the Divine, it is because it is so that I did it and it is so that it can best be done and not by retiring into oneself and shutting oneself away from all that can disturb equanimity and excite the ego. As for concentration and perfection of the being and the finding of the inner self, I did as much of it walking in the streets of Calcutta to my work or in dealing with men during my work as alone and in solitude. (C 35: 261-62)

Possibilities of the mental being not limited

To reject doubts means control of one's thoughts — very certainly so. But the control of one's thoughts is as necessary as the control of one's vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one's body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, *manomaya puruṣa, sāksī, anumantā, īśvara*. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body,

at least a certain part of its movements: it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svārājya*.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the enviroing Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. "Sit in meditation," he said, "but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence." I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for of course the later fullest development of this new untrammelled mental Power took time, many years); but a progressive freedom and mastery over one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and will to undertake it. (C 35: 242-44)

“To its heights we can always reach . . .”

Sri Aurobindo has no remarks to make on Huxley’s comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase “to its heights we can always reach” very obviously “we” does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life.* It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience. After three years of spiritual effort with only minor results he was shown by a Yogi the way to silence his mind. This he succeeded in doing entirely in two or three days by following the method shown. There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity but yet was met wherever one turned. This condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost. At the same time an experience intervened; something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara and felt himself moved by that in all his Sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights to which Sri Aurobindo refers and to which he says we can always rise; for they presented to him no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to carry out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconsciousness and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

(C 35: 258-59)

*Ed. Note in CWSA:

In his book The Perennial Philosophy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946, p. 74), Aldous Huxley quoted and commented on the following passage from Sri Aurobindo’s Life Divine,

pp. 13-14: “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness — to its heights we can always reach — when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing,’ says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe.”

Ascent

(1)

The Silence

Into the Silence, into the Silence,
 Arise, O Spirit immortal,
 Away from the turning Wheel, breaking the magical Circle.
 Ascend, single and deathless:
 Care no more for the whispers and the shoutings in the darkness,
 Pass from the sphere of the grey and the little,
 Leaving the cry and the struggle,
 Into the Silence for ever.

Vast and immobile, formless and marvellous,
 Higher than Heaven, wider than the universe,
 In a pure glory of being,
 In a bright stillness of self-seeing,
 Communing with a boundlessness voiceless and intimate,
 Make thy knowledge too high for thought, thy joy too deep for emotion;
 At rest in the unchanging Light, mute with the wordless self-vision,
 Spirit, pass out of thyself; Soul, escape from the clutch of Nature.
 All thou hast seen cast from thee, O Witness.
 Turn to the Alone and the Absolute, turn to the Eternal:
 Be only eternity, peace and silence,
 O world-transcending nameless Oneness,
 Spirit immortal.

(2)

Beyond the Silence

Out from the Silence, out from the Silence,
 Carrying with thee the ineffable Substance,
 Carrying with thee the splendour and wideness,
 Ascend, O Spirit immortal.
 Assigning to Time its endless meaning,
 Blissful enter into the clasp of the Timeless.
 Awake in the living Eternal, taken to the bosom of love of the Infinite,
 Live self-found in his endless completeness,
 Drowned in his joy and his sweetness,
 Thy heart close to the heart of the Godhead for ever.

Vast, God-possessing, embraced by the Wonderful,
 Lifted by the All-Beautiful into his infinite beauty,
 Love shall envelop thee endless and fathomless,
 Joy unimaginable, ecstasy illimitable,
 Knowledge omnipotent, Might omniscient,
 Light without darkness, Truth that is dateless.
 One with the Transcendent, calm, universal,
 Single and free, yet innumerably living,
 All in thyself and thyself in all dwelling,
 Act in the world with thy being beyond it.
 Soul, exceed life's boundaries; Spirit, surpass the universe.
 Outclimbing the summits of Nature,
 Transcending and uplifting the soul of the finite,
 Rise with the world in thy bosom,
 O Word gathered into the heart of the Ineffable.
 One with the Eternal, live in his infinity,
 Drowned in the Absolute, found in the Godhead,
 Swan of the supreme and spaceless ether wandering winged through the universe,
 Spirit immortal.

(C 2: 581-82)

THE EVERLASTING NO

What then is Nirvana?

What then is Nirvana? In orthodox Buddhism it does mean a disintegration, not of the soul — for that does not exist — but of a mental compound or stream of associations or *samskāras* which we mistake for ourself. In illusionist Vedanta it means, not a disintegration but a disappearance of a false and unreal individual self into the one real Self or Brahman; it is the idea and experience of individuality that so disappears and ceases, — we may say a false light that is extinguished (*nirvāna*) in the true Light. In spiritual experience it is sometimes the loss of all sense of individuality in a boundless cosmic consciousness; what was the individual remains only as a centre or a channel for the flow of a cosmic consciousness and a cosmic force and action. Or it may be the experience of the loss of individuality in a transcendent being and consciousness in which the sense of cosmos as well as the individual disappears. Or again, it may be in a transcendence which is aware of and supports the cosmic action. But what do we mean by the individual? What we usually call by that name is a natural ego, a device of Nature which holds together her action in the mind and body. This ego has to be extinguished, otherwise there is no complete liberation possible; but the individual self or soul is not this ego. The individual soul is the spiritual being which is sometimes described as an eternal portion of the Divine, but can also be described as the Divine himself supporting his manifestation as the Many. This is the true spiritual individual which appears in its complete truth when we get rid of the ego and our false separative sense of individuality, realise our oneness with the transcendent and cosmic Divine and with all beings. It is this which makes possible the Divine Life. Nirvana is a step towards it; the disappearance of the false separative individuality is a necessary condition for our realising and living in our true eternal being, living divinely in the Divine. But this we can do in the world and in life. (S 22: 46-47)

About Nirvana

About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work — mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual — logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental

philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya, he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, “Well, but it is there.”

Of course, it is there. But the question is, first, what is it? Is it really an illusionary Power and nothing else, or is the Mayavadin’s idea of it a mistaken first view, a mental imperfect reading, even perhaps itself an illusion? And next, “Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Superconsciousness possesses?” The Absolute is an absolute Truth free from Maya, otherwise liberation would not be possible. Has then the supreme and absolute Truth no other active Power than a power of falsehood and with it, no doubt, for the two go together, a power of dissolving or disowning the falsehood, — which is yet there for ever? I suggested that this sounded a little queer. But queer or not, if it is so, it is so — for, as you point out, the Ineffable cannot be subjected to the laws of logic. But who is to decide whether it is so? You will say, those who get there. But get where? To the Perfect and the Highest, *pūrṇam param*. Is the Mayavadin’s featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete — is it the very Highest? Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *parātparam*? That is not a question of logic, it is a question of spiritual fact, of a supreme and complete experience. The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic, but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience — an experience which must of course include or have passed through that of Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga. . . .

(S 22: 48-49)

Mayavada serves a great spiritual end, but . . .

But I do not insist on everybody passing through my experience or following the Truth that is its consequence. I have no objection to anybody accepting Mayavada as his soul’s truth or his mind’s truth or their way out of the cosmic difficulty. I object to it only if somebody tries to push it down my throat or the world’s throat as the sole possible, satisfying and all-comprehensive explanation of things. For it is not that at all. There are many other possible explanations; it is not at all satisfactory, for in the end it explains nothing; and it is — and must be unless it departs from its own logic — all-exclusive, not in the least all-comprehensive. But that does not matter. A theory may be wrong or at least one-sided and imperfect and yet extremely practical and useful. This has been amply shown by the history of Science. In fact,

a theory whether philosophical or scientific, is nothing else than a support for the mind, a practical device to help it to deal with its object, a staff to uphold it and make it walk more confidently and get along on its difficult journey. The very exclusiveness and one-sidedness of the Mayavada make it a strong staff or a forceful stimulus for a spiritual endeavour which means to be one-sided, radical and exclusive. It supports the effort of the Mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconscience. Or rather it is the Purusha in Mind that wants to get away from the limitations of Mind and Life into the superconscient Infinite. Theoretically, the way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see and treat them as illusions. Practically, when the mind draws back from itself, it enters easily into a relationless peace in which nothing matters, — for in its absoluteness there are no mental or vital values, — and from which the mind can rapidly move towards that great short cut to the superconscient, mindless trance, *susupti*. In proportion to the thoroughness of that movement all the perceptions it had once accepted become unreal to it — illusion, Maya. It is on its road towards immergence.

Mayavada therefore with its sole stress on Nirvana, quite apart from its defects as a mental theory of things, serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far. Even, if the Mind were the last word and there were nothing beyond it except the pure Spirit, I would not be averse to accepting it as the only way out. For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect — even when true, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance. (S 22: 51-52)

The everlasting No

As Science fills our mind with the idea of a universal government of Law in the physical and outward world and in our relations with Nature, though she leaves behind it all a great unanswered query, an agnosticism, a blank of some other ungrasped Infinite, — here covered by the concept of Chance, — the Buddhist conception too fills the spaces of our mental and moral being with the same sense of a government of mental and moral Law: but this too erects behind that Law a great unanswered query, an agnosticism, the blank of an ungrasped Infinite. But here the

covering word is more grandly intangible; it is the mystery of Nirvana. This Infinite is figured in both cases by the more insistent and positive type of mind as an Inconscience, — but material in the one, in the other a spiritual infinite zero, — but by the more prudent or flexible thinkers simply as an unknowable. The difference is that the unknown of Science is something mechanical to which mechanically we return by physical dissolution or *laya*, but the unknown of Buddhism is a Permanent beyond the Law to which we return spiritually by an effort of self-suppression, of self-renunciation and, at the latest end, of self-extinction, by a mental dissolution of the Idea which maintains the law of relations and a moral dissolution of the world-desire which keeps up the stream of successions of the universal action. This is a rare and an austere metaphysics; but to its discouraging grandeur we are by no means compelled to give assent, for it is neither self-evident nor inevitable. It is by no means so certain that a high spiritual negation of what I am is my only possible road to perfection; a high spiritual affirmation and absolute of what I am may be also a feasible way and gate. This nobly glacial or blissfully void idea of a Nirvana, because it is so overwhelmingly a negation, cannot finally satisfy the human spirit, which is drawn persistently to some highest positive and affirmation of itself and only uses negations by the way the better to rid itself of what comes in as an obstacle to its self-finding. To the everlasting No the living being may resign itself by an effort, a sorrowful or a superb turning upon itself and existence, but the everlasting Yes is its native attraction: our spiritual orientation, the magnetism that draws the soul, is to eternal Being and not to eternal Non-Being. (C 13: 335-36)

Negative aspect of Nirvana

The feeling of the Self as a vast peaceful Void, a liberation from existence as we know it, is one that one can always have, Buddhist or no Buddhist. It is the negative aspect of Nirvana — it is quite natural for the mind, if it follows the negative movement of withdrawal, to get that first, and if you lay hold on that and refuse to go farther, being satisfied with this liberated Non-Existence, then you will naturally philosophise like the Buddhists that Shunya is the eternal truth. Lao Tse is more perspicacious when he spoke of it as the Nothing that is All. Many of course have the positive experience of the Atman first, not as a void but as pure unrelated Existence like the Advaitins (Shankara) or as the one Existent. (S 22: 65)

The first silence

In what may be called the first silence, it is like that — silence alone with no emotion or other inner activity. When it deepens one can feel the Nirvana of the Buddhists or

the *ātmabodha* of the Vedantins. Both force and bliss or either can descend into the silence, filling it with calm Tapas or silent Ananda. (S 24: 1193)

A few words of explanation

I realised that I know nothing of Buddhistic teaching except the word Nirvana. Kindly say a few words on what Buddha stood for or taught his disciples.

. . . Buddhist teaching does not recognise any inner self or soul — there is only a stream of consciousness from moment to moment — the consciousness itself is only a bundle of associations — it is kept moving by the wheel of Karma. If the associations are untied and thrown away (they are called *sanskaras*), then it dissolves; the idea of self or a persistent person ceases; the stream flows no longer, the wheel stops. There is left according to some Sunya, a mysterious Nothing from which all comes; according to others a mysterious Permanent in which there is no individual existence. This is Nirvana. Buddha himself always refused to say what there was beyond cosmic existence; he spoke neither of God nor Self nor Brahman. He said there was no utility in discussing that — all that was necessary was to know the causes of this unhappy temporal existence and the way to dissolve it. (N: 979-80)

For most men Nirvana more difficult than all

I may point out that Karmayoga is not a new but a very old yoga; the Gita was not written yesterday and Karmayoga existed before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best use of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in admiring it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the problem of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow, your doubt whether works can lead to realisation or rather your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer — yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is what one has to learn not to do. Thought and feeling can also externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even Bhakti is not easy and Nirvana for most men more difficult than all.

(S 23: 527)

Who gets Nirvana?

The Jivatman descends here — but not geographically. It is a way of saying that it “takes up the consciousness”, “organises the nature”, etc. Who ‘gets’ Nirvana? Or who ‘passes away’ into the Absolute? It is the Jivatman. (E: 770)

The true Nirvana

Our first absorbing impulse when we become inwardly aware of something entirely beyond what we now are and know and are powerfully attracted to it, is to get away from the present actuality and dwell in that higher reality altogether. The extreme form of this attraction when we are drawn to the supreme Existence and the infinite Ananda is the condemnation of the lower and the finite as an illusion and an aspiration to Nirvana in the beyond, — the passion for dissolution, immersion, extinction in the Spirit. But the real dissolution, the true *nirvāṇa* is the release of all that is bindingly characteristic of the lower into the larger being of the Higher, the conscious possession of the living symbol by the living Real. We discover in the end that not only is that higher Reality the cause of all the rest, not only it embraces and exists in all the rest, but as more and more we possess it, all this rest is transformed in our soul-experience into a superior value and becomes the means of a richer expression of the Real, a more many-sided communion with the Infinite, a larger ascent to the Supreme. Finally, we get close to the absolute and its supreme values which are the absolutes of all things. We lose the passion for release, *mumukṣutva*, which till then actuated us, because we are now intimately near to that which is ever free, that which is neither attracted into attachment by what binds us now nor afraid of what to us seems to be bondage. It is only by the loss of the bound soul’s exclusive passion for its freedom that there can come an absolute liberation of our nature. (C 23: 507-08)

Nirvana — a status of absolute bliss of freedom

The Buddha himself, it may be remarked, seems to have conceived of Nirvana as a status of absolute bliss of freedom, a negation of Karmic existence in some incognisable Absolute which he refused steadfastly to describe or define by any positive or any negative, — as indeed definition by any exclusive positive or widest sum of positives or any negative or complete sum of negatives would seem by the very fact of its bringing in a definition and thereby a limitation to be inapplicable to the Absolute. The Illusionist’s Maya is a more mystic thing and more obscure to the intelligence; but we have at least here a Self, a positive Infinite which is capable therefore of an eternal freedom, but only in inaction, by cessation from Karma. For

the self as the individual, the soul in action of Karma is bound always by ignorance, and only by rejection of individuality and of the cosmic illusion can we return to the liberty of the Absolute. What we see in both these systems is that spiritual freedom and the cosmic compulsion are equally admitted, but in a total separation and an exclusion from each other's own proper field, — still as absolute opposites and contraries. Compulsion of ignorance or Karma is absolute in the world of birth; freedom of the spirit is absolute in a withdrawal from birth and cosmos and Karma.

(C 13: 341-42)

Getting tired of Nirvana

Disciple: Souls like Vivekananda come down for a specific work in this world and after doing their work they again ascend to their higher status. Is this true?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. There is a plane of liberation from which beings can come down here and perhaps that is what Ramakrishna meant by saying that there are Nitya Mukta souls — souls who are eternally liberated — who can go up and down the ladder of existence.

Disciple: Can they not evolve further on their own plane?

Sri Aurobindo: No.

Disciple: So there is no evolution on the other planes?

Sri Aurobindo: No. On the other planes there are only types and they cannot evolve. If they want to evolve to a condition higher than theirs they must take birth here on earth, that is to say, take a human body. Even the gods are compelled to take human birth if they want to evolve.

Disciple: Why should the gods want to evolve? They must be feeling quite happy in their own state.

Sri Aurobindo: They may get tired of their happiness, and may want something higher, for example, they may want Nirvana.

Disciple: But then they may get tired of Nirvana! (*Laughter*)

Sri Aurobindo: There is no *one* in Nirvana to get tired! A was asking me the same question: “Who has the experience of Nirvana, if there is no *being* in that state?” The answer is: “Nobody has it. Something in you drops off and Nirvana takes its place.” In fact, there is no “getting” but blotting out of “what one is”. A was probably thinking that he would be sitting with his mental personality somewhere looking at Nirvana and saying: “Ah! This is Nirvana!” The reply is: “So long as *you* are there, no Nirvana can be.” One has to get rid of all attachments and all personalities before Nirvana can come and that is extremely difficult for one attached to his mental personality like A.

Disciple: If Nirvana is such a negative state, what is the difference between one who has it and one who has not?

Another disciple: From the point of view of Nirvana there is no difference!
(*Laughter*)

Sri Aurobindo: Yes. You find the difference because it is you who get blotted out in Nirvana and not anybody else.

(*After a pause*)

This letter* makes at least something precise about Vivekananda's experience because what he speaks of here is the condition of Nirvana accompanied by a sense of illusion of the world.

Disciple: The division of consciousness into two, one feeling fundamentally free and other imperfect or impure is a very common experience.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not only common, it is the ordinary experience, and in order that one may be able to act without ambition one should be able to take action lightly. That is to say, one should not be perturbed if it is done or not done. It is something like the Gita's "inaction in action" and yet one must act, as the Gita says. The test is that even if the work is taken away or destroyed it must make no difference to the condition of your consciousness.

Disciple: Nirvana is a fundamental spiritual experience, is it not?

Sri Aurobindo: Nirvana, as I know it, is a necessary experience in order to get rid of the nature-personality which is subject to ignorance. You cease to be the small individual ego in a vast world. You throw away that and become the One in Nirvana.

Nirvana is a passage — for passing into a condition in which your true individuality can be attained. That individuality is not a small, narrow and limited self contained in the world, but is vast and infinite and can contain the world within itself; you can remain in the world and yet be above it, so to say. To get rid of the separative personality in nature Nirvana is a powerful experience.

Disciple: Does one realise oneself as an individual, that is to say, as the true Jiva after Nirvana?

Sri Aurobindo: One realises oneself as the One in all, and also One as Many and yet that One is also He.

Disciple: That is what you have called "multiple unity".

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Disciple: In our Yoga we accept life as real.

Sri Aurobindo: That is to say, you have to give life a place in the Reality.

Disciple: And we are supposed or expected to do everything for you and the Divine Mother. But in our nature we are full of ego and ignorance. So our surrender is also full of ego.

Sri Aurobindo: But you are supposed to make the surrender without the ego-

*Vivekananda's letter of 18th April 1900.

sense. The law is that you should get rid of attachment and desire in your surrender.

Disciple: But there are people who want to force their attitude and ideas on others?

Sri Aurobindo: These are the people who have the ideas of *our* work, *our* Ashram. That is a form of ego and that must go. (E: 161-63)

The universe only a partial manifestation of Brahman

The universe is only a partial manifestation and Brahman as its foundation is the Sat. But there is also that which is not manifested and beyond manifestation and is not contained in the basis of manifestation. The Buddhists and others got from that the conception of Asat as the ultimate thing.

Another meaning given is — Sat = the Eternal, Asat = the Temporary and Unreal. (S 22: 65)

Not a pessimistic theory of life but a luminous ascent into godhead

Buddha's teaching laid heavy stress on the sorrow and impermanence of things, but the Buddhist Nirvana won by the heroic spirit of moral self-conquest and calm wisdom is a state of ineffable calm and joy, open not only to a few like the Christian heavens, but to all, and very different from the blank cessation which is the mechanical release of our pain and struggle, the sorry Nirvana of the Western pessimist, the materialist's brute flat end of all things. Even illusionism preached, not a gospel of sorrow, but the final unreality of joy and grief and the whole world-existence. It admits the practical validity of life and allows its values to those who dwell in the Ignorance. And like all Indian asceticism it places before man the possibility of a great effort, a luminous concentration of knowledge, a mighty urge of the will by which he can rise to an absolute peace or an absolute bliss. A not ignoble pessimism there has been about man's normal life as it is, a profound sense of its imperfection, a disgust of its futile obscurity, smallness and ignorance; but an unconquerable optimism as regards his spiritual possibility was the other side of this mood. If it did not believe in the ideal of an immense material progress of the race or a perfection of the normal man with earth as its field, it believed in a sure spiritual progress for every individual and an ultimate perfection lifted above subjection to the shocks of life. And this pessimism with regard to life is not the sole note of the Indian religious mind; its most popular forms accept life as a game of God and see beyond our present conditions for every human being the eternal nearness to the Divine. A luminous ascent into godhead was always held to be a consummation well within man's grasp. That can hardly be called a depressing or pessimistic theory of existence.

(C 20: 130-31)

Ordinary mind and Nirvana

You quote the sayings of V or X. I would like to know before assigning a value to these utterances what they actually did for the testing of their spiritual perceptions and experiences. How did V test the value of his spiritual experiences — some of them not easily credible to the ordinary positive mind any more than the miracles attributed to some famous yogis? I know nothing about X, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What are his methods? his criteria? It seems to me that no ordinary mind will accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour's talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them *a priori* or on the sole evidence of V, which comes to the same thing, or to reject them *a priori* as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could “test” them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could — to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experimental consequences until I had sufficient yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others? (S 22: 191-92)

Cosmic consciousness and Nirvana

. . . Now about the cosmic consciousness and Nirvana. Cosmic consciousness is a complex matter. To begin with, there are two sides to it, the experience of the Self free, infinite, silent, inactive, one in all and beyond all, and the direct experience of the cosmic Energy and its forces, workings and formations, this latter experience not being complete till one has the sense of being commensurate with the universe or pervading, exceeding and containing it. Till then there may be direct contacts, communications, interchanges with cosmic forces, beings, movements, but not the full unity of mind with the cosmic Mind, of life with the cosmic Life, of body and physical consciousness with the cosmic material Energy and its substance. Again, there may be a realisation of the Cosmic Self which is not followed by the realisation of the dynamic universal oneness. Or, on the contrary, there may be some dynamic universalising of consciousness without the experience of the free static Self omnipresent everywhere, — the preoccupation with and pleasure of the greater energies that one would thus experience would stop the way to that liberation. Also the identification or universalisation may be more on one plane or level than on another, predominantly mental or predominantly emotional (through universal sympathy or love) or vital of another kind (experience of the universal life forces)

or physical. But in any case, even with the full realisation and experience it should be evident that this cosmic play would be something that one would finally feel as limited, ignorant, imperfect from its very nature. The free soul might regard it untouched and unmoved by its imperfections and vicissitudes, do some appointed work, try to help all or be an instrument of the Divine, but neither the work nor the instrumentation would have anything like the perfection or even the full light, power, bliss of the Divine. This could only be gained by an ascension into higher planes of cosmic existence or their descent into one's consciousness — and, if this were not envisaged or accepted, the push to Nirvana would still remain as a way of escape. The other way would be the ascent after death into these higher planes — the heavens of the religions signify after all nothing but such an urge to a greater, luminous, beatific Divine Existence.

But, one might ask, if the higher planes or if the overmind itself were to manifest their consciousness with all their power, light, freedom and vastness and these things were to descend into an individual consciousness here, would not that make unnecessary both the cosmic negation or the Nirvanic push and the urge towards some Divine Transcendence? But in the result though one might live in a union with the Divine in a luminous wide free consciousness embracing the universe in itself and be a channel of great energies or creations, spiritual or external, yet this world here would remain fundamentally the same — there would be a gulf of difference between the Spirit within and its medium and stuff on which it acted, between the inner consciousness and the world in which it is working. The achievement inner, subjective, individual might be perfect, but the dynamic outcome insufficient, disparate, a mixture, not a perfect harmony of the inner and the outer, a new integral rhythm of existence here that could be called truly divine. Only a consciousness like the supramental, unconditioned and in perfect unity with its source, a Truth-Consciousness empowered to create its own free determinations would be able to establish some perfect harmony and rhythm of the higher hemisphere in this lowest rung of the lower hemisphere. Whether it is to do so or not depends on the significance of the evolutionary existence; it depends on whether that existence is something imperfect in its very nature and doomed to frustration — in which case either a negative way of transcendence by some kind of Nirvana or a positive way of transcendence, perhaps by breaking the shining shield of overmind, *hiraṇmaya pātra*, into what is above it, would be the final end of the soul escaping from this meaningless universe; unless indeed like the Amitabha Buddha one were held by compassion or else the Divine Will within to continue helping and sharing the upward struggle towards the Light of those here still in the darkness of the Ignorance. If, on the contrary, this world is a Lila of spiritual involution and evolution in which one power after another up to the highest is to appear, as Matter, Life and Mind have already appeared out of an apparent indeterminate Inconscience, then another culmination is possible.

The push to Nirvana has two motive forces behind it. One is the sense of the imperfection, sorrow, death, suffering of this world — the original motive force of the Buddha. But for escape from these afflictions Nirvana might not be necessary, if there are higher worlds into which one can ascend where there is no such imperfection, sorrow, death or suffering. But this other possibility of escape is met by the idea that these higher worlds too are transient and part of the Ignorance, that one has to return here always till one overcomes the Ignorance, that the Reality and the cosmic existence are as Truth and Falsehood, opposite, incompatible. This brings in the second motive force, that of the call to transcendence. If the Transcendent is not only supracosmic but an aloof Incommunicable, *avyavahāryam*, which one cannot reach except by a negation of all that is here, then some kind of Nirvana, an absolute Nirvana even is inevitable. If, on the other hand, the Divine is transcendent but not incommunicable, the call will still be there and the soul will leave the chequered cosmic play for the beatitude of the transcendent existence, but an absolute Nirvana would not be indispensable; a beatific union with the Divine offers itself as the way before the seeker. This is the reason why the Cosmic Consciousness is not sufficient and the push away from it is so strong, — it is only if the golden lid of the overmind is overpassed and opened and the dynamic contact with the supermind and a descent of its Light and Power here is intended that it can be otherwise. (S 22: 246-49)

Nirvana in other planes

Once the being or its different parts begin to ascend to the planes above, any part of the being may do it, frontal or other. The Sanskar that one cannot come back must be got rid of. One can have the experience of Nirvana at the summit of the mind or anywhere in those planes that are now superconscient to the mind; the mind spiritualised by the ascent into Self has the sense of *laya*, dissolution of itself, its thoughts, movements, Sanskaras into a superconscient Silence and Infinity which it is unable to grasp, — the Unknowable. But this would bring or lead to some form of Nirvana, only if one makes Nirvana the goal, if one is tied to the mind and accepts its dissolution into the Infinite as one's own dissolution or if one has not the capacity to reorganise experience on a higher than the mental plane. But otherwise what was superconscient becomes conscient, one begins to possess or else be the instrument of the dynamis of the higher planes and there is a movement, not of liberation into Nirvana, but of liberation and transformation. However high one goes, one can always return, unless one has the will not to do so. (S 24: 1139)

Nirvana — not a world but a condition

For the few who go out of the Ignorance and enter into Nirvana, there is no question of their going straight up into higher worlds of manifestation. Nirvana or Moksha is a liberated condition of the being, not a world — it is a withdrawal from the worlds and the manifestation. The analogy of *pitryāna* and *devayāna* can hardly be mentioned in this connection. (S 22: 440)

Nirvana not a world but a withdrawal from world

It is not possible to situate Nirvana as a world or plane, for the Nirvana push is to a withdrawal from world and world-values; it is therefore a state of consciousness or rather of super-consciousness without habitation or level. There is more than one kind of Nirvana (extinction or dissolution) possible. Man being a mental being in a body, *manomaya puruṣa*, makes this attempt at retreat from the cosmos through the spiritualised mind, he cannot do otherwise and it is this that gives it the appearance of an extinction or dissolution, *laya, nirvāṇa*; for extinction of the mind and all that depends on it including the separative ego in something Beyond is the natural way, almost the indispensable way for such a withdrawal. In a more affirmative yoga seeking transcendence but not withdrawal there would not be this indispensability, for there would be the way already alluded to of self-exceeding or transformation of the mental being. But it is possible also to pass to that through a certain experience of Nirvana, an absolute silence of mind and cessation of activities, constructions, representations, which can be so complete that not only to the silent mind but also to the passive senses the whole world is emptied of its solidity and reality and things appear only as unsubstantial forms without any real habitations or else floating in Something that is a nameless infinite: this infinite or else something still beyond is That which alone is real; an absolute calm, peace, liberation would be the resulting state. Action would continue, but no initiation or participation in it by the silent liberated consciousness; a nameless power would do all until there began the descent from above which would transform the consciousness, making its silence and freedom a basis for a luminous knowledge, action, Ananda. But such a passage would be rare; ordinarily a silence of the mind, a liberation of the consciousness, a renunciation of its belief in the final value or truth of the mind's imperfect representations or constructions would be enough for the higher working to be possible. (S 22: 245-46)

The ego and its continuity

The ego and its continuity, they [the Buddhists] say, are an illusion, the result of the continuous flowing of energies and ideas in a determined current. There is no real formation of an ego. As to the liberation, it is in order to get free from *duḥkha* etc., — it is a painful flow of energies and to get free from the pain they must break up their continuity. That is all right, but how it started, why it should end at all and how anybody is benefited by the liberation, since there is nobody there, only a mass of idea and action — these things are insoluble mysteries. But is there not the same difficulty with the Mayavadin also, since there is no Jiva really, only Brahman and Brahman is by nature free and unbound for ever? So how did the whole absurd affair of Maya come into existence and who is liberated? That is what the old sages said at last, “There is none bound, none freed, none seeking to be free”. It was all a mistake (a rather long-standing one though). The Buddhists, I suppose, could say that also. (S 22: 66)

Mental silence

To get rid of the random thoughts of the surface physical mind is not easy. It is sometimes done by a sudden miracle as in my own case, but that is rare. Some get it done by a slow process of concentration, but that may take a very long time. It is easier to have a quiet mind with things that come in passing on the surface, as people pass in the street, and one is free to attend to them or not — that is to say, there develops a sort of double mind, one inner silent and concentrated when it pleases to be so, a quiet witness when it chooses to see thoughts and things, — the other meant for surface dynamism. It is probable in your case that this will come as soon as these descents of peace, intensity or Ananda get strong enough to occupy the whole system. (C 35: 245-46)

This is Swarga, Vaikuntha, Goloka; this is Nirvana

The world lives in and by Ananda. From Ananda, says the Veda, we were born, by Ananda we live, to Ananda we return, and it adds that no man could even have the strength to draw in his breath and throw it out again if there were not this heaven of Bliss embracing our existence as ether embraces our bodies, nourishing us with its eternal substance and strength and supporting the life and the activity. A world which is essentially a world of bliss — this was the ancient Vedantic vision, the *drishti* of the Vedic *drashta*, which differentiates Hinduism in its early virility from the cosmic sorrow of Buddhism and the cosmic disillusionment of Mayavada. But it

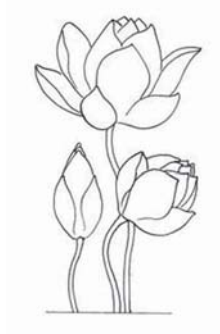
is possible to fall from this Bliss, not to realise it with the lower nature, in the Aparā Prakriti, not to be able to grasp and possess it. Two things are necessary for the fullness of man's bliss, — the fullness of his being and the fullness of his knowledge creating by their union the fullness of his strength in all its manifestations, viryam, balam, bhrajas, tejas, ojas. For Ananda, Sat & Chit make one reality, and Chit is in its outward working pure force to which our Rishis gave the name of Tapas. To attain even here upon earth this fullness of bliss dependent upon fullness of existence, illumination and force, must always be humanity's drift, man's collective endeavour. To attain it within himself here and beyond, iha ca amutra ca, must always be the drift of the human unit, the individual's endeavour. Wherever the knowledge in him thinks it can grasp this bliss, it will fix its heaven. This is Swarga, Vaikuntha, Goloka; this is Nirvana. (C 12: 205-06)

Departure from Oneness and difference

But what really is this Will which as Purusha watches the motion and the drama and as Prakriti is the motion and the drama? It is the One motionless, unconditioned, inexpressible Parabrahman of whom, being beyond mark and feature, the Upanishad speaks always as It, while of Isha, the Lord, it speaks as He; for Isha as Purusha is the male or spiritual presence which generates forms in Prakriti the female or material Energy. The spiritual entity does not work, but merely is and has a result; it is the material Energy, the manifestation of Spirit, which works or ceases from work. Eventually however Spirit and Matter are merely aspects of each other & of something which is behind both; that something is the motionless, actionless It. This which without moving is swifter than thought, is It; this which mind & senses cannot reach, for it moves far in front, is It; this which stands still & yet outstrips others as they run is It. Will, Energy, Isha, the play of Prakriti for Purusha, are all merely the manifestation of that unmanifested It. What we envisage as the manifested Brahman is, in His reality to Himself, the unmanifest Parabrahman. It is only in His reality to us that He is the manifested Brahman. And according as a man comes nearer to the truth of Him or loses himself in Him, so will be his spiritual condition. While we think of Him as Isha, the one in innumerable aspects, the idea of difference remains though it can be subordinated to the idea of Oneness; that is the beginning of Yoga. When we realize Isha as one with Parabrahman, the idea of Oneness has sway & rules; that is the culmination of Yoga. When we realize Parabrahman Itself, that is the cessation of Yoga; for we depart utterly from Oneness & difference and no longer envisage the world of phenomena at all; that is Nirvana. (C 17: 225-26)

A basic extreme realisation

There is another basic realisation, the most extreme of all, that yet comes sometimes as the first decisive opening or an early turn of the Yoga. It is the awakening to an ineffable high transcendent Unknowable above myself and above this world in which I seem to move, a timeless and spaceless condition or entity which is at once, in some way compelling and convincing to an essential consciousness in me, the one thing that is to it overwhelmingly real. This experience is usually accompanied by an equally compelling sense either of the dreamlike or shadowy illusoriness of all things here or else of their temporary, derivative and only half-real character. For a time at least all around me may seem to be a moving of cinematographic shadow forms or surface figures and my own action may appear as a fluid formulation from some Source ungrasped as yet and perhaps unseizable above or outside me. To remain in this consciousness, to carry out this initiation or follow out this first suggestion of the character of things would be to proceed towards the goal of dissolution of self and world in the Unknowable, — Moksha, Nirvana. But this is not the only line of issue; it is possible, on the contrary, for me to wait till through the silence of this timeless unfilled liberation I begin to enter into relations with that yet ungrasped Source of myself and my actions; then the void begins to fill, there emerges out of it or there rushes into it all the manifold Truth of the Divine, all the aspects and manifestations and many levels of a dynamic Infinite. At first this experience imposes on the mind and then on all our being an absolute, a fathomless, almost an abysmal peace and silence. Overpowered and subjugated, stilled, liberated from itself, the mind accepts the Silence itself as the Supreme. But afterwards the seeker discovers that all is there for him contained or new-made in that silence or through it descends upon him from a greater concealed transcendent Existence. For this Transcendent, this Absolute is not a mere peace of signless emptiness; it has its own infinite contents and riches of which ours are debased and diminished values. If there were not that Source of all things, there could be no universe; all powers, all works and activities would be an illusion, all creation and manifestation would be impossible. (C 23: 117-18)



A GREAT AND POWERFUL DISCIPLINE

Steps of the philosophical intellect

The nature of the philosophical intellect is to move among ideas and to give them a sort of abstract reality of their own apart from all their concrete representations which affect our life and personal consciousness. Its bent is to reduce these representations to their barest and most general terms and to subtilise even these if possible into some final abstraction. The pure intellectual direction travels away from life. In judging things it tries to get back from their effects on our personality and to arrive at whatever general and impersonal truth may be behind them; it is inclined to treat that kind of truth as the only real truth of being or at least as the one superior and permanent power of reality. Therefore it is bound by its own nature to end in its extremes at an absolute impersonality and an absolute abstraction. This is where the ancient philosophies ended. They reduced everything to three abstractions, existence, consciousness and bliss of being, and they tended to get rid of the two of these three which seemed dependent on the first and most abstract, and to throw all back into a pure featureless existence from which everything else had been discharged, all representations, all values, except the one infinite and timeless fact of being. But the intellect had still one farther possible step to take and it took it in Buddhistic philosophy. It found that even this final fact of existence was only a representation; it abstracted that also and got to an infinite zero which might be either a void or an eternal inexpressible.

The heart and life, as we know, have an exactly opposite law. They cannot live with abstractions; they can find their satisfaction only in things that are concrete or can be made seizable; whether physically, mentally or spiritually, their object is not something which they seek to discriminate and arrive at by intellectual abstraction; a living becoming of it or a conscious possession and joy of their object is what they seek. Nor is it the satisfaction of an abstract mind or impersonal existence to which they respond, but the joy and the activity of a being, a conscious Person in us, whether finite or infinite, to whom the delights and powers of his existence are a reality. Therefore when the heart and life turn towards the Highest and the Infinite, they arrive not at an abstract existence or non-existence, a Sat or else a Nirvana, but at an existent, a Sat Purusha, not merely at a consciousness, but at a conscious Being, a Chaitanya Purusha, not merely at a purely impersonal delight of the Is, but at an infinite I Am of bliss, an Anandamaya Purusha; nor can they immerse and lose his consciousness and bliss in featureless existence, but must insist on all three in one, for delight of existence is their highest power and without consciousness

delight cannot be possessed. That is the sense of the supreme figure of the intensest Indian religion of love, Sri Krishna, the All-blissful and All-beautiful.

The intelligence can also follow this trend, but it ceases then to be the pure intellect; it calls in its power of imagination to its aid, it becomes the image-maker, the creator of symbols and values, a spiritual artist and poet. Therefore the severest intellectual philosophy admits the Saguna, the divine Person, only as the supreme cosmic symbol; go beyond it to reality and you will arrive, it says, at last to the Nirguna, the pure Impersonal. The rival philosophy asserts the superiority of the Saguna; that which is impersonal is, it will perhaps say, only the material, the stuff of his spiritual nature out of which he manifests the powers of his being, consciousness and bliss, all that expresses him; the impersonal is the apparent negative out of which he looses the temporal variations of his eternal positive of personality. There are evidently here two instincts, or, if we hesitate to apply that word to the intellect, two innate powers of our being which are dealing each in its own manner with the same Reality. (C 24: 578-80)

The last refuge of reason

But our evolution is only the progressive unfolding of our nature and faculties, & in the list of those faculties reason does not hold the highest place; it is not even a separate and independent power, but a link, servant and intermediary. Its business, when it is allowed to rule, is to train the lower man so as to make him a fit vessel for an activity higher than its own. The animal is content to follow his impulses under the flashlight of instinct. If ever, as is likely, there was a time when man also was a supreme animal, he must have been guided by an instinct different, perhaps, in its special kind but as trustworthy as animal instinct & of the same essential nature. It was, then, the development in us of that reason which we see ill developed in the animal which deprived man of his sure animal instinct & compelled him to seek for a higher guide. Everything goes to show that he must have sought it at first in the lower intuition & revelation which works in the heart, the aesthetic impulses, the senses. Again, it is the insistent development of reason that has served to make him dissatisfied with these powerful, but still inferior guides. But not until reason, without lapsing back to the lower movements, yet becomes permanently dissatisfied with its own limitations, can it fulfil its work of preparation. For there is a faculty in us superior to the rational, there is that direct seeing & touch of things which shows itself in the higher revelation & intuition & works obscurely, like a fire enveloped in smoke, in the phenomena of intellectual genius & unusual personality. Beyond direct seeing there is a faculty of direct being, if I may so express it, which, if we can entirely reach & hold to it, makes us one with God, brahmabhūta, can reveal in this material life the perfection of Brahman as it is intended to be manifested in humanity,

so that man on the human level, in the human cadre, becomes perfect as God is perfect. The intellect itself cannot reach these heights. It can only discipline, chasten & prepare the lower members to receive & hold without harm or disintegration that higher force which has alone the power to raise us to the summits. In the intellectual ages of mankind, reason forgets these limitations; it tries to do a double work, to judge correctly all the knowledge which presents itself to the sensorium & its instruments and also to know things directly & in their essence. The former is its legitimate work & deserves the name of Science; the latter is an illegitimate attempt to go beyond its sphere and conceals an error under the name of Metaphysics. The intellect can know & judge phenomena; by its labour in examining them it arrives, in spite of much presumption & error, at a considerable number of phenomenal certainties; but it cannot know & judge the essence of things; by attempting to examine that field, whether unaided or as the principal inquirer, it only arrives, if it is honest with itself, at this one truth, that it can be certain of nothing; — all the rest is appearance, asseveration or opinion. We can know things as they seem to be in the order of the physical Nature in which they live; by the reason we cannot be sure what anything is, in itself, in that order of realities of which physical Nature is only the external seeming. Therefore the last refuge of reason, when it becomes conscious of its blunder, is to deny that such an order of realities exists at all, & to confine itself to the knowledge of material & phenomenal certainties. But such a restriction of knowledge brings with it a lowering, narrowing & petrifying of our humanity, because contrary to the whole nature and ineradicable tendency of our kind & sure therefore to falsify & slow down the springs of our action & being. Therefore Nature, mightier & wiser than the Scientist, compels man to revolt against the cold & debasing tyranny of a negative scepticism. She compels him back to the way to his internal skies & compels him to recover, in whatever new terms, the promise of his Scriptures & his Gospels. She makes him listen again for some indirect echo, if not for the actual resonance of the eternal, immutable chant, the ever-rhythmic unwritten Veda.

(C 17: 561-63)

Uprooting suffering

Sri Aurobindo: The Indian ascetic idea of torturing the body is not exactly the same as the Christian idea of suffering. They don't want self-purification through suffering. They have the idea of self-mastery, that the body shall do what the spirit wants it do. That is the idea behind asceticism. Self-mastery has been the trend of Indian thought all along its spiritual development. Even Buddha, when he started, had the idea of uprooting suffering and evil from the world. Only, he said that you can't achieve it here in this world unless you go into Nirvana. The Indian ascetic self-torture was done in the violent Asuric way and by self-will trying to master the

body by throwing great vital force upon it. There was also a certain contempt for the body and for the limitations which the physical being imposed upon the spirit. It was a violent revolt against that bondage.

Disciple: The Christian idea is “Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Perhaps they are rewarded in heaven in proportion to their suffering.

Sri Aurobindo: It is not so mathematical as that. It only means: when you suffer more, more grace is upon you. It is an opportunity that God sends you to liberate yourself. According to them salvation is in the cross — it is, in fact, a symbol of salvation. (E: 428-29)

The inhabitant and the habitation

This human being though he lays hold on intellect as a guide and aspires to ideality and spirit, does not live centred in those superior movements of consciousness; brain leads his thought when it can, but he lives in the heart & lives in it, too, besieged by the nerves and body. His mentality is, therefore, emotional, sensational and temperamental, not intellectual or ideal, and the practical aspect of his own problem is not limitation or infinity, but the pressure of pain, grief, sorrow and suffering and the possibility of escape from these his ruthless and omnipresent persecutors. He could even be content for a while with death and limitation if, free from this admixture of pain & suffering, his short span of life & circumscribed sphere of action could be assured of that limited happiness which the race at large is vainly pursuing. It was the agony of this problem that seized on Buddha and drove him from his kingly home & rich domestic joys to wander through the world as a beggar and ascetic; to escape from the insistent pain, grief and suffering of the world the Lord of Pity discovered for man the eightfold path, the law of compassion & self-sacrifice, the heavenly door of renunciation and the silent and blindly luminous haven of Nirvana. The Seer of the Upanishad sets before himself the same problem but arrives at a very different solution; for he proceeds not from pity, but from a clear strength and a steady knowledge, perceiving the problem but not overpowered by it, *samáhita*, *dhíra*. Dwelling in a world of grief, pain, death and limitation, *anityam asukham imam lokam prápya*, yet irresistibly impelled by Nature to aspire after joy, immortality and freedom, bound not to renounce that apparently impossible ideal on peril of forfeiting our highest, most consoling and most exalting impulses, how are we to reconcile this ineffugable contradiction or to escape from this unending struggle? This is the problem which the Seer solves in three brief words, *tena tyaktena bhunjítháh*, again a monumental phrase whose echoes travel the whole of existence. It is because it provides the true practical basis for the solution he is going to suggest that he has preferred to announce at the outset the immediate and active relation of our twofold existence, God inhabiting Nature, rather than the remoter essential

relation, God and Nature one Brahman. For the first practical step towards freedom must always be to distinguish between the Inhabitant and the habitation and withdraw from the motion towards the Lord of the motion. It is in the motion that these shadows of limitation, grief and death appear; the Inhabitant is free, blissful and immortal. To escape, then, we must turn from the world to the Master of the world; in ordinary religious parlance, we must renounce the world in order to find and possess God. So also the Gita, after describing our condition, arrived in this transient and troubled world, *anityam asukham imam lokam prápya*, immediately points out the remedy, *bhajaswa Mám*. Turn & cleave rather to me, the Lord. But the world was made by its Lord for divine habitation & possession; the object of the renunciation, therefore, cannot be to turn away utterly from the world after abandoning it in itself & in the lower consciousness, but to conquer and repossess it through the divine Krishna and in the supreme & all-blissful conscious being of the Lord. *Nivasishyasi mayyeva*. Thou shalt dwell in Me utterly, in My illimitable being & not in a limited & mortal experience of the world. (C 17: 448-50)

Mighty labour of a vast Life-Spirit

There must be some inspiration for the terrestrial endeavour of man, an object, a stimulus, a force for development and a will to live. Whether or not our end is silence and Nirvana, a spiritual cessation or a material death, this is certain that the world itself is a mighty labour of a vast Life-Spirit and man the present doubtful crown on earth and the struggling but still unsuccessful present hero and protagonist of its endeavour or its drama. (C 20: 151)

A great and powerful discipline

The infinite can only be reached after we have grown in the finite, the eternal grasped only by man growing in time, the spiritual perfected only by man accomplished first in body, life and mind. If that necessity has been ignored, then one may fairly contend that there has been a gross, impracticable and inexcusable error in the governing idea of Indian culture. But as a matter of fact there has been no such error. We have seen what were the aim and idea and method of Indian culture and it will be perfectly clear that the value of life and its training were amply recognised in its system and given their proper place. Even the most extreme philosophies and religions, Buddhism and Illusionism, which held life to be an impermanence or ignorance that must be transcended and cast away, yet did not lose sight of the truth that man must develop himself under the conditions of this present ignorance or impermanence before he can attain to knowledge and to that

Permanent which is the denial of temporal being. Buddhism was not solely a cloudy sublimation of Nirvana, nothingness, extinction and the tyrannous futility of Karma; it gave us a great and powerful discipline for the life of man on earth. The enormous positive effects it had on society and ethics and the creative impulse it imparted to art and thought and in a less degree to literature, are a sufficient proof of the strong vitality of its method. If this positive turn was present in the most extreme philosophy of denial, it was still more largely present in the totality of Indian culture.

(C 20: 238-39)

Beyond the lures of the earth and the lures of heaven

It was necessary at one time to insist even exclusively on the idea of individual salvation so that the sense of a Beyond might be driven into man's mentality, as it was necessary at one time to insist on a heaven of joys for the virtuous and pious so that man might be drawn by that shining bait towards the practice of religion and the suppression of his unbridled animality. But as the lures of earth have to be conquered, so also have the lures of heaven. The lure of a pleasant Paradise of the rewards of virtue has been rejected by man; the Upanishads belittled it ages ago in India and it is now no longer dominant in the mind of the people; the similar lure in popular Christianity and popular Islam has no meaning for the conscience of modern humanity. The lure of a release from birth and death and withdrawal from the cosmic labour must also be rejected, as it was rejected by Mahayanist Buddhism which held compassion and helpfulness to be greater than Nirvana. As the virtues we practise must be done without demand of earthly or heavenly reward, so the salvation we seek must be purely internal and impersonal; it must be the release from egoism, the union with the Divine, the realisation of our universality as well as our transcendence, and no salvation should be valued which takes us away from the love of God in his manifestation and the help we can give to the world. If need be, it must be taught for a time, "Better this hell with our other suffering selves than a solitary salvation." (C 18: 96-97)

Verbal logic vs actual experience

The method of Darshana, the way of Shankara and Buddha, although it works round and upon certain grand psychological experiences, Maya, Nirvana, is essentially speculative and logical, not intuitive and experiential.

How came this method to be substituted for the old Vedic tradition and what is its real validity? The question has a great practical importance; for every Indian

thinker* who approaches these questions feels himself naturally impelled to be metaphysical in his method or his atmosphere and follow, with whatever modern variations, the path of Shankara, Buddha and the Sankhyas. The way of knowledge has become in India the way of metaphysical disquisition. Are we really bound to continue this tradition or is the more ancient method also the right method, to which humanity must eventually return; and, if so, what have we gained or lost by this more than millennial substitution of speculation for revelation and verbal logic for actual experience? (C 17: 558-59)

The Illusionist position

The position taken up by the Illusionists must first be firmly stated; for often there is a great nebulosity in the minds both of its supporters and antagonists which leaves room for much confused thinking and the real issue, the vital point gets obscured. We must first give this admission to the defence for whatever it is worth, that Illusionism does not affirm the absolute non-existence of the universe but only that it is an existence which is in its beginning and its end a non-existence and in its middle it is an existence which amounts to non-existence. It is real while it lasts to the mind that creates it; but it is not really real, — it is only phenomenally existent, like a dream, like a hallucination, like the imaginations of a person in delirium. Three questions arise from this proposition. Is this hallucinatory creation of the universe a truth or is the theory itself a hallucination of the logical mind or of the experiencing consciousness? Secondly, if true, how does the illusion come about and how is it possible? Thirdly, who is the victim of the hallucination?

The whole theory arises from and turns on one original proposition of which it is the logical consequence. It is this that Brahman the one real, original and eternal existence is, firstly, self-existent, secondly, featureless and relationless, thirdly, unmodifiable, immutable, incapable therefore of developing feature and relation, fourthly, solely existent, for there is and can be nothing else but that in existence. None of these original positions about the Brahman imposes itself irrefutably upon the intellect; there are philosophies which deny them one and all and with quite as good a show of logic as any the logical apparatus of the Mayavada can furnish us. In fact, what we first see as the one experience of our consciousness is not this at all, but just the opposite. We see that every thing reduces itself not to an existence at all, but to a continuity of the action of Force, Karma as the Buddhists call it. We see that this action of Force exists only by an infinite flux of feature and relation, the stream of the Buddhist figure. Apart from that it is nothing, it is the Buddhist sunya or

*The only exception, to my knowledge, is Swami Vivekananda and even he has not entirely escaped the necessity of his environment.

Nihil, and the reduction of the universe to its original starting point, the escape out of it is not a return to the self-existent, but a return to Nihil, a Nirvana or extinction. Far, then, from being immutable and incapable of modification, it is in its very nature a constant modification and mutation. Eliminate the stream of becoming and the result is not Being, but a zero. This is the difficulty which the Mayavada has to surmount, the logic which it has to refute. (C 12: 210)

Self-imposed bondage

Buddhism and Illusionism too do not assert any external or internal predestination, but only a self-imposed bondage. And very insistently they demand of man a choice between the right and the wrong way, between the will to an impermanent existence and the will to Nirvana, between a will to cosmic existence and the will to an absolute spiritual being. Nor do they demand this choice of the Absolute or of the universal Being or Power, who indeed cares nothing for their claim and goes on very tranquilly and securely with his mighty eternal action, but they ask it of the individual, of the soul of man halting perplexed between the oppositions of his mentality. It would seem then that there is something in our individual being which has some real freedom of will, some power of choice of a great consequence and magnitude, and what is it then that thus chooses, and what are the limits, where the beginning or the end of its actual or its possible liberty? (C 13: 342)

Getting out of the tangle

The ordinary idea of Karma follows this latter unsound method. The world we see is to our notions, if not immoral, yet non-moral and contradictory to our idea of what it should be. Therefore we go behind it, discover that this earth life is not all, erect anew there our moral rule and rejoice to find that after all the universe does obey our human conceptions and therefore all is well. The mysterious conflict, the Manichean struggle, the inextricable tangle here of good and evil is not cured or accounted for, but we say that at least the good and the evil are justly dealt with according to their kind, this duly rewarded and that duly punished in other worlds or other births, there is therefore a dominant moral law and we may cherish a faith that the good will prevail, Ahuramazda conquer and not Ahriman, and on the whole all is as it should be. Or if not, if the tangle is inextricable, if this world is evil or existence itself an enormous mistake — as it must be, man is inclined to think, if it does not suit his desires and conceptions, — then at least I individually by satisfying the moral law may get out of the tangle away to the pleasures of a better world or to the bodiless and mindless peace of Nirvana. (C 13: 386-87)

Shankara and Buddha

Shankara, one of the mightiest of metaphysical intellects, a far greater intellect than the Buddha, though a less mighty soul, built up by his intuitions and reasonings a third position which reconciles Vedic Brahmovada and the Karmavada of Buddhistic rationalism & Rationalistic materialism. Shankara asserts the real existence of the Atman, self or soul which alone exists and is indeed the essential substratum & continent of this phenomenal universe. But he admits with Buddha the absolute rule of Karma, of the law of works, the law of cause & effect over the conscious soul immersed in the phenomenal universe. Is then the soul eternally coerced by its own phenomena, eternally bound to the revolving wheel of its own phenomenal manifestations? No, for freedom is the ultimate spiritual experience. Where then is the point of escape, the door, the egress? The point of escape is for Shankara, as for Buddha, in an ultimate act of knowledge which denies the real existence of the phenomenal world. He erects a rigid antagonism between essential truth and practical truth, paramartha & vyavahara, the one alone we must admit to be true truth, the other we must reject as only apparent truth. This world is a world of action, of karma, & in a world of action the governing practical truth is the law of karma which drives the soul through the endless chain of birth & death & rebirth, whirling for ever betwixt heaven & earth & hell, tossed from good to evil & evil to good, pain to joy & joy to pain, like a tennis ball kept continually at play between two equally skilful players. But all action depends upon and is only rendered possible by relation, and all relation depends upon and is only rendered possible by self-division, by bheda, by dwaita, by the false conception in the soul of itself as not one, but many, by Avidya therefore, by Maya, a great original sin of Ignorance, a mighty cosmic self-deception. Where there are many, relation and action are possible; where there is one, there can be no relation and therefore no action. Atman or Soul is one, therefore relationless and actionless, shantam avyavaharyam, therefore free from karma, from rebirth, from Maya. The rest is a phenomenon of creation produced by the play of active consciousness, jagati, & cast by it like a shadow or reflected image on the surface of the still, actionless & relationless soul. This play, this jagati is Maya which is and is not, — is in itself, for its works are there, but is not, for those works are unrealities; they are a mass of self-deceptions starting from an original self-deception rooted in the principle of mind. What the mind sees is a reality, it is Atman, Brahman, but the ideas, the terms in which mind sees it are falsehoods.* All practice therefore, however true for practical purposes in world, is really the plausible & well-arranged play of

*The explanations given by modern Adwaitins of Shankara's views, their interpretations in modern thought of his philosophical formulae, are so various & mutually contradictory, that it is becoming as difficult to know the real truth of his views as to know the real & original teaching of Buddha. I give what seems to me to be his teaching & at any rate it is the only logical basis for Mayavada.

a falsehood; & practical truth & action are only so far useful that out of them, properly handled, emerges the impulse which leads to cessation from action & the knowledge which denies practical existence. In that cessation, in that denial is man's only escape from his false mental self into the calm essential reality, objectless bliss & relationless self-knowledge of the Atman. We see then that Shankara has practically transmuted or replaced Buddha's vague & undefined Nirvana by this actionless & peaceful Atman, the shanta akriya Sacchidananda, substituted for Buddha's false world of subjective sensations a false world of erroneous ideas starting from the original self-deception of duality, and accepting Buddha's law of karma as applicable only to this false world and Buddha's means of escape by an ultimate act of knowledge, substituted knowledge of real self for Buddha's knowledge of non-self as the essence of that act & the true culmination of inner experience & meditative reason. Shankara like Buddha refuses to explain or discuss how active consciousness came at all to exist on the surface of a sole Self-existence which is in its very being shanta and inactive; he drives, like Buddha, straight at the actual fact of our bondage, the practical cause of bondage and the most direct path of escape from the bondage. These he states for us as he holds them to be established by Scripture, experience & reason & then, the fact once thus triply established, our business is not to account for its existence, which, moreover, must in the nature of things be inexplicable to the mind, since Maya is an original mystery & therefore incapable of solution, but to grasp at the one means of escape, of release, of the great & final liberation. The intellectual difference between the two systems is immense, their temperamental kinship is close. Yet we have this curious result, due to Buddha's stress on the means of self-denial provided by life & its ethical & altruistic possibilities as a preliminary training, that Shankara's system, less intellectually Nihilistic than Buddha's, has been practically more fatal to the activities of the divine power & joy in life in the nation which has so largely accepted his teachings. By denying God in life, by withdrawing the best souls from life, by discouraging through their thought & example, — the thought & example of the best, yad yad acharati sreshthah, — the sraddha of life, the full confident self-acting of Matariswan even in those who have practically accepted & cling to the burden of worldly existence, he has enlarged the original Vedantic seed of ascetic tendency into a gigantic growth of stillness & world-disgust which has overshadowed for centuries the lives & souls of hundreds of millions of human beings. On one side the race & the world have gained immensely, on the other it has suffered an immense impoverishment. The world-fleeing saint & the hermit have multiplied, the world-helping saint & the divine warrior of life come rarely & fail for want of the right atmosphere & environment. The Avatars of moral purity & devotional love abound, the Avatars of life, Krishna & Balarama, manifest themselves no more. Gone are Janaka & Ajatashatru, Arjuna & Vyasa, the great scientists, the great lawgivers. The cry of OM Tapas with which God creates has grown faint in the soul of India, the cry of OM Shanti with which

He withdraws from life alone arouses & directs the best energies of a national consciousness to whose thought all life is sorrow, self-delusion & an undivine blunder. Chilled is that marvellous & mighty vigour which flowed out from the Veda & Upanishads on the Indian consciousness & produced the grand & colossal forms of life eternally portrayed for us in the fragments of our ancient art & history & in the ideal descriptions of the Epics. (C 17: 497-500)

Nirvana of the Buddha and Brahma Nirvana of the Gita

It [Nirvana of Buddha] is the same [as Brahma Nirvana of the Gita]. Only the Gita describes it as Nirvana in the Brahman while Buddha preferred not to give any name or say anything about that into which the Nirvana took place. Some later schools of Buddhists described it as Shunya, the equivalent of the Chinese Tao, described as the Nothing which is everything. (S 22: 62)

Brahma-Nirvana

Of course, X's view about the canalisation of Niagara is my standpoint also. But for the human mind it is difficult to get across the border between mind and spirit without making a forceful rush or push along one line only and that must be some line of pure experience in which, especially if it is the bhakti way, one gets easily swallowed up in the rapids (did not Chaitanya at last disappear in the waters?) and goes no farther. The first thing is to break into the spiritual consciousness, any part of it, anyhow and anywhere, afterwards one can explore the country, to which exploration there can hardly be a limit; one is always going higher and higher, getting wider and wider, but there is a certain intense ecstasy about the first complete plunge which is extraordinarily seizing. It is not only the Bhakta's rapture, but the Jnani's plunge into the Brahma-Nirvana or Brahmananda or release into the still eternity of the Self that is of that seizing and absorbing character — it does not look at first as if one could or would care or need to get beyond into anything else. One cannot find fault with the Sannyasi lost in his *laya* or the Bhakta lost in his ecstasy; they remain there probably because they are constituted for that and it is the limit of their leap. But, all the same, it has always appeared to me that it is a stage and not the end; I subscribe fully to the canalisation of the Niagara. (S 22: 427)

Two consciousnesses

The silence descends into the inner being first — as also other things from the higher consciousness. One can become aware of this inner being calm, silent, untouched by the movements of Nature, full of knowledge or light, and at the same time be aware of another lesser being, the small personality on the surface which is made up of the movements of Nature or else still subject to them or else, if not subject to them, still open to invasion by them. This is a condition that any number of sadhaks and yogis have experienced. The inner being means the psychic, the inner mind, the inner vital, the inner physical. In this condition none of these can be even touched, so there has been an essential purification. All need not feel this division into two consciousnesses, but most do. When it is there, the will that decides the action is in the inner being, not in the outer — so the invasion of the outer by vital movements can in no way compel the action. It is on the contrary a very favourable stage in the transformation because the inner being can bring the whole force of the higher consciousness in it to change the nature wholly, observing the action of Nature without being affected by it, putting the force for change wherever needed and setting the whole being right as one does with a machine. That is if one wants a transformation. For many Vedantins don't think it necessary — they say the inner being is *mukta*, the rest is simply a mechanical continuation of the impetus of Nature in the physical man and will drop away with the body so that one can depart into Nirvana. (S 23: 1008)

All the dreamers

The Mayavadin talks of my Personal God as a dream and prefers to dream of Impersonal Being; the Buddhist puts that aside too as a fiction and prefers to dream of Nirvana and the bliss of nothingness. Thus all the dreamers are busy reviling each other's visions and parading their own as the panacea. What the soul utterly rejoices in, is for thought the ultimate reality. (C 12: 483-84)

Partial truths

The most powerful support and argument of purely ascetic philosophies is the Buddhistic idea, foreign to Vedic Hinduism, that true freedom and true bliss are impossible in the universe and can only become possible if we escape out of it into some world-shunning secrecy of being, whether Nihil or Nirvana. The soul handling objects, it is thought, must be attracted to them; or else the freedom from attraction is so difficult and so rare that it is presumptuous to reckon on it as a practical

possibility; in Samadhi the spirit is blissful & free, awaking from Samadhi it is bound to feel or be always susceptible to touches of limitation and of grief; the duality of pain & grief is an irrevocable law of the universe and where there is bliss in the world, there must also be as its companion grief in the world, for unmixed bliss is only possible where mind and its laws are excluded. These are the fundamental ideas of Asceticism and if they were true with this scope and this force, the very foundations of the thought in the Isha Upanishad would be vitiated and annulled; but, although generally held and insisted on by numbers of great saints and lofty thinkers, they are an instance of partial truths, perfectly valid, even perfectly general in their own province, carried in practice beyond their province and so by a false extension becoming, like all exaggerated truths, the foundation of error. They are perfectly true in the field where they apply but they apply only in the limits of mind & so long as the soul is subjected in the world to mind and its processes. (C 17: 459)

The two Hinduisms

If the theory of the Illusionist is true, life is an inexplicable breach of Truth, an unjustifiable disturbance in the silence & stillness of the Eternal. It is a freak to be corrected, a snare to be escaped from, a delusion to be renounced, a mighty cosmic whim & blunder. The results upon the nation which produced this tremendous negation, have been prodigious. India has become the land of saints & ascetics, but progressively also of a decaying society and an inert, effete & helpless people. The indignant denunciation of the Vishnu Purana against the certain results to society of the Buddhist heresy has been fulfilled in the fate of our strongly Buddhicised Hindu nation. We see increasing upon it through the centuries the doom announced in the grave warnings of the Gita against the consequences of inaction, “utsideyur ime lokah . . sarirayatrapi akarmanah . . sankarasya cha karta syam upahanyam imah prajah . . buddhibhedam janayed ajnanam karmasanganam” etc. The religious life of this country has divided itself into two distinct & powerful tendencies, the Hinduism of the withdrawal from life which has organised itself in the monastery & the hermitage and the Hinduism of social life which has resolved itself into a mass of minute ceremony & unintelligent social practice. Neither is pure; both are afflicted with sankara, mixture & confusion of dharmas; for the life of the monastery is stricken with the tendency towards a return to the cares & corruptions of life, the life of society sicklied over & rendered impotent by the sense of its own illusion & worthlessness faced with the superiority of the monastic ideal. If a man or a nation becomes profoundly convinced that this phenomenal life is an illusion, its aims & tendencies of a moment & its values all false values, you cannot expect either the man or the nation to flourish here, whatever may be gained in Nirvana. For the nation any sustained & serious greatness of aim & endeavour becomes impossible. (C 17: 372-73)

Transcendence

Transcendence is the goal of the development, but it does not exclude the possession of that which is transcended. The soul need not and should not push transcendence so far as to aim at its own extinction. Nirvana is extinction of the ego-limitations, but not of all possibility of manifestation, since it can be possessed even in the body.

The desire of the exclusive liberation is the last desire that the soul in its expanding knowledge has to abandon; the delusion that it is bound by birth is the last delusion that it has to destroy. (C 17: 67-68)

Mayavadic Vedantins

But they [the Mayavadic Vedantins] had no clear perception of these things [overmind, supermind, etc.] because they lived at the highest in the spiritualised higher mind, and for the rest could only receive things from even the overmind — they could not enter it except by deep samadhi (*susupti*). Prajna and Ishwara were for them Lord of the *susupti*. (S 22: 58-59)

The exclusive trenchancy of Buddhism

The Buddhist ideal of Nirvana was no more than a sharply negative and exclusive statement of the highest Vedantic spiritual experience. The ethical system of the eightfold path taken as the way to release was an austere sublimation of the Vedic notion of the Right, Truth and Law followed as the way to immortality, *ṛtasya panthāḥ*. The strongest note of Mahayana Buddhism, its stress on universal compassion and fellow-feeling, was an ethical application of the spiritual unity which is the essential idea of Vedanta. The most characteristic tenets of the new discipline, Nirvana and Karma, could have been supported from the utterances of the Brahmanas and Upanishads. Buddhism could easily have claimed for itself a Vedic origin and the claim would have been no less valid than the Vedic ascription of the Sankhya philosophy and discipline with which it had some points of intimate alliance. But what hurt Buddhism and determined in the end its rejection, was not its denial of a Vedic origin or authority, but the exclusive trenchancy of its intellectual, ethical and spiritual positions. A result of an intense stress of the union of logical reason with the spiritualised mind — for it was by an intense spiritual search supported on a clear and hard rational thinking that it was born as a separate religion, — its trenchant affirmations and still more exclusive negations could not be made sufficiently compatible with the native flexibility, many-sided susceptibility and rich

synthetic turn of the Indian religious consciousness; it was a high creed but not plastic enough to hold the heart of the people. Indian religion absorbed all that it could of Buddhism, but rejected its exclusive positions and preserved the full line of its own continuity, casting back to the ancient Vedanta. (C 20: 207-08)

Buddhistic Nirvana and Adwaita Nirvana

They [those who have the experience of Nirvana] do not feel as if they had any existence at all. In the Buddhistic Nirvana they feel as if there were no such thing at all, only an infinite zero without form. In the Adwaita Nirvana there is felt only one Vast Existence, no separate being is discernible anywhere. There are forms of course but they are only forms, not separate beings. Mind is silent, thought has ceased, — desires, passions, vital movements there are none. There is consciousness but only a formless elemental consciousness without limits. The body moves and acts, but the sense of the body is not there. Sometimes there is only the consciousness of pure existence, sometimes only pure consciousness, sometimes all that exists is only a ceaseless limitless Ananda. Whether all else is really dissolved or only covered up is a debatable point, but at any rate it is an experience as if of their dissolution. (S 22: 65-66)

Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin's Moksha are the same

The Buddhist Nirvana and the Adwaitin's Moksha are the same thing. It corresponds to a realisation in which one does not feel oneself any longer as an individual with such a name or such a form, but an infinite eternal Self spaceless (even when in space), timeless (even when in time). Note that one can perfectly well do actions in that condition and it is not to be gained only by Samadhi. (S 22: 62)

Mahayanist affair

There is no difference between such a description* and what is meant by soul, except that it is called “impersonal”— but evidently here impersonal is used as opposed to

*“An impersonal principle, this microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic persists throughout all existences, or states of conditioned being within the Sangsara. . . . But the impersonal consciousness principle is not to be in any way identified with the personality represented by a name, or bodily form or a Sangsaric mind . . . it is itself non-Sangsaric, being uncreated, unborn, unshaped, beyond human concept or definition, and therefore transcending time and space . . . it is beginningless and endless.” *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz.

the thing dependent on name, body and form, what is called personality. Europeans especially, but also people without philosophic ideas would easily mistake this outward personality for the soul and then they would deny the name of soul to the unborn and endless entity. Do they then consider it as spirit or self — *ātman*? But the difficulty is that the old Buddhists rejected the conception of *ātman* also. So we are left entirely at sea. The Nihilistic Buddhistic teaching is plain and comprehensible that there is no soul, only a bundle of Sanskaras continuing or a stream of them renewing themselves without dissolution (Nirvana). But this Mahayanist affair seems a sort of loose and curt compromise with Vedanta. (S 22: 68)

The walls of logic

The original method of all these differences was the method of Gautama in the episode of the Chhandogya, the exclusive affirmation of one's own seeing, the logical exclusion, by process of verbal & ideative distinction, of that which has [been] seen by others. We perceive very well this root of the evil in the grand example, supreme in its kind, of the Buddha. Unhelped by the conflicting philosophies of the schools, dissatisfied with the too rigorously materialised methods of the Yogins, he takes the right, the supreme step, he retires into himself & gives his soul the charge of the Truth. Sa tapo atapyata. He emerges from this concentration of soul, tapas taptwa, with the great illumination received in the ever-memorable night under the Bo tree. What is this illumination of Buddha? It is the perception of the chain of Karma, of the impermanence of sanskaras, of the illusoriness of the mental ego, of the release into the motionless peace of Nirvana. There was nothing new in these things considered merely as tenets; they belong, in one form or another, to Vedanta; they cannot have been unknown to the philosophers of the age. What was new in them was their puissant revivification in a supreme soul and a great personality, their removal from the category of metaphysical dogmas & abstractions, into realities of life, concrete, human, vivid, which could once more be pursued by all, realised, practised and lived. It was this return to the sources, this puissant reconnection of Vedanta with ordinary life which was the secret of the Buddha's tremendous effectuality. New also was the particular connection & interlinking of all these central ideas in the thought of the Buddha, the singular cast given to them by his unique, yet universal temperament & the formulation in the mould of that temperament of a system of Vedantic ethics. Still, in his fundamental method, in his approach to truth & his handling of truth, Buddha had not, so far, gone beyond the method of the Vedantic Rishis; Yajnavalkya or Pippalada would have so sought in themselves for the truth, received illumination in the same fashion, equally cast that knowledge into well-linked formulae of experience which could be lived and practised. But Yajnavalkya or Pippalada would not have shot the iron bolt of logic on the knowledge

they had gained and shut themselves in a prison of ratiocination to the experiences of others and to fresh vision. It was here that, owing, perhaps, to the very strenuousness of Buddha's search as well as to the limits of the question with which he had started, "How shall one escape from the pain & grief of the world," he turned from the ancient path and allowed the metaphysical & logical training of his past [to] lay its heavy hand upon him. He built up walls of logic; he shut himself up in a creed. Thus it came about that this great destroyer of the ego, sanctioned in his disciples the supreme act of intellectual egoism and this giant render of chains imposed on his Sangha, without positively intending it, deprecating it indeed, the bondage to a single personality & the chain of a specific formula of thought. The movement of the metaphysical philosophies, more purely intellectual, far less temperamental & personal than the Buddha's, yet followed the same limiting process. They obeyed not a personal illumination, but the logic of their starting point. Sankhya, for instance, proceeded on a discriminative analysis of the world, proceeded indeed to the last limit of that analysis and found that, fundamentally, Existence starts & maintains its manifestation of world on the basis, first, of the Unity of Nature, — the unity, the Yogin would say, of the energy of the Lord, — and, secondly, of the multiplicity of souls observing & reflecting the works of Nature, — the multiplicity, the Vedantin would say, of the individual souls, in which Brahman, the Lord, the one Supreme soul, puts Himself forth to enjoy the works of His energy. Of these two fundamental principles the Sankhya metaphysician made a formula, an ultimate perception; he refused to go beyond; he built up a wall of logical disquisition to shelter himself from wider perceptions and a more complex experience. Such was the method of all these schools, the developed method of which we find so indistinct a seed in the Upanishads. (C 17: 571-73)

Nirvana in Buddhism, Vedanta, Spiritual Experience

What then is Nirvana? In orthodox Buddhism it does mean a disintegration, not of the soul — for that does not exist — but of a mental compound or stream of associations or *samskāras* which we mistake for ourself. In illusionist Vedanta it means, not a disintegration but a disappearance of a false and unreal individual self into the one real Self or Brahman; it is the idea and experience of individuality that so disappears and ceases, — we may say a false light that is extinguished (*nirvāṇa*) in the true Light. In spiritual experience it is sometimes the loss of all sense of individuality in a boundless cosmic consciousness; what was the individual remains only as a centre or a channel for the flow of a cosmic consciousness and a cosmic force and action. Or it may be the experience of the loss of individuality in a transcendent being and consciousness in which the sense of cosmos as well as the individual disappears. Or again, it may be in a transcendence which is aware of and

supports the cosmic action. But what do we mean by the individual? What we usually call by that name is a natural ego, a device of Nature which holds together her action in the mind and body. This ego has to be extinguished, otherwise there is no complete liberation possible; but the individual self or soul is not this ego. The individual soul is the spiritual being which is sometimes described as an eternal portion of the Divine, but can also be described as the Divine himself supporting his manifestation as the Many. This is the true spiritual individual which appears in its complete truth when we get rid of the ego and our false separative sense of individuality, realise our oneness with the transcendent and cosmic Divine and with all beings. It is this which makes possible the Divine Life. Nirvana is a step towards it; the disappearance of the false separative individuality is a necessary condition for our realising and living in our true eternal being, living divinely in the Divine. But this we can do in the world and in life. (S 22: 46-47)

Indian and European metaphysicians

Advaita asserts the pure self as an ultimate experience of consciousness; Buddhism denies it, holds it to be an illusion and goes beyond to the experience of psychological Nothingness. Yet again, logical argument is called in to decide the question. Therefore we find that our metaphysical method of arriving at the higher truth is practically, — though in theory this is subject to certain qualifications, — as much an intellectual & logical method as the method of European metaphysics or the method of scientific rationalism. Only, the Indian metaphysician admits certain data, values certain orders of evidence, which are ruled out of court as invalid or irrelevant by European thinkers. (C 17: 557-58)

Sunyavada and bhakti

There is no reason why the passage about Buddhism should be omitted. It gives one side of the Buddhistic teaching which is not much known or is usually ignored, for that teaching is by most rendered as Nirvana (Sunyavada) and a spiritual humanitarianism. The difficulty is that it is these sides that have been stressed especially in the modern interpretations of Buddhism and any strictures I may have passed were in view of these interpretations and that one-sided stress. I am aware of course of opposite tendencies in the Mahayana and the Japanese cult of Amitabha Buddha which is a cult of bhakti. It is now being said even of Shankara that there was another side of his doctrine — but his followers have made him stand solely for the Great Illusion, the inferiority of bhakti, the uselessness of Karma — *jagan mithyā*. (S 22: 61-62)

Liberation and laya

According to both Buddha and Shankara liberation means laya of the individual in some transcendent Permanence that is not individualised — so logically a belief in the individual soul must prevent liberation while the sense of misery in the world leads to the attempt to escape. (S 22: 66)

Disgust and Nirvana

Since the soul descended into Ignorance through a process of devolution, it has to go back through evolution.

What is this devolution? Let me hear more about it, — for it is new to me. I know of an involution and an evolution, but not a devolution.

Though the soul may repent for its misadventure, it can't take a leap into the Kingdom of Light or walk straight to its Father like the Prodigal Son . . .

A leap, no! But if it has got thoroughly disgusted, it can try its chance at Nirvana. (N: 309)

A Permanent beyond

Buddha, it must be remembered, refused always to discuss what was beyond the world. But from the little he said it would appear that he was aware of a Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe. The denial of anything beyond the world except a negative state of Nirvana was a later teaching, not Buddha's. (S 22: 62)

Not Buddha's fault

Disciple: The materialist and scientist say that Yogis have done nothing for human happiness. Buddhas and Avatars have come and gone but the sufferings of humanity are just the same.

Sri Aurobindo: Did Avatars come to relieve the sufferings of humanity? It was only Buddha who showed the way of release from suffering. But his path was to get away from the world and enter into Nirvana. Does mankind follow him? And if they do not and cannot get rid of their suffering, it is not Buddha's fault! (E: 588)

A contradiction of Buddhism

The phrase “to pass on”^{*} shows that what is meant by them is an evolution not on earth but somewhere beyond, God knows where. In that case Nirvana would be a place or world on the way to other worlds and the soul evolves from one world to another — e.g. from earth to Nirvana and from Nirvana to some Beyond-Nirvana. This is an entirely European idea and it is most unlikely that it was held by the Buddhists. The Indian idea was that the evolution is here and even the Gods if they want to go beyond their godhead and get liberation have to come down on earth for the purpose. It is the Western spiritualists and others who think that the birth on earth is a stage of progress from some place inferior to earth and after once being born on earth one does not return but goes to some other world and remains there till one can progress to some other better world and so on and on. . . . Again, this “perfected social order on earth” is certainly not a Buddhist idea, the Buddhas never dreamed of it — their preoccupation was with helping men towards Nirvana, not towards a perfected order here. All that is a sheer contradiction of Buddhism.

(S 22: 67)

Another contradiction and a reconciliation

Nirvana cannot be at once the ending of the Path with nothing beyond to explore and yet only a rest house or rather the beginning of the Higher Path with everything still to explore. . . . The reconciliation would be that it is the end of the lower Path through the lower Nature and the beginning of the Higher Evolution. In that case it would accord exactly with the teaching of our yoga. (S 22: 67)

A new-fangled version?

How is this Absolute^{**} different from the Absolute of the Vedanta? or this emancipation different from the Vedantic Mukti? If it were so, there would never have been all this quarrel between Buddhism and the Vedantic schools. It must be a new-fangled version of Buddhism or else it was a later development in which Buddhism

^{*}“The Great Ones. . . renounce their right to pass on to a still Higher Evolution and remain within the Cosmos for the good of all sentient beings. . . . It is these Bodhic Forces. . . which lead mankind. . . towards a perfected social order on Earth.” *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz.

^{**}“Thus the Doctrine of Shunyata underlying the whole of the Prajna-Paramita, posits . . . an Absolute as inherent in phenomena, for the Absolute is the source and support of the phenomena. . . and in the last analysis of things by the Bodhi-illuminated mind, freed of Ignorance, duality vanishes and there remains but the One in All, the All in One.” *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz.

reduced itself back to Adwaita.

But, is this Higher Evolution really a Buddhistic idea or only a European version of what Nirvana might be? (S 22: 67-68)

Tibetan Nirvana

The Tibetan Nirvana as described in the last extract* is very much like the Tao of Laotse. It is more and more said now that that is the real teaching of Buddha and of Buddhism. (C 35: 317)

Buddha and “service to mankind”

If Buddha really combated and denied all Vedantic conceptions of the Self, then it can be no longer true that Buddha refrained from all metaphysical speculations or distinct pronouncements as to the nature of the ultimate Reality. The view you take of his conception of Nirvana seems to concur with the Mahayanist interpretation and its conception of the Permanent, *dhruvam*, which could be objected to as a later development like the opposite Nihilistic conception of the Shunyam. What Buddha very certainly taught was that the world is not-Self and that the individual has no true existence since what does exist in the world is a stream of impermanent consciousness from moment to moment and the individual person is fictitiously constituted by a bundle of *samskāras* and can be dissolved by dissolving the bundle. This is in conformity with the Vedantic Monistic view that there is no true separate individual. As to the other Vedantic view of the one Self, impersonal and universal and transcendent, it does not seem that Buddha made any distinct and unmistakable pronouncement on abstract and metaphysical questions; but if the world or all in the world is not-Self, *anātman*, there can be no more room for a universal Self, only at most for a transcendent Real Being. His conception of Nirvana was of something transcendent of the universe, but he did not define what it was because he was not concerned with any abstract metaphysical speculations about the Reality; he must have thought them unnecessary and irrelevant and any indulgence in them likely to divert from the true object. His explanation of things was psychological and not

*“The Clear Light . . . symbolizes the unconditioned pure *Nirvānic* Consciousness, the transcendent, Supramundane Consciousness of a Fully Awakened One. It is a Mystic Radiance of the *Dharma-Kāya*, of the *Nirvānic* Consciousness free of all *sangsāric* or conditioned obscuration. It cannot be described; It can only be known; and to know It is to know the Thatness of all things. As being colourless, or without qualities, It is the Clear Light; as being without limitations, It is All-Pervading Intelligence; as being unknowable in terms of *sangsāric* consciousness, and without form, It is the Formless Void.” *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* by Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz.

metaphysical and his methods were all psychological, — the breaking up of the false associations of consciousness which cause the continuance of desire and suffering, so getting rid of the stream of birth and death in a purely phenomenal (not unreal) world; the method of life by which this liberation could be effected was also a psychological method, the eightfold path developing right understanding and right action. His object was pragmatic and severely practical and so were his methods; metaphysical speculations would only draw the mind away from the one thing needful.

As to Buddha's attitude towards life, I do not quite see how "service to mankind" or any ideal of improvement of the world-existence can have been part of his aim, since to pass out of life into a transcendence was his object. His eightfold path was the means towards that end and not an aim in itself or indeed in any way an aim. Obviously, if right understanding and right action become the common rule of life, there would be a great improvement in the world, but for Buddha's purpose that could be an incidental result and not at all part of his central object. You say, "Buddha himself urged the necessity to serve mankind; his ideal was to achieve a consciousness of inner eternity and then be a source of radiant influence and action." But where and when did Buddha say these things, use these terms or express these ideas? "The service of mankind" sounds like a very modern and European conception; it reminds me of some European interpretations of the Gita as merely teaching the disinterested performance of duty or the pronouncement that the whole idea of the Gita is service. The exclusive stress or overstress on mankind or humanity is also European. Mahayanist Buddhism laid stress on compassion, fellow-feeling with all, *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, just as the Gita speaks of the feeling of oneness with all beings and preoccupation with the good of all beings, *sarvabhūta hite ratāḥ*, but this does not mean humanity only, but all beings and *vasudhā* means all earth-life. Are there any sayings of Buddha which would justify the statement that the object or one object in attaining to Nirvana was to become a source of radiant influence and action? The consciousness of inner eternity may have that result, but can we really say that that was Buddha's ideal, the object which he held in view or for which he came? (S 22: 59-61)

Duḥkhavāda

Buddhism is the turning away from *duḥkha* and its causes to the attracting face of Nirvana. The *duḥkhavāda* did not exist in India, except in the theory of the Vaishnava *viraha*; otherwise it was not considered as a means or even a stage of the sadhana. But that does not mean that *duḥkha* does not come in the sadhana; it comes and has to be rejected and overcome, overpassed — excepting the psychic sorrow which does not disturb or depress but rather liberates the vital. To make a *vāda* or gospel

of sorrow is dangerous because sorrow, if indulged, becomes a habit, sticks and few things, if once they stick, can be more sticky. (S 24: 1635-36)

Various schools of Buddhism

Buddhism is of many kinds and the entirely nihilistic kind is only one variety. Most Buddhism admits a Permanent as beyond the realm of Karma and Sanskaras. Even the Shunya of the Shunyapanthis is described like the Tao of Lao Tse as a Nothing which is All. So as a higher 'above mental' state is admitted which one tries to reach by a strong discipline of the consciousness, it may be called spirituality.

(S 22: 62-63)

Buddha left the ultimate metaphysical question aside

Buddhism views the same set of facts from the other end of thought. Not self-working material force, but a mass of subjective sensations is its reading of the universe. Material existence & action only exist in sensational consciousness and as terms of sensational consciousness; and sensational consciousness only exists as a phenomenon in the void. But behind this sensation-troubled void, there is another state, entity or what you will, Nirvana, in which there is neither this continual birth in phenomena, nor the sensational activity of which continual birth is the nodus. Later Buddhistic schools have supposed Nirvana itself to be void or Nihil, but it does not appear that this was the actual teaching of the Buddha. He left the ultimate metaphysical question aside and fastened only on the practical fact of this bound & troubled sensational existence and that ineffable bliss of release & escape. To escape, that is the goal & end of man. But who escapes? Buddhism denies God, denies the existence of the Atman. There is no one who escapes, only the escape itself. Buddha avoided always the logical difficulty & seized on the practical fact. There is here, undeniably, the phenomenal existence of something which feels, desires, sins & suffers, and the great principle of divine Compassion in him which far more than reason & logic was the master key of his thinking, compelled him only to take hold of this great sufferer, this tormented self-deluder & turn it into that path by which alone it could escape from its own false existence. The path of escape is that moral & intellectual discipline which leads it out of the dual stream of good and bad Karma. To Buddha also the sum of past workings still operative on us is the great preexisting condition which is causal of continued state, action & happenings, past working as cause produces fresh working as effect which again constitutes itself into fresh cause. From this chain there is no escape in Nature except by perceiving existence as a streaming activity of successive sensational associations or sanskaras

and climbing out of the stream by a supreme act of knowledge. For, unlike the modern Rationalist, Buddha's problem was complicated by the belief inherited from Vedic Hinduism that death is not a release; personality survives & in other states, other births, continues to suffer & enjoy, enjoy & suffer through unending Time unless & until the knot is cut, the renunciation of the self-idea envisaged and effected. Then we escape from these running figments of heaven & earth & hell, pleasure & pain, life & death, self & not-self into the shoreless & streamless peace of Nirvana. (C 17: 496-97)

Different versions of the One in Buddhism

About the One [of the Buddhists] there are different versions. I just read somewhere that the Buddhist One is a Superbuddha from whom all Buddhas come — but it seemed to me a rehash of Buddhism in Vedantic terms born of a modern mind. The Permanent of Buddhism has always been supposed to be Supracosmic and Ineffable — that is why Buddha never tried to explain what it was; for, logically, how can one talk about the Ineffable? It has really nothing to do with the Cosmos which is a thing of Sanskaras and Karma. (S 22: 63)

Buddha's refusal to discuss metaphysics

Buddha, it must be remembered, refused always to discuss what was beyond the world. But from the little he said it would appear that he was aware of a Permanent beyond equivalent to the Vedantic Para-Brahman, but which he was quite unwilling to describe. The denial of anything beyond the world except a negative state of Nirvana was a later teaching, not Buddha's. (S 22: 62)

Buddha and Avatarhood

I only took the Puranic list of Avatars and interpreted it as a parable of evolution, so as to show that the idea of evolution is implicit behind the theory of Avatarhood. As to whether one accepts Buddha as an Avatar or prefers to put others in his place (in some lists Balaram replaces Buddha), is a matter of individual feeling. The Buddhist Jatakas are legends about the past incarnations of the Buddha, often with a teaching implied in them, and are not a part of the Hindu system. To the Buddhists Buddha was not an Avatar at all, he was the soul climbing up the ladder of spiritual evolution till it reached the final stage of emancipation — although Hindu influence did make Buddhism develop the idea of an eternal Buddha above, that was not a universal or

fundamental Buddhistic idea. Whether the Divine in manifesting his Avatarhood could choose to follow the line of evolution from the lowest scale, manifesting on each scale as a Vibhuti is a question again to which the answer is not inevitably in the negative. If we accept the evolutionary idea, such a thing may have its place.

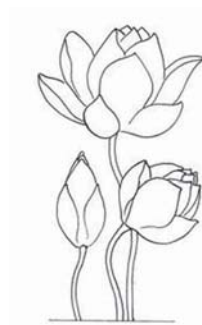
If Buddha taught something different from Krishna, that does not prevent his advent from being necessary in the spiritual evolution. The only question is whether the attempt to scale the heights of an absolute Nirvana through negation of cosmic existence was a necessary step or not, having a view to the fact that one can make the attempt to reach the Highest on the *neti neti* as well as the *iti iti* line.

(S 22: 403-04)

Avatars and the parable of evolution

It [the overmind liberation] can't be supreme if there is something beyond it — but there is a liberation even in higher Mind. But in speaking of supreme liberation I was simply taking the Buddhist-Adwaita view for granted and correcting it by saying that this Nirvana view is too negative. Krishna opened the possibility of overmind with its two sides of realisation, static and dynamic. Buddha tried to shoot from mind to Nirvana in the Supreme, just as Shankara did in another way after him. Both agree in overleaping the other stages and trying to get at a nameless and featureless Absolute. Krishna on the other hand was leading by the normal course of evolution. The next normal step is not a featureless Absolute, but the supermind. I consider that in trying to overshoot, Buddha like Shankara made a mistake, calling away the dynamic side of the liberation. Therefore there has to be a correction by Kalki.

I was of course dealing with the ten Avatars as a “parable of the evolution”, and only explaining the interpretation we can put on it from that point of view. It was not my own view of the thing that I was giving. (S 22: 402-03)



EKAM EVADVITIYAM BRAHMA

The two gates of perfection

The Upanishad tells us that after the knowledge-self above the mental is possessed and all the lower selves have been drawn up into it, there is another and last step of all still left to us — though one might ask, is it eternally the last or only the last practically conceivable or at all necessary for us now? — to take up our gnostic existence into the Bliss-Self and there complete the spiritual self-discovery of the divine Infinite. Ananda, a supreme Bliss eternal, far other and higher in its character than the highest human joy or pleasure, is the essential and original nature of the spirit. In Ananda our spirit will find its true self, in Ananda its essential consciousness, in Ananda the absolute power of its existence. The embodied soul's entry into this highest absolute, unlimited, unconditional bliss of the spirit is the infinite liberation and the infinite perfection. It is true that something of this bliss can be enjoyed by reflection, by a qualified descent even on the lower planes where the Purusha plays with his modified and qualified Nature. There can be the experience of a spiritual and boundless Ananda on the plane of matter, on the plane of life, on the plane of mind as well as on the gnostic truth-plane of knowledge and above it. And the Yogin who enters into these lesser realisations, may find them so complete and compelling that he will imagine there is nothing greater, nothing beyond it. For each of the divine principles contains in itself the whole potentiality of all the other six notes of our being; each plane of Nature can have its own perfection of these notes under its own conditions. But the integral perfection can come only by a mounting ascent of the lowest into the highest and an incessant descent of the highest into the lowest till all becomes one at once solid block and plastic sea-stuff of the Truth infinite and eternal.

The very physical consciousness in man, the *annamaya puruṣa*, can without this supreme ascent and integral descent yet reflect and enter into the self of Sachchidananda. It can do it either by a reflection of the Soul in physical Nature, its bliss, power and infinity secret but still present here, or by losing its separate sense of substance and existence in the Self within or without it. The result is a glorified sleep of the physical mind in which the physical being forgets itself in a kind of conscious Nirvana or else moves about like a thing inert in the hands of Nature, *jaḍavat*, like a leaf in the wind, or otherwise a state of pure happy and free irresponsibility of action, *bālavat*, a divine childhood. But this comes without the higher glories of knowledge and delight which belong to the same status upon a more exalted level. It is an inert realisation of Sachchidananda in which there is

neither any mastery of the Prakriti by the Purusha nor any sublimation of Nature into her own supreme power, the infinite glories of the Para Shakti. Yet these two, this mastery and this sublimation, are the two gates of perfection, the splendid doors into the supreme Eternal. (C 23: 498-99)

Brahman — omnipresent reality

We recognise, then, that it is possible for the consciousness in the individual to enter into a state in which relative existence appears to be dissolved and even Self seems to be an inadequate conception. It is possible to pass into a Silence beyond the Silence. But this is not the whole of our ultimate experience, nor the single and all-excluding truth. For we find that this Nirvana, this self-extinction, while it gives an absolute peace and freedom to the soul within is yet consistent in practice with a desireless but effective action without. This possibility of an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness, was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha's teaching, — this superiority to ego and to the chain of personal workings and to the identification with mutable form and idea, not the petty ideal of an escape from the trouble and suffering of the physical birth. In any case, as the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and the activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the universe. It would thus reproduce in itself perpetually the eternal miracle of the divine Existence, in the universe, yet always beyond it and even, as it were, beyond itself. The opposite experience could only be a concentration of mentality in the individual upon Non-existence with the result of an oblivion and personal withdrawal from a cosmic activity still and always proceeding in the consciousness of the Eternal Being.

Thus, after reconciling Spirit and Matter in the cosmic consciousness, we perceive the reconciliation, in the transcendental consciousness, of the final assertion of all and its negation. We discover that all affirmations are assertions of status or activity in the Unknowable; all the corresponding negations are assertions of Its freedom both from and in that status or activity. The Unknowable is Something to us supreme, wonderful and ineffable which continually formulates Itself to our consciousness and continually escapes from the formulation It has made. This it does not as some malicious spirit or freakish magician leading us from falsehood to greater falsehood and so to a final negation of all things, but as even here the Wise beyond our wisdom guiding us from reality to ever profounder and vaster reality until we find the profoundest and vastest of which we are capable. An omnipresent reality is the Brahman, not an omnipresent cause of persistent illusions.

(C 21: 34-35)

The Supreme Reality and the Becoming of Brahman

In the supracosmic view of things the supreme Reality is alone entirely real. A certain illusoriness, a sense of the vanity of cosmic existence and individual being is a characteristic turn of this seeing of things, but it is not essential, not an indispensable adjunct to its main thought-principle. In the extreme forms of its world-vision human existence has no real meaning; it is a mistake of the soul or a delirium of the will to live, an error or ignorance which somehow overcasts the absolute Reality. The only true truth is the supracosmic; or, in any case, the Absolute, the Parabrahman is the origin and goal of all existence, all else is an interlude without any abiding significance. If so, it would follow that the one thing to be done, the one wise and needful way of our being is to get away from all living, whether terrestrial or celestial, as soon as our inner evolution or some hidden law of the spirit makes that possible. True, the illusion is real to itself, the vanity pretends to be full of purpose; its laws and facts, — they are only facts and not truths, empirical and not real realities, — are binding on us so long as we rest in the error. But from any standpoint of real knowledge, in any view of the true truth of things, all this self-delusion would seem to be little better than the laws of a cosmic madhouse; so long as we are mad and have to remain in the madhouse, we are perforce subject to its rules and we must make, according to our temperament, the best or the worst of them, but always our proper aim is to get cured of our insanity and depart into light and truth and freedom. Whatever mitigations may be made in the severity of this logic, whatever concessions validating life and personality for the time being, yet from this view-point the true law of living must be whatever rule can help us soonest to get back to self-knowledge and lead by the most direct road to Nirvana; the true ideal must be an extinction of the individual and the universal, a self-annulment in the Absolute. This ideal of self-extinction which is boldly and clearly proclaimed by the Buddhists, is in Vedantic thought a self-finding: but the self-finding of the individual by his growth into his true being in the Absolute would only be possible if both are interrelated realities; it could not apply to the final world-abolishing self-affirmation of the Absolute in an unreal or temporary individual by the annulment of the false personal being and by the destruction of all individual and cosmic existence for that individual consciousness, — however much these errors may go on, helplessly inevitable, in the world of Ignorance permitted by the Absolute, in a universal, eternal and indestructible Avidya.

But this idea of the total vanity of life is not altogether an inevitable consequence of the supracosmic theory of existence. In the Vedanta of the Upanishads, the Becoming of Brahman is accepted as a reality; there is room therefore for a truth of the Becoming: there is in that truth a right law of life, a permissible satisfaction of the hedonistic element in our being, its delight of temporal existence, an effective utilisation of its practical energy, of the executive force of consciousness in it; but,

the truth and law of its temporal becoming once fulfilled, the soul has to turn back to its final self-realisation, for its natural highest fulfilment is a release, a liberation into its original being, its eternal self, its timeless reality. There is a circle of becoming starting from eternal Being and ending in it; or, from the point of view of the Supreme as a personal or superpersonal Reality, there is a temporary play, a game of becoming and living in the universe. Here, evidently, there is no other significance of life than the will of the Being to become, the will of consciousness and the urge of its force towards becoming, its delight of becoming; for the individual, when that is withdrawn from him or fulfilled in him and no longer active, the becoming ceases: but otherwise the universe persists or always comes back into manifestation, because the will to become is eternal and must be so since it is the inherent will of an eternal Existence. It may be said that one defect in this view of things is the absence of any fundamental reality of the individual, of any abiding value and significance of his natural or his spiritual activity: but it can be replied that this demand for a permanent personal significance, for a personal eternity, is an error of our ignorant surface consciousness; the individual is a temporary becoming of the Being, and that is a quite sufficient value and significance. It may be added that in a pure or an absolute Existence there can be no values and significances: in the universe values exist and are indispensable, but only as relative and temporary buildings; there can be no absolute values, no eternal and self-existent significances in a Time-structure. This sounds conclusive enough and it seems that nothing more can be said about the matter. And yet the question remains over; for the stress on our individual being, the demand on it, the value put on individual perfection and salvation is too great to be dismissed as a device for a minor operation, the coiling and uncoiling of an insignificant spiral amid the vast circlings of the Eternal's becoming in the universe.

(C 22: 694-96)

The spirit's power of infinite variation

At the same time indeterminability is also a necessary element in our conception of the Absolute and in our spiritual experience: this is the other side of the supramental regard on being and on things. The Absolute is not limitable or definable by any one determination or by any sum of determinations; on the other side, it is not bound down to an indeterminable vacancy of pure existence. On the contrary, it is the source of all determinations: its indeterminability is the natural, the necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of power of being; it can be infinitely all things because it is no thing in particular and exceeds any definable totality. It is this essential indeterminability of the Absolute that translates itself into our consciousness through the fundamental negating positives of our spiritual experience, the immobile immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without

qualities, the pure featureless One Existence, the Impersonal, the Silence void of activities, the Non-being, the Ineffable and the Unknowable. On the other side it is the essence and source of all determinations, and this dynamic essentiality manifests to us through the fundamental affirming positives in which the Absolute equally meets us; for it is the Self that becomes all things, the Saguna Brahman, the Eternal with infinite qualities, the One who is the Many, the infinite Person who is the source and foundation of all persons and personalities, the Lord of creation, the Word, the Master of all works and action; it is that which being known all is known: these affirmatives correspond to those negatives. For it is not possible in a supramental cognition to split asunder the two sides of the One Existence, — even to speak of them as sides is excessive, for they are in each other, their co-existence or one-existence is eternal and their powers sustaining each other found the self-manifestation of the Infinite.

But neither is the separate cognition of them entirely an illusion or a complete error of the Ignorance; this too has its validity for spiritual experience. For these primary aspects of the Absolute are fundamental spiritual determinates or indeterminates answering at this spiritual end or beginning to the general determinates or generic indeterminates of the material end or inconscient beginning of the descending and ascending Manifestation. Those that seem to us negative carry in them the freedom of the Infinite from limitation by its own determinations; their realisation disengages the spirit within, liberates us and enables us to participate in this supremacy: thus, when once we pass into or through the experience of immutable self, we are no longer bound and limited in the inner status of our being by the determinations and creations of Nature. On the other, the dynamic side, this original freedom enables the Consciousness to create a world of determinations without being bound by it: it enables it also to withdraw from what it has created and re-create in a higher truth-formula. It is on this freedom that is based the spirit's power of infinite variation of the truth-possibilities of existence and also its capacity to create, without tying itself to its workings, any and every form of Necessity or system of order: the individual being too by experience of these negating absolutes can participate in that dynamic liberty, can pass from one order of self-formulation to a higher order. At the stage when from the mental it has to move towards its supramental status, one most liberatingly helpful, if not indispensable experience that may intervene is the entry into a total Nirvana of mentality and mental ego, a passage into the silence of the Spirit. In any case, a realisation of the pure Self must always precede the transition to that mediating eminence of the consciousness from which a clear vision of the ascending and descending stairs of manifested existence is commanded and the possession of the free power of ascent and descent becomes a spiritual prerogative.

(C 21: 330-32)

Extinction of the ego

To get into the universal Self — one in all — is to be liberated from ego; ego either becomes a small instrumental circumstance in the consciousness or even disappears from our consciousness altogether. That is the extinction or Nirvana of the ego. To get into the transcendent self above all makes us capable of transcending altogether even cosmic consciousness and action — it can be the way to that complete liberation from the world-existence which is called also extinction, *laya*, *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*.

It must be noted however that the opening upward does not necessarily lead to peace, silence and Nirvana only. The sadhak becomes aware not only of a great, eventually an infinite peace, silence, wideness above us, above the head as it were and extending into all physical and supraphysical space, but also he can become aware of other things — a vast Force in which is all power, a vast Light in which is all knowledge, a vast Ananda in which is all bliss and rapture. At first they appear as something essential, indeterminate, absolute, simple, *kevala*: a Nirvana into any of these things seems possible. But we can come to see too that this Force contains all forces, this Light all lights, this Ananda all joy and bliss possible. And all this can descend into us. Any of them and all of them can come down, not peace alone; only the safest is to bring down first an absolute calm and peace, for that makes the descent of the rest more secure; otherwise it may be difficult for the external nature to contain or bear so much Force, Light, Knowledge or Ananda. All these things together make what we call the higher spiritual or Divine Consciousness. The psychic opening through the heart puts us primarily into connection with the individual Divine, the Divine in his inner relation with us; it is especially the source of love and bhakti. This upward opening puts us into direct relation with the whole Divine and can create in us the divine consciousness and a new birth or births of the spirit.

When the Peace is established, this higher or Divine Force from above can descend and work in us. It descends usually first into the head and liberates the inner mind centres, then into the heart centre and liberates fully the psychic and emotional being, then into the navel and other vital centres and liberates the inner vital, then into the Muladhara and below and liberates the inner physical being. It works at the same time for perfection as well as liberation; it takes up the whole nature part by part and deals with it, rejecting what has to be rejected, sublimating what has to be sublimated, creating what has to be created. It integrates, harmonises, establishes a new rhythm in the nature. It can bring down too a higher and yet higher force and range of the higher nature until, if that be the aim of the sadhana, it becomes possible to bring down the supramental force and existence. All this is prepared, assisted, farthered by the work of the psychic being in the heart centre; the more it is open, in front, active, the quicker, safer, easier the working of the Force can be. The more love and bhakti and surrender grow in the heart, the more rapid and perfect becomes the evolution of the sadhana. For the descent and

transformation imply at the same time an increasing contact and union with the Divine. (S 24: 1166-67)

Not a cold void but an illimitable bliss

And when it is no longer only possible but grasped? Then the individual Self entering into full realisation, ceases in any sense to be the individual Self, but merges into & becomes again the eternal and absolute Brahman, without parts, unbeginning, undecaying, unchanging. He has passed beyond causality and phenomena and is no longer under the bondage of that which is only by seeming. This is the *laya* or utter absorption of Hinduism, the highest *nirvana* or extinction from phenomena of the Upanishads and of Buddhist metaphysics. It is obviously a state which words fail to describe, since words which are created to express relations and have no meaning except when they express relations, cannot deal successfully with a state which is perfectly pure, absolute and unrelated; nor is it a condition which the bounded & finite intellect of man on this plane can for a moment envisage. This unintelligibility of the supreme state is naturally a great stumblingblock to the undisciplined imagination of our present-day humanity which, being sensuous, emotional and intellectual, inevitably recoils from a bliss in which neither the senses, emotions nor intellect have any place. Surely, we cry, the extinction or quietude of all these sources & means of sensation and pleasure implies not supreme bliss but absolute nothingness, blank annihilation. "An error", answers the Vedanta, "a pitiful, grovelling error! Why is it that the senses cease in that supreme condition? Because the senses were evolved in order to sense external being and where externality ceases, they having no action cease to exist. The emotions too are directed outwards and need another for their joy, they can only survive so long as we are incomplete. The intellect similarly is and works only so long as there is something external to it and ungrasped. But to the Most High there is nothing ungrasped, the Most High depends on none for His joy. He has therefore neither emotions nor intellect, nor can he either who merges in and becomes the Most High, possess them for a moment after that high consummation. The deprivation of the limited senses in His boundlessness is not a loss or an extinction, but must be a fulfilment, a development into Being which rejoices in its own infinity. The disappearance of our broken & transient emotions in His completeness must bring us not into a cold void but rather into illimitable bliss. The culmination of knowledge by the supersession of our divided & fallible intellect must lead not to utter darkness and blank vacuity but to the luminous ecstasy of an infinite Consciousness. Not the annihilation of Being, but utter fullness of Being is our Nirvana." And when this ecstatic language is brought to the touchstone of reason, it must surely be declared just and even unanswerable. For the final absolution of the intellect can only be at a point where

the Knower, Knowledge and the Known become one, Knowledge being there infinite, direct and without media. And where there is this infinite and flawless knowledge, there must be, one thinks, infinite and flawless existence and bliss. But by the very conditions of this state, we can only say of it that it is, we cannot define it in words, precisely because we cannot realize it with the intellect. The Self can be realized only with the Self; there is no other instrument of realization.

(C 18: 362-64)

Our starting-point and constant base: an Absolute

The Unknowable, if it is at all, may be a supreme state of Sachchidananda beyond our highest conceptions of existence, consciousness and bliss; that is what was evidently meant by the Asat, the Non-Existent of the Taittiriya Upanishad, which alone was in the beginning and out of which the existent was born, and possibly too it may be the inmost sense of the Nirvana of the Buddha: for the dissolution of our present state by Nirvana may be a reaching to some highest state beyond all notion or experience of self even, an ineffable release from our sense of existence. Or it may be the Upanishad's absolute and unconditioned bliss which is beyond expression and beyond understanding, because it surpasses all that we can conceive of or describe as consciousness and existence. This is the sense in which we have already accepted it; for the acceptance commits us only to a refusal to put a limit to the ascension of the Infinite. Or, if it is not this, if it is something quite different from existence, even from an unconditioned existence, it must be the absolute Non-Being of the nihilistic thinker.

But out of absolute Nothingness nothing can come, not even anything merely apparent, not even an illusion; and if the absolute Non-Existence is not that, then it can only be an absolute eternally unrealised Potentiality, an enigmatic zero of the Infinite out of which relative potentialities may at any time emerge, but only some actually succeed in emerging into phenomenal appearance. Out of this Non-Existence anything may arise, and there is no possibility of saying what or why; it is for all practical purposes a seed of absolute chaos out of which by some happy — or rather unhappy — accident there has emerged the order of a universe. Or we may say that there is no real order of the universe; what we take for such is a persistent habit of the senses and the life and a figment of the mind and it is useless to seek for an ultimate reason of things. Out of an absolute chaos all paradox and absurdity can be born, and the world is such a paradox, a mysterious sum of contraries and puzzles, or, it may be, in effect, as some have felt or thought, a huge error, a monstrous, an infinite delirium. Of such a universe not an absolute Consciousness and Knowledge, but an absolute Inconscience and Ignorance may be the source. Anything may be true in such a cosmos: everything may have been born out of nothing; thinking

mind may be only a disease of unthinking Force or inconscient Matter; dominant order, which we suppose to be existence according to the truth of things, may be really the mechanical law of an eternal self-ignorance and not the self-evolution of a supreme self-ruling conscious Will; perpetual existence may be the constant phenomenon of an eternal Nihil. All opinions about the origins of things become of an equal force, since all are equally valid or invalid; for all become equally possible where there is no sure starting-point and no ascertainable goal of the revolutions of the becoming. All these opinions have been held by the human mind and in all there has been profit, even if we regard them as errors; for errors are permitted to the mind because they open doors upon truth, negatively by destroying opposite errors, positively by preparing an element in a new constructive hypothesis. But, pushed too far, this view of things leads to the negation of the whole aim of philosophy, which seeks for knowledge and not for chaos and which cannot fulfil itself if the last word of knowledge is the Unknowable, but only if it is something, to use the words of the Upanishad, which being known all is known. The Unknowable — not absolutely unknowable, but beyond mental knowledge — can only be a higher degree in the intensity of being of that Something, a degree beyond the loftiest summit attainable by mental beings, and, if it were known as it must be known to itself, that discovery would not destroy entirely what is given us by our supreme possible knowledge but rather carry it to a higher fulfilment and larger truth of what it has already gained by self-vision and self-experience. It is then this Something, an Absolute which can be so known that all truths can stand in it and by it and find there their reconciliation, that we must discover as our starting-point and keep as our constant base of thinking and seeing and by it find a solution of the problem; for it is That alone that can carry in it a key to the paradoxes of the universe.

(C 21: 588-90)

The goal in the traditional systems of yoga

The traditional systems, whatever their other differences, all proceed on the belief or the perception that the Eternal and Absolute can only be or at least can only inhabit a pure transcendent state of non-cosmic existence or else a non-existence. All cosmic existence or all that we call existence is a state of ignorance. Even the highest individual perfection, even the most blissful cosmic condition is no better than a supreme ignorance. All that is individual, all that is cosmic has to be austere renounced by the seeker of the absolute Truth. The supreme quiescent Self or else the absolute Nihil is the sole Truth, the only object of spiritual knowledge. The state of knowledge, the consciousness other than this temporal that we must attain is Nirvana, an extinction of ego, a cessation of all mental, vital and physical activities, of all activities whatsoever, a supreme illumined quiescence, the pure bliss of an

impersonal tranquillity self-absorbed and ineffable. The means are meditation, a concentration excluding all things else, a total loss of the mind in its object. Action is permissible only in the first stages of the search in order to purify the seeker and make him morally and temperamentally a fit vessel for the knowledge. Even this action must either be confined to the performance of the rites of worship and the prescribed duties of life rigorously ordained by the Hindu Shastra or, as in the Buddhistic discipline, must be guided along the eightfold path to the supreme practice of the works of compassion which lead towards the practical annihilation of self in the good of others. In the end, in any severe and pure Jnanayoga, all works must be abandoned for an entire quiescence. Action may prepare salvation; it cannot give it. Any continued adherence to action is incompatible with the highest progress and may be an insuperable obstacle to the attainment of the spiritual goal. The supreme state of quiescence is the very opposite of action and cannot be attained by those who persist in works. And even devotion, love, worship are disciplines for the unripe soul, are at best the best methods of the Ignorance. For they are offered to something other, higher and greater than ourselves; but in the supreme knowledge there can be no such thing, since there is either only one self or no self at all and therefore either no one to do the worship and offer the love and devotion or no one to receive it. Even thought-activity must disappear in the sole consciousness of identity or of nothingness and by its own quiescence bring about the quiescence of the whole nature. The absolute Identical alone must remain or else the eternal Nihil.

This pure Jnanayoga comes by the intellect, although it ends in the transcendence of the intellect and its workings. The thinker in us separates himself from all the rest of what we phenomenally are, rejects the heart, draws back from the life and the senses, separates from the body that he may arrive at his own exclusive fulfilment in that which is beyond even himself and his function. There is a truth that underlies, as there is an experience that seems to justify this attitude. There is an Essence that is in its nature a quiescence, a supreme of Silence in the Being that is beyond its own developments and mutations, immutable and therefore superior to all activities of which it is at most a Witness. And in the hierarchy of our psychological functions the Thought is in a way nearest to this Self, nearest at least to its aspect of the all-conscious knower who regards all activities but can stand back from them all. The heart, will and other powers in us are fundamentally active, turn naturally towards action, find through it their fulfilment, — although they also may automatically arrive at a certain quiescence by fullness of satisfaction in their activities or else by a reverse process of exhaustion through perpetual disappointment and dissatisfaction. The thought too is an active power, but is more capable of arriving at quiescence by its own conscious choice and will. The thought is more easily content with the illumined intellectual perception of this silent Witness Self that is higher than all our activities and, that immobile Spirit once seen, is ready, deeming its mission of truth-finding accomplished, to fall at rest and become itself immobile. For in its most

characteristic movement it is itself apt to be a disinterested witness, judge, observer of things more than an eager participant and passionate labourer in the work and can arrive very readily at a spiritual or philosophic calm and detached aloofness. And since men are mental beings, thought, if not truly their best and highest, is at least their most constant, normal and effective means for enlightening their ignorance. Armed with its functions of gathering and reflection, meditation, fixed contemplation, the absorbed dwelling of the mind on its object, *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, it stands at our tops as an indispensable aid to our realisation of that which we pursue, and it is not surprising that it should claim to be the leader of the journey and the only available guide or at least the direct and innermost door of the temple.

In reality, thought is only a scout and pioneer; it can guide but not command or effectuate. The leader of the journey, the captain of the march, the first and most ancient priest of our sacrifice is the Will. This Will is not the wish of the heart or the demand or preference of the mind to which we often give the name. It is that inmost, dominant and often veiled conscious force of our being and of all being, Tapas, Shakti, Sraddha, that sovereignly determines our orientation and of which the intellect and the heart are more or less blind and automatic servants and instruments. The Self that is quiescent, at rest, vacant of things and happenings is a support and background to existence, a silent channel or a hypostasis of something Supreme: it is not itself the one entirely real existence, not itself the Supreme. The Eternal, the Supreme is the Lord and the all-originating Spirit. Superior to all activities and not bound by any of them, it is the source, sanction, material, efficient power, master of all activities. All activities proceed from this supreme Self and are determined by it; all are its operations, processes of its own conscious force and not of something alien to Self, some power other than the Spirit. In these activities is expressed the conscious Will or Shakti of the Spirit moved to manifest its being in infinite ways, a Will or Power not ignorant but at one with its own self-knowledge and its knowledge of all that it is put out to express. And of this Power a secret spiritual will and soul-faith in us, the dominant hidden force of our nature, is the individual instrument, more nearly in communication with the Supreme, a surer guide and enlightener, could we once get at it and hold it, because profounder and more intimately near to the Identical and Absolute than the surface activities of our thought powers. To know that will in ourselves and in the universe and follow it to its divine finalities, whatever these may be, must surely be the highest way and truest culmination for knowledge as for works, for the seeker in life and for the seeker in Yoga.

The thought, since it is not the highest or strongest part of Nature, not even the sole or deepest index to Truth, ought not to follow its own exclusive satisfaction or take that for the sign of its attainment to the supreme Knowledge. It is here as the guide, up to a certain point, of the heart, the life and the other members, but it cannot be a substitute for them; it has to see not only what is its own ultimate satisfaction but whether there is not an ultimate satisfaction intended also for these

other members. An exclusive path of abstract thought would be justified, only if the object of the Supreme Will in the universe has been nothing more than a descent into the activity of the ignorance operated by the mind as blinding instrument and jailor through false idea and sensation and an ascent into the quiescence of knowledge equally operated by the mind through correct thought as enlightening instrument and saviour. But the chances are that there is an aim in the world less absurd and aimless, an impulse towards the Absolute less dry and abstract, a truth of the world more large and complex, a more richly infinite height of the Infinite. Certainly, an abstract logic must always arrive, as the old systems arrived, at an infinite empty Negation or an infinite equally vacant Affirmation; for, abstract it moves towards an absolute abstraction and these are the only two abstractions that are absolutely absolute. But a concrete ever deepening wisdom waiting on more and more riches of infinite experience and not the confident abstract logic of the narrow and incompetent human mind is likely to be the key to a divine suprahuman knowledge. The heart, the will, the life and even the body, no less than the thought, are forms of a divine Conscious-Being and indices of great significance. These too have powers by which the soul can return to its complete self-awareness or means by which it can enjoy it. The object of the Supreme Will may well be a culmination in which the whole being is intended to receive its divine satisfaction, the heights enlightening the depths, the material Inconscient revealed to itself as the Divine by the touch of the supreme Superconscience. (C 23: 287-91)

The occult link

. . . once this entry into the inner being is accomplished, the inner Self is found to be capable of an opening, an ascent upwards into things beyond our present mental level; that is the second spiritual possibility in us. The first most ordinary result is a discovery of a vast static and silent Self which we feel to be our real or our basic existence, the foundation of all else that we are. There may be even an extinction, a Nirvana both of our active being and of the sense of self into a Reality that is indefinable and inexpressible. But also we can realise that this self is not only our own spiritual being but the true self of all others; it presents itself then as the underlying truth of cosmic existence. It is possible to remain in a Nirvana of all individuality, to stop at a static realisation or, regarding the cosmic movement as a superficial play or illusion imposed on the silent Self, to pass into some supreme immobile and immutable status beyond the universe. But another less negative line of supernormal experience also offers itself; for there takes place a large dynamic descent of light, knowledge, power, bliss or other supernormal energies into our self of silence, and we can ascend too into higher regions of the Spirit where its immobile status is the foundation of those great and luminous energies. It is evident in either case that we

have risen beyond the mind of Ignorance into a spiritual state; but, in the dynamic movement, the resultant greater action of Consciousness-Force may present itself either simply as a pure spiritual dynamis not otherwise determinate in its character or it may reveal a spiritual mind-range where mind is no longer ignorant of the Reality, — not yet a supermind level, but deriving from the supramental Truth-Consciousness and still luminous with something of its knowledge.

It is in the latter alternative that we find the secret we are seeking, the means of the transition, the needed step towards a supramental transformation; for we perceive a graduality of ascent, a communication with a more and more deep and immense light and power from above, a scale of intensities which can be regarded as so many stairs in the ascension of Mind or in a descent into Mind from That which is beyond it. We are aware of a sealike downpour of masses of a spontaneous knowledge which assumes the nature of Thought but has a different character from the process of thought to which we are accustomed; for there is nothing here of seeking, no trace of mental construction, no labour of speculation or difficult discovery; it is an automatic and spontaneous knowledge from a Higher Mind that seems to be in possession of Truth and not in search of hidden and withheld realities. One observes that this Thought is much more capable than the mind of including at once a mass of knowledge in a single view; it has a cosmic character, not the stamp of an individual thinking. Beyond this Truth-Thought we can distinguish a greater illumination instinct with an increased power and intensity and driving force, a luminosity of the nature of Truth-Sight with thought formulation as a minor and dependent activity. If we accept the Vedic image of the Sun of Truth, — an image which in this experience becomes a reality, — we may compare the action of the Higher Mind to a composed and steady sunshine, the energy of the Illumined Mind beyond it to an outpouring of massive lightnings of flaming sun-stuff. Still beyond can be met a yet greater power of the Truth-Force, an intimate and exact Truth-vision, Truth-thought, Truth-sense, Truth-feeling, Truth-action, to which we can give in a special sense the name of Intuition; for though we have applied that word for want of a better to any supra-intellectual direct way of knowing, yet what we actually know as intuition is only one special movement of self-existent knowledge. This new range is its origin; it imparts to our intuitions something of its own distinct character and is very clearly an intermediary of a greater Truth-Light with which our mind cannot directly communicate. At the source of this Intuition we discover a superconscient cosmic Mind in direct contact with the supramental Truth-Consciousness, an original intensity determinant of all movements below it and all mental energies, — not Mind as we know it, but an Overmind that covers as with the wide wings of some creative Oversoul this whole lower hemisphere of Knowledge-Ignorance, links it with that greater Truth-Consciousness while yet at the same time with its brilliant golden Lid it veils the face of the greater Truth from our sight, intervening with its flood of infinite possibilities as at once an obstacle and a passage in our seeking of

the spiritual law of our existence, its highest aim, its secret Reality. This then is the occult link we were looking for; this is the Power that at once connects and divides the supreme Knowledge and the cosmic Ignorance. (C 21: 290-93)

Happy passivity

The gnosis does not reject the realisations of the lower planes; for it is not an annihilation or extinction, not a Nirvana but a sublime fulfilment of our manifested Nature. It possesses the first realisations under its own conditions after it has transformed them and made them elements of a divine order. The gnostic soul is the child, but the king-child;* here is the royal and eternal childhood whose toys are the worlds and all universal Nature is the miraculous garden of the play that tires never. The gnosis takes up the condition of divine inertia; but this is no longer the inertia of the subject soul driven by Nature like a fallen leaf in the breath of the Lord. It is the happy passivity bearing an unimaginable intensity of action and Ananda of the Nature-Soul at once driven by the bliss of the mastering Purusha and aware of herself as the supreme Shakti above and around him and mastering and carrying him blissfully on her bosom for ever. This true being of Purusha-Prakriti is as if a flaming Sun and body of divine Light self-carried in its orbit by its own inner consciousness and power at one with the universal, at one with a supreme Transcendence. Its madness is a wise madness of Ananda, the incalculable ecstasy of a supreme consciousness and power vibrating with an infinite sense of freedom and intensity in its divine life-movements. Its action is supra-rational and therefore to the rational mind which has not the key it seems a colossal madness. And yet this that seems madness is a wisdom in action that only baffles the mind by the liberty and richness of its contents and the infinite complexity in fundamental simplicity of its motions, it is the very method of the Lord of the worlds, a thing no intellectual interpretation can fathom, — a dance this also, a whirl of mighty energies, but the Master of the dance holds the hands of His energies and keeps them to the rhythmic order, the self-traced harmonic circles of his Rasa-lila. The gnostic soul is not bound any more than the divine demoniac by the petty conventions and proprieties of the normal human life or the narrow rules through which it makes some shift to accommodate itself with the perplexing dualities of the lower nature and tries to guide its steps among the seeming contradictions of the world, to avoid its numberless stumbling-blocks and to foot with gingerly care around its dangers and pitfalls. The gnostic supramental life is abnormal to us because it is free to all the hardships and audacious delights of a soul dealing fearlessly and even violently with Nature, but yet is it the very normality of the infinite and all governed by the law of the Truth in

*So Heraclitus, "The kingdom is of the child."

its exact unerring process. It obeys the law of a self-possessed Knowledge, Love, Delight in an innumerable Oneness. It seems abnormal only because its rhythm is not measurable by the faltering beats of the mind, but yet it steps in a wonderful and transcendent measure. (C 23: 503-04)

If the Divine has any value, is it not worth some trouble and time and labour to follow after him . . . ?

The whole world knows, spiritual thinker and materialist alike, that the world for the created or naturally evolved being in the ignorance or the inconscience of Nature is neither a bed of roses nor a path of joyous Light. It is a difficult journey, a battle and struggle, an often painful and chequered growth, a life besieged by obscurity, falsehood and suffering. It has its mental, vital, physical joys and pleasures, but these bring only a transient taste — which yet the vital self is unwilling to forego — and they end in distaste, fatigue or disillusionment. What then? To say the Divine does not exist is easy, but it leads nowhere — it leaves you where you are with no prospect or issue — neither Russell nor any materialist can tell you where you are going or even where you ought to go. The Divine does not manifest himself so as to be recognised in the external world-circumstances — admittedly so. These are not the works of an irresponsible autocrat somewhere — they are the circumstances of a working out of Forces according to a certain nature of being, one might say a certain proposition or problem of being into which we have all really consented to enter and co-operate. The work is painful, dubious, its vicissitudes impossible to forecast? There are either of two possibilities then, to get out of it into Nirvana by the Buddhist or the illusionist way or to get inside oneself and find the Divine there since he is not discoverable on the surface. For those who have made the attempt, and there were not a few but hundreds and thousands, have testified through the ages that he is there and that is why there exists the yoga. It takes long? The Divine is concealed behind a thick veil of his Maya and does not answer at once or at any early stage to our call? Or he gives only a glimpse uncertain and passing and then withdraws and waits for us to be ready? But if the Divine has any value, is it not worth some trouble and time and labour to follow after him and must we insist on having him without any training or sacrifice or suffering or trouble? It is surely irrational to make a demand of such a nature. It is positive that we have to get inside, behind the veil to find him; it is only then that we can see him outside and the intellect be not so much convinced as forced to admit his presence by experience — just as when a man sees what he has denied and can no longer deny it. But for that the means must be accepted and the persistence in the will and patience in the labour. (S 22: 163-64)

The Supreme is here in the world

The culmination of the path of knowledge need not necessarily entail extinction of our world-existence. For the Supreme to whom we assimilate ourselves, the Absolute and Transcendent into whom we enter has always the complete and ultimate consciousness for which we are seeking and yet he supports by it his play in the world. Neither are we compelled to believe that our world-existence ends because by attaining to knowledge its object or consummation is fulfilled and therefore there is nothing more for us here afterwards. For what we gain at first with its release and immeasurable silence and quietude is only the eternal self-realisation by the individual in the essence of his conscious being; there will still remain on that foundation, unannulled by the silence, one with the release and freedom, the infinitely proceeding self-fulfilment of Brahman, its dynamic divine manifestation in the individual and by his presence, example and action in others and in the universe at large, — the work which the Great Ones remain to do. Our dynamic self-fulfilment cannot be worked out so long as we remain in the egoistic consciousness, in the mind's candle-lit darkness, in the bondage. Our present limited consciousness can only be a field of preparation, it can consummate nothing; for all that it manifests is marred through and through by an ego-ridden ignorance and error. The true and divine self-fulfilment of Brahman in the manifestation is only possible on the foundation of the Brahman-consciousness and therefore through the acceptance of life by the liberated soul, the Jivanmukta.

This is the integral knowledge; for we know that everywhere and in all conditions all to the eye that sees is One, to a divine experience all is one block of the Divine. It is only the mind which for the temporary convenience of its own thought and aspiration seeks to cut an artificial line of rigid division, a fiction of perpetual incompatibility between one aspect and another of the eternal oneness. The liberated knower lives and acts in the world not less than the bound soul and ignorant mind but more, doing all actions, *sarvakṛt*, only with a true knowledge and a greater conscient power. And by so doing he does not forfeit the supreme unity nor fall from the supreme consciousness and the highest knowledge. For the Supreme, however hidden now to us, is here in the world no less than he could be in the most utter and ineffable self-extinction, the most intolerant Nirvana. (C 23: 298)

The idea of liberation — two sides

For certain ways of thinking liberation is a throwing off of all nature, a silent state of pure being, a nirvana or extinction, a dissolution of the natural existence into some indefinable Absolute, *mokṣa*. But an absorbed and immersed bliss, a wideness of actionless peace, a release of self-extinction or a self-drowning in the Absolute is

not our aim. We shall give to the idea of liberation, *mukti*, only the connotation of that inner change which is common to all experience of this kind, essential to perfection and indispensable to spiritual freedom. We shall find that it then implies always two things, a rejection and an assumption, a negative and a positive side; the negative movement of freedom is a liberation from the principal bonds, the master-knots of the lower soul-nature, the positive side an opening or growth into the higher spiritual existence. (C 24: 674)

The lines of liberation

The Divine attracts the soul of man to him by various lures; all of them are born of its own relative and imperfect conceptions of bliss; all are its ways of seeking for the Ananda, but, if clung to till the end, miss the inexpressible truth of those surpassing felicities. First in order comes the lure of an earthly reward, a prize of material, intellectual, ethical or other joy in the terrestrial mind and body. A second remoter greater version of the same fruitful error is the hope of a heavenly bliss, far exceeding these earthly rewards; the conception of heaven rises in altitude and purity till it reaches the pure idea of the eternal presence of God or an unending union with the Eternal. And last we get the subtlest of all lures, an escape from these worldly or heavenly joys and from all pains and sorrows, effort and trouble and from all phenomenal things, a Nirvana, a self-dissolution in the Absolute, an Ananda of cessation and ineffable peace. In the end all these toys of the mind have to be transcended. The fear of birth and the desire of escape from birth must entirely fall away from us. For, to repeat the ancient language, the soul that has realised oneness has no sorrow or shrinking; the spirit that has entered into the bliss of the Spirit has nought to fear from anyone or anything whatsoever. Fear, desire and sorrow are diseases of the mind; born of its sense of division and limitation, they cease with the falsehood that begot them. The Ananda is free from these maladies; it is not the monopoly of the ascetic, it is not born from the disgust of existence. (C 23: 508)

Action of the liberated soul

Often, we see this desire of personal salvation overcome by another attraction which also belongs to the higher turn of our nature and which indicates the essential character of the action the liberated soul must pursue. It is that which is implied in the great legend of the Amitabha Buddha who turned away when his spirit was on the threshold of Nirvana and took the vow never to cross it while a single being remained in the sorrow and the Ignorance. It is that which underlies the sublime verse of the Bhagavata Purana, "I desire not the supreme state with all its eight siddhis nor the

cessation of rebirth; may I assume the sorrow of all creatures who suffer and enter into them so that they may be made free from grief.” It is that which inspires a remarkable passage in a letter of Swami Vivekananda. “I have lost all wish for my salvation,” wrote the great Vedantin, “may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols.” (C 23: 269-70)

All existence in the world is work

All existence in the world is work, force, potency, and has a dynamic effect in the whole by its mere presence, even the inertia of the clod, even the silence of the immobile Buddha on the verge of Nirvana. There is the question only of the manner of the action, the instruments that are used or that act of themselves, and the spirit and knowledge of the worker. For in reality, no man works, but Nature works through him for the self-expression of a Power within that proceeds from the Infinite. To know that and live in the presence and in the being of the Master of Nature, free from desire and the illusion of personal impulsion, is the one thing needful. That and not the bodily cessation of action is the true release; for the bondage of works at once ceases. A man might sit still and motionless for ever and yet be as much bound to the Ignorance as the animal or the insect. But if he can make this greater consciousness dynamic within him, then all the work of all the worlds could pass through him and yet he would remain at rest, absolute in calm and peace, free from all bondage. Action in the world is given us first as a means for our self-development and self-fulfilment; but even if we reached a last possible divine self-completeness, it would still remain as a means for the fulfilment of the divine intention in the world and of the larger universal self of which each being is a portion — a portion that has come down with it from the Transcendence.

In a certain sense, when his Yoga has reached a certain culmination, works cease for a man; for he has no further personal necessity of works, no sense of works being done by him; but there is no need to flee from action or to take refuge in a blissful inertia. For now he acts as the Divine Existence acts without any binding necessity and without any compelling ignorance. Even in doing works *he* does not work at all; he undertakes no personal initiative. (C 23: 265-66)

The Divine in self and the Divine in Nature

The divine life will give to those who enter into it and possess it an increasing and finally a complete possession of the truth-consciousness and all that it carries in it; it will bring with it the realisation of the Divine in self and the Divine in Nature. All that is sought by the God-seeker will be fulfilled in his spirit and in his life as he moves towards spiritual perfection. He will become aware of the transcendent reality, possess in the self-experience the supreme existence, consciousness, bliss, be one with Sachchidananda. He will become one with cosmic being and universal Nature: he will contain the world in himself, in his own cosmic consciousness and feel himself one with all beings; he will see himself in all and all in himself, become united and identified with the Self which has become all existences. He will perceive the beauty of the All-Beautiful and the miracle of the All-Wonderful; he will enter in the end into the bliss of the Brahman and live abidingly in it and for all this he will not need to shun existence or plunge into the annihilation of the spiritual Person in some self-extinguishing Nirvana. As in the Self, so in Nature, he can realise the Divine. The nature of the Divine is Light and Power and Bliss; he can feel the divine Light and Power and Bliss above him and descending into him, filling every strand of his nature, every cell and atom of his being, flooding his soul and mind and life and body, surrounding him like an illimitable sea and filling the world, suffusing all his feeling and sense and experience, making all his life truly and utterly divine. This and all else that the spiritual consciousness can bring to him the divine life will give him when it reaches its utmost completeness and perfection and the supramental truth-consciousness is fulfilled in all himself; but even before that he can attain to something of it all, grow in it, live in it, once the Supermind has descended upon him and has the direction of his existence. All relations with the Divine will be his: the trinity of God-knowledge, divine works and devotion to God will open within him and move towards an utter self-giving and surrender of his whole being and nature. He will live in God and with God, possess God, as it is said, even plunge in him forgetting all separate personality, but not losing it in self-extinction. The love of God and all the sweetness of love will remain his, the bliss of contact as well as the bliss of oneness and the bliss of difference in oneness. All the infinite ranges of experience of the Infinite will be his and all the joy of the finite in the embrace of the Infinite. (C 13: 563-64)

Ekam evadvitiam

All existence of whatever nature is existence of the One Divine, the Eternal and Infinite.

For not only the Infinite is that existence, but the finite also; not only the existence

of the One, but the existence of the Many, not only the existence of the Unmanifest, but the existence of the manifested universe and of all actual or possible universes, not only the Impersonal, but the Personal, not only the Pure Existence, Consciousness, Bliss of Sachchidananda but all forms of existence or consciousness blissful or unblissful, not only the existence of the Absolute but the existence of all that is relative. There is nothing that is not the existence of the One Divine, the Eternal and Infinite. *Ekam evadvitiam*.

*

There is one Being, infinite, eternal and divine, the sole Reality. All is the [], there is nothing else in the universe or outside the universe. *Ekam evadvitiam*.

This eternity is not of Time; the eternity of Time is an extension in movement of the Timeless.

This infinity is not of Space; the infinity of Space is an extension in self of this spaceless Infinite.

*

All existence is the existence of the Eternal, the Infinite, the Divine, the Ineffable — existence in Time no less than existence in Eternity, existence in the finite no less than existence in the Infinite, of the Many no less than of the One, of the Personal no less than of the Impersonal, of the individual and the cosmos no less than of the supercosmic, of the relative no less than of the Absolute. *Ekam evadvitiam Brahma*.

The Eternal is in his very truth of being Existence, Consciousness and Bliss of existence. These three are a trinity and inseparable — they are not three but one; it is only in a certain play of the Manifestation that they can be distinguished and separated from each other or turned phenomenally into their opposites. What appears to us as Nonexistence (Asat, Nihil or Sunya) is only an existence other than the existence of which we are aware. What appears to us as Inconscience is only a veiled or involved consciousness or else a consciousness to which our mind or sense has no access. What affects us as pain or suffering is only Ananda turned against itself, a distorted and tortured Bliss of existence. These contradictions are real in the Ignorance and because of the Ignorance, but to the true consciousness they are only phenomenal and superficial, not true truths of being. (C 12: 187-88)

* * *

All existence, — as the mind and sense know existence, — is manifestation of an Eternal and Infinite which is to the mind and sense unknowable but not unknowable to its own self-awareness.

Whatever the manifestation spiritual or material or other may be, it has behind it something that is beyond itself, and even if we reached the highest possible heights of manifested existence there would be still beyond that even an Unmanifested from which it came.

The Unmanifested Supreme is beyond all definition and description by mind or speech; no definition the mind can make, affirmative or negative, can be at all expressive of it or adequate.

To the Mind this Unmanifest can present itself as a Self, a supreme Nihil (Tao or Sunya), a featureless Absolute, an Indeterminate, a blissful Nirvana of manifested existence, a Non-Being out of which Being came or a Being of Silence out of which a world-illusion came. But all these are mental formulas expressing the mind's approach to it, not That itself; impressions which fall from That upon the receiving consciousness, not the true essence or nature (swarupa) of the Eternal and Infinite. Even the words Eternal and Infinite are only symbolic expressions through which the mind feels without grasping some vague impression of this Supreme.

If we say of it *neti neti*, this can mean nothing except that nothing in the world or beyond it of which the mind can take cognisance is the Supreme in Its entirety or Its essence. If we say of it *iti iti*, this can mean at the most that what we see of it in the world or beyond is some indication of something that is there beyond and by travelling through all these indications to their absolutes we may get a step or two nearer to the Absolute of all absolutes, the Supreme. Both formulas have a truth in them, but neither touches the secret truth of the Supreme. (C 12: 189-90)

All proceeds from and takes place in the Eternal and Infinite

All existence and all force proceeds from the One Supreme and all works of whatever being or whatever force are movements of the Universal and take place in the Eternal and Infinite. The Supreme is not manifest to our minds encased in matter; numberless superphysical planes separate our terrestrial consciousness from all direct touch of our Source, and there can be no question of an unveiled immediate intimate presence and guidance of that Ineffable. And yet the Divine Consciousness and Force, the everlasting Chitshakti, the original Power, the transcendent and eternal Mother, because she holds the Supreme concealed in her, can put us into some kind of touch with that inexpressible Glory and communicate to us a highest Will and its consequence. This cannot be done through the mind; for the thinking mind can only form some inadequate and quite abstract conception of an Absolute or a supreme Person or an impersonal Principle or Presence. And even the higher mind that experiences returns only a pale reflection of Sachchidananda which it takes for that Ineffable or a vague sense of the Eternal or the Infinite. It cannot lay hold upon That and it cannot enter, for if it tries, either that vanishes from it or itself it disappears in a

featureless trance, extinction, annihilation, void or dissolution, nirvikalpa samadhi, nirvana, vinasha, shunya, laya. But what the mind cannot do, the soul and a great secret Overmind [can.]

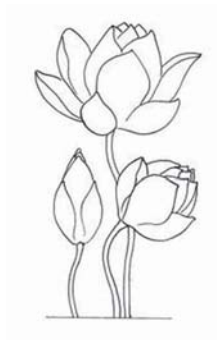
To the earth-mind God does not exist or is only a mental idea, an emotional [] or the Life-mind's projection and self-image[.] (C 12: 198-99)

All is a divine manifestation

When we say that all is a divine manifestation, even that which we call undivine, we mean that in its essentiality all is divine even if the form baffles or repels us. Or, to put it in a formula to which it is easier for our psychological sense of things to give its assent, in all things there is a presence, a primal Reality, — the Self, the Divine, Brahman, — which is for ever pure, perfect, blissful, infinite: its infinity is not affected by the limitations of relative things; its purity is not stained by our sin and evil; its bliss is not touched by our pain and suffering; its perfection is not impaired by our defects of consciousness, knowledge, will, unity. In certain images of the Upanishads the divine Purusha is described as the one Fire which has entered into all forms and shapes itself according to the form, as the one Sun which illumines all impartially and is not affected by the faults of our seeing. But this affirmation is not enough; it leaves the problem unsolved, why that which is in itself ever pure, perfect, blissful, infinite, should not only tolerate but seem to maintain and encourage in its manifestation imperfection and limitation, impurity and suffering and falsehood and evil: it states the duality that constitutes the problem, but does not solve it.

If we simply leave these two dissonant facts of existence standing in each other's presence, we are driven to conclude that there is no reconciliation possible; all we can do is to cling as much as we can to a deepening sense of the joy of the pure and essential Presence and do the best we may with the discordant externality, until we can impose in its place the law of its divine contrary. Or else we have to seek for an escape rather than a solution. For we can say that the inner Presence alone is a Truth and the discordant externality is a falsehood or illusion created by a mysterious principle of Ignorance; our problem is to find some way of escape out of the falsehood of the manifested world into the truth of the hidden Reality. Or we may hold with the Buddhist that there is no need of explanation, since there is this one practical fact of the imperfection and impermanence of things and no Self, Divine or Brahman, for that too is an illusion of our consciousness: the one thing that is necessary for liberation is to get rid of the persistent structure of ideas and persistent energy of action which maintain a continuity in the flux of the impermanence. On this road of escape we achieve self-extinction in Nirvana; the problem of things gets itself extinguished by our own self-extinction. This is a way out, but it does not look like the true and only way, nor are the other solutions altogether

satisfactory. It is a fact that by excluding the discordant manifestation from our inner consciousness as a superficial externality, by insisting only on the pure and perfect Presence, we can achieve individually a deep and blissful sense of this silent Divinity, can enter into the sanctuary, can live in the light and the rapture. An exclusive inner concentration on the Real, the Eternal is possible, even a self-immersion by which we can lose or put away the dissonances of the universe. But there is too somewhere deep down in us the need of a total consciousness, there is in Nature a secret universal seeking for the whole Divine, an impulsion towards some entire awareness and delight and power of existence; this need of a whole being, a total knowledge, this integral will in us is not fully satisfied by these solutions. So long as the world is not divinely explained to us, the Divine remains imperfectly known; for the world too is That and, so long as it is not present to our consciousness and possessed by our powers of consciousness in the sense of the divine being, we are not in possession of the whole Divinity. (C 21: 407-08)



THE WIDE COMPLETENESS OF AN INTEGRAL YOGA

Two necessary lines of progress

It appears at once that there are two necessary lines of progress which we must follow, and the first is to extend the action of the intuition and make it more constant, more persistent and regular and all-embracing until it is so intimate and normal to our being that it can take up all the action now done by the ordinary mind and assume its place in the whole system. This cannot wholly be done so long as the ordinary mind continues to assert its power of independent action and intervention or its habit of seizing on the light of the intuition and manipulating it for its own purposes. The higher mentality cannot be complete or secure so long as the inferior intelligence is able to deform it or even to bring in any of its own intermixture. And either then we must silence altogether the intellect and the intellectual will and the other inferior activities and leave room only for the intuitive action or we must lay hold on and transform the lower action by the constant pressure of the intuition. Or else there must be an alternation and combination of the two methods if that be the most natural way or at all possible. The actual process and experience of Yoga manifests the possibility of several methods or movements none of which by itself produces the entire result in practice, however it may seem at first sight that logically each should or might be adequate. And when we learn to insist on no particular method as exclusively the right one and leave the whole movement to a greater guidance, we find that the divine Lord of the Yoga commissions his Shakti to use one or the other at different times and all in combination according to the need and turn of the being and the nature.

At first it might seem the straight and right way to silence the mind altogether, to silence the intellect, the mental and personal will, the desire mind and the mind of emotion and sensation, and to allow in that perfect silence the Self, the Spirit, the Divine to disclose himself and leave him to illuminate the being by the supramental light and power and Ananda. And this is indeed a great and powerful discipline. It is the calm and still mind much more readily and with a much greater purity than the mind in agitation and action that opens to the Infinite, reflects the Spirit, becomes full of the Self and awaits like a consecrated and purified temple the unveiling of the Lord of all our being and nature. It is true also that the freedom of this silence gives a possibility of a larger play of the intuitive being and admits with less obstruction and turmoil of mental groping and seizing the great intuitions, inspirations, revelations which emerge from within or descend from above. It is therefore an immense gain

if we can acquire the capacity of always being able at will to command an absolute tranquillity and silence of the mind free from any necessity of mental thought or movement and disturbance and, based in that silence, allow thought and will and feeling to happen in us only when the Shakti wills it and when it is needful for the divine purpose. It becomes easier then to change the manner and character of the thought and will and feeling. Nevertheless it is not the fact that by this method the supramental light will immediately replace the lower mind and reflective reason. When the inner action proceeds after the silence, even if it be then a more predominately intuitive thought and movement, the old powers will yet interfere, if not from within, then by a hundred suggestions from without, and an inferior mentality will mix in, will question or obstruct or will try to lay hold on the greater movement and to lower or darken or distort or minimise it in the process. Therefore the necessity of a process of elimination or transformation of the inferior mentality remains always imperative, — or perhaps both at once, an elimination of all that is native to the lower being, its disfiguring accidents, its depreciations of value, its distortions of substance and all else that the greater truth cannot harbour, and a transformation of the essential things our mind derives from the supermind and spirit but represents in the manner of the mental ignorance.

A second movement is one which comes naturally to those who commence the Yoga with the initiative that is proper to the way of Bhakti. It is natural to them to reject the intellect and its action and to listen for the voice, wait for the impulsion or the command, the *ādeśa*, obey only the idea and will and power of the Lord within them, the divine Self and Purusha in the heart of the creature, *īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām ḥṛddeśe*. This is a movement which must tend more and more to intuitivise the whole nature, for the ideas, the will, the impulsions, the feelings which come from the secret Purusha in the heart are of the direct intuitive character. This method is consonant with a certain truth of our nature. The secret Self within us is an intuitive self and this intuitive self is seated in every centre of our being, the physical, the nervous, the emotional, the volitional, the conceptual or cognitive and the higher more directly spiritual centres. And in each part of our being it exercises a secret intuitive initiation of our activities which is received and represented imperfectly by our outer mind and converted into the movements of the ignorance in the external action of these parts of our nature. The heart or emotional centre of the thinking desire mind is the strongest in the ordinary man, gathers up or at least affects the presentation of things to the consciousness and is the capital of the system. It is from there that the Lord seated in the heart of all creatures turns them mounted on the machine of Nature by the Maya of the mental ignorance. It is possible then by referring back all the initiation of our action to this secret intuitive Self and Spirit, the ever-present Godhead within us, and replacing by its influences the initiations of our personal and mental nature to get back from the inferior external thought and action to another, internal and intuitive, of a highly spiritualised character. Never-

theless the result of this movement cannot be complete, because the heart is not the highest centre of our being, is not supramental nor directly moved from the supramental sources. An intuitive thought and action directed from it may be very luminous and intense but is likely to be limited, even narrow in its intensity, mixed with a lower emotional action and at the best excited and troubled, rendered unbalanced or exaggerated by a miraculous or abnormal character in its action or at least in many of its accompaniments which is injurious to the harmonised perfection of the being. The aim of our effort at perfection must be to make the spiritual and supramental action no longer a miracle, even if a frequent or constant miracle, or only a luminous intervention of a greater than our natural power, but normal to the being and the very nature and law of all its process.

The highest organised centre of our embodied being and of its action in the body is the supreme mental centre figured by the yogic symbol of the thousand-petalled lotus, *sahasradala*, and it is at its top and summit that there is the direct communication with the supramental levels. It is then possible to adopt a different and a more direct method, not to refer all our thought and action to the Lord secret in the heart-lotus but to the veiled truth of the Divinity above the mind and to receive all by a sort of descent from above, a descent of which we become not only spiritually but physically conscious. The siddhi or full accomplishment of this movement can only come when we are able to lift the centre of thought and conscious action above the physical brain and feel it going on in the subtle body. If we can feel ourselves thinking no longer with the brain but from above and outside the head in the subtle body, that is a sure physical sign of a release from the limitations of the physical mind, and though this will not be complete at once nor of itself bring the supramental action, for the subtle body is mental and not supramental, still it is a subtle and pure mentality and makes an easier communication with the supramental centres. The lower movements must still come, but it is then found easier to arrive at a swift and subtle discrimination telling us at once the difference, distinguishing the intuitional thought from the lower intellectual mixture, separating it from its mental coatings, rejecting the mere rapidities of the mind which imitate the form of the intuition without being of its true substance. It will be easier to discern rapidly the higher planes of the true supramental being and call down their power to effect the desired transformation and to refer all the lower action to the superior power and light that it may reject and eliminate, purify and transform and select among them its right material for the Truth that has to be organised within us. This opening up of a higher level and of higher and higher planes of it and the consequent re-formation of our whole consciousness and its action into their mould and into the substance of their power and luminous capacity is found in practice to be the greater part of the natural method used by the divine Shakti.

A fourth method is one which suggests itself naturally to the developed intelligence and suits the thinking man. This is to develop our intellect instead of

eliminating it, but with the will not to cherish its limitations, but to heighten its capacity, light, intensity, degree and force of activity until it borders on the thing that transcends it and can easily be taken up and transformed into that higher conscious action. This movement also is founded on the truth of our nature and enters into the course and movement of the complete Yoga of self-perfection. That course, as I have described it, included a heightening and greatening of the action of our natural instruments and powers till they constitute in their purity and essential completeness a preparatory perfection of the present normal movement of the Shakti that acts in us. The reason and intelligent will, the buddhi, is the greatest of these powers and instruments, the natural leader of the rest in the developed human being, the most capable of aiding the development of the others. The ordinary activities of our nature are all of them of use for the greater perfection we seek, are meant to be turned into material for them, and the greater their development, the richer the preparation for the supramental action.

The intellectual being too has to be taken up by the Shakti in the Yoga and raised to its fullest and its most heightened powers. The subsequent transformation of the intellect is possible because all the action of the intellect derives secretly from the supermind, each thought and will contains some truth of it however limited and altered by the inferior action of the intelligence. The transformation can be brought about by the removal of the limitation and the elimination of the distorting or perverting element. This however cannot be done by the heightening and greatening of the intellectual activity alone; for that must always be limited by the original inherent defects of the mental intelligence. An intervention of the supramental energy is needed that can light up and get rid of its deficiencies of thought and will and feeling. This intervention too cannot be completely effective unless the supramental plane is manifested and acts above the mind no longer from behind a lid or veil, however thin the veil may have grown, but more constantly in an open and luminous action till there is seen the full sun of Truth with no cloud to moderate its splendour. It is not necessary, either, to develop the intellect fully in its separateness before calling down this intervention or opening up by it the supramental levels. The intervention may come in earlier and at once develop the intellectual action and turn it, as it develops, into the higher intuitive form and substance.

The widest natural action of the Shakti combines all these methods. It creates, sometimes at first, sometimes at some later, perhaps latest stage, the freedom of the spiritual silence. (C 24: 802-07)

Elements in most yogas enter into this one

There are elements in most yogas which enter into this one, so it is not surprising if there is something in Buddhism also. But such notions as a Higher Evolution beyond

Nirvana seem to me not genuinely Buddhistic, unless of course there is some offshoot of Buddhism which developed something so interpreted by the author. I never heard of it as part of Buddha's teachings — he always spoke of Nirvana as the goal and refused to discuss metaphysically what it might be. (S 22: 68-69)

Difference between this and old Yogas

The difference between this and the old Yogas is not that they are incompetent and cannot do these things — they can do them perfectly well — but that they proceed from realisation of self to Nirvana or some Heaven and abandon life, while this does not abandon life. The supramental is necessary for the transformation of terrestrial life and being, not for reaching the self. One must realise self first — only afterwards can one realise the supermind. (C 35: 305)

A certain kind of Nirvana is necessary even for our Yoga

Disciple: Can one be free if one acts without feeling responsibility?

Sri Aurobindo: You can't get rid of responsibility like that. Even though you may say you are not responsible, you will feel internally that you are responsible.

You must become free if you want to be free from responsibility. There are three ways, or rather several ways, of attaining that freedom. One is by the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and realising it as free from it. Another is by realising the Self, the Atman or the Spirit, free from the cosmic movement. A third is by the identification with the Transcendent — by realising the Paramatman. You can also have this freedom by merging into the Shunyam through the Buddhistic discipline.

Disciple: In the experience of the first two methods does the Purusha remain the witness?

Sri Aurobindo: Not necessarily. It may be a witness in the first method because the Purusha separates himself from Prakriti and is then the witness not taking part in her action.

But in the second — the realisation of the Self — the Purusha need not be the witness of the universe, or the universal movement. The Self may remain ingathered without witnessing anything. There are many conditions into which the spirit can pass.

A certain kind of Nirvana is necessary even for our Yoga. That is to say, the world must become, in a way, nothing to you, because as it is constituted it is the work of ignorance. Then only can you enter into and bring into existence the true creation, the world of Truth or Light here.

Disciple: When the Gita says: "You will find the Self in all and all in the Self

and then in Me” — what Self does it speak of?

Sri Aurobindo: It is the Brahmic Consciousness. That is to say, you see one Consciousness in all and all contained in the One Self; and then you rise above to the realisation of the One that is both personal and impersonal and is above both.

Disciple: Is it true that men with a spiritual bent are born with Adhikara for it?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes.

Disciple: Can one acquire Adhikara? That is to say, if one has not the Adhikara at first, can one get it by some means?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, a man *can* acquire Adhikara. That is what we mean when we say “He is not ready”; and when we say “He can prepare himself” it means he can get the Adhikara.

Disciple: A man can also acquire Adhikara by keeping the company of saints?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, of course. (E: 667)

“Our yoga for the sake of the Divine”

As to the extract about Vivekananda,* the point I make there does not seem to me humanitarian. You will see that I emphasise there the last sentences of the page quoted from Vivekananda, not the words about God the poor and sinner and criminal. The point is about the Divine in the world, the All, *sarva-bhūtāni* of the Gita. That is not merely humanity, still less, only the poor or the wicked; surely, even the rich or the good are the part of the All and those also who are neither good nor bad nor rich nor poor. Nor is there any question (I mean in my own remarks) of philanthropic service; so neither *daridrer sevā* is the point. I had formerly not the humanitarian but the humanity view — and something of it may have stuck to my expressions in the *Arya*. But I had already altered my viewpoint from the “Our yoga for the sake of humanity” to “Our yoga for the sake of the Divine”. The Divine includes not only the supracosmic but the cosmic and the individual — not only Nirvana or the Beyond but Life and the All. It is that I stress everywhere. (S 22: 149)

*“I have lost all wish for my salvation, may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols.” (From a letter of Swami Vivekananda; quoted by Sri Aurobindo in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Centenary Edition, 1972, pp. 257-58.)

An explanation

The passage* in *The Yoga and its Objects* is written from the point of view of the spiritualised mind approaching the supreme Truth directly, without passing through the supermind or disappearing into it. The mind spiritualises itself by shedding all its own activities and formations and reducing everything to a pure Existence, *sad-ātman*, from which all things and activities proceed and which supports everything. When it wants to go still beyond, it negates yet further and arrives at an *asat*, which is the negation of all this existence and yet something inconceivable to mind, speech or defining experience. It is the silent Unknowable, the Turiya or featureless and relationless Absolute of the monistic Vedantins, the Shunyam of the nihilistic Buddhists, the Tao or omnipresent and transcendent Nihil of the Chinese, the indefinable and ineffable Permanent of the Mahayana. Many Christian mystics also speak of the necessity of a complete ignorance in order to get the supreme experience and speak too of the divine Darkness — they mean the shedding of all mental knowledge, making a blank of the mind and engulfing it in the Unmanifest, the *param avyaktam*. All this is the mind's way of approaching the Supreme — for beyond the *avyaktam*, *tamasah parastāt*, is the Supreme, the Purushottama of the Gita, the Para Purusha of the Upanishads. It is *ādityavarṇa* in contrast to the darkness of the Unmanifest; it is a metaphor, but not a mere metaphor, for it is a symbol also, a symbol visually seen by the *sūkṣma dr̥ṣṭi*, the subtle vision, and not merely a symbol, but, as one might say, a fact of spiritual experience. The sun in the yoga is the symbol of the supermind and the supermind is the first power of the Supreme which one meets across the border where the experience of spiritualised mind ceases and the unmodified divine Consciousness begins the domain of the supreme Nature, *parā prakṛti*. It is that Light of which the Vedic mystics got a glimpse and it is the opposite of the intervening darkness of the Christian mystics, for the supermind is all light and no darkness. To the mind the Supreme is *avyaktāt param avyaktam* but if we follow the line leading to the supermind, it is an increasing affirmation rather than an increasing negation through which we move.

Light is always seen in yoga with the inner eye, even with the outer eye, but there are many lights; all are not and all do not come from the supreme Light, *param jyotiḥ*. (S 22: 64-65)

*“For behind the *sad ātman* is the silence of the *asat* which the Buddhist Nihilists realised as the *śūnyam* and beyond that silence is the *parātpara puruṣa* (*puruṣo vareṇya ādityavarṇas tamasaḥ parastāt*).” Sri Aurobindo, *The Yoga and its Objects* (1968 Edition, pp. 12-13).

Newness of this yoga

It is new as compared with the old yogas:

1. Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into Heaven or Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent — the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even the Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the divine fulfilment of life. . . . (S 22: 100)

Nirvana — a beginning

In our yoga the Nirvana is the beginning of the higher Truth, as it is the passage from the Ignorance to the higher Truth. The Ignorance has to be extinguished in order that the Truth may manifest. (S 22: 59)

Nirvana — only a stage or passage

I don't think I have written, but I said once that souls which have passed into Nirvana may (not "must") return to complete the larger upward curve. I have written somewhere, I think, that for this yoga (it might also be added, in the natural complete order of the manifestation) the experience of Nirvana can only be a stage or passage to the complete realisation. I have said also that there are many doors by which one can pass into the realisation of the Absolute (Parabrahman), and Nirvana is one of them, but by no means the only one. You may remember Ramakrishna's saying that the Jivakoti can ascend the stairs, but not return, while the Ishwarakoti can ascend and descend at will. If that is so, the Jivakoti might be those who describe only the curve from Matter through Mind into the silent Brahman and the Ishwarakoti those who get to the integral Reality and can therefore combine the Ascent with the Descent and contain the "two ends" of existence in their single being. (S 22: 59)

Nirvana — not the aim here

The idea that all sadhaks must be aloof from each other and at daggers drawn is itself a preconceived idea that must be abandoned. Harmony and not strife is the

law of yogic living. This preconceived idea arises perhaps from the old notion of Nirvana as the aim; but Nirvana is not the aim here. The aim here is fulfilment of the Divine in life and for that, union and solidarity are indispensable.

The ideal of the yoga is that all should be centred in and around the Divine and the life of the sadhaks must be founded on that firm foundation, their personal relations also should have the Divine for their centre. . . .

That is the ideal, but as for the way of attainment, it may differ for different people. (S 23: 803-04)

“Nirvana is not the aim of my Yoga”

It seems to be some *tamas* or inertia coming down on the system. It is sometimes like that when the vital gets dissatisfied with the conditions or with what has been attained and initiates a sort of non-co-operation or passive resistance, saying, “As I am not satisfied, I won’t take interest in anything or help you to do anything.”

It may be because I asked to stop meditating and to wait. The vital does not like waiting. But I had to tell you that because of the burning of the centres, the disturbance of sleep and the rest — these must go before you can meditate in the right way and with success. If you meditate at all now, it should be only in calm and peace with a very quiet aspiration for the divine calm and peace to descend into you.

It is also perhaps due to your *penchant* for Nirvana. For the desire of Nirvana easily brings this kind of collapse of the energies. Nirvana is not the aim of my Yoga — but whether for Nirvana or for this yoga, calm and peace in the whole being are the necessary foundation of all *siddhi*. (S 24: 1301-02)

Nirvana — a passage

Disciple: What about the work for humanity?

Sri Aurobindo: We are not concerned with that at all primarily. What one puts forth generally outside in the form of action is what one internally is. Our first aim is not to work for humanity in the current sense of the term, but to found life on a Higher Consciousness than the present ignorant and limited consciousness of Mind, Life and Body. At present, man — I mean the average man — is physical and vital in his nature, using mind for satisfying his vital being. We want to leave mind — and intellect — behind and find a Higher Consciousness. You may call it Nirvana, Passive Brahman, Sachchidananda or Higher Power or any other name.

So, our first task is to find God and base life on that consciousness. In that process what is necessary for humanity will naturally be done. But that is not our

direct aim. Ours is a tremendous task. It is an adventure in which one must be prepared to leave behind his desires and passions, intellectual preferences and mental constructions in order to enable the Higher Power to do its work. You have to see whether you can give your consent to the radical transformation that is inevitable.

(E : 37)

The realisation of this yoga

The realisation of this yoga is not lower but higher than Nirvana or Nirvikalpa Samadhi. (S 22: 59)

The wide completeness of an integral Yoga

In a Yoga lived entirely on the spiritualised mental plane it is possible and even usual for these three fundamental aspects of the Divine — the Individual or Immanent, the Cosmic and the Transcendent — to stand out as separate realisations. Each by itself then appears sufficient to satisfy the yearning of the seeker. Alone with the personal Divine in the inner heart's illumined secret chamber, he can build his being into the Beloved's image and ascend out of fallen Nature to dwell with him in some heaven of the Spirit. Absolved in the cosmic wideness, released from ego, his personality reduced to a point of working of the universal Force, himself calm, liberated, deathless in universality, motionless in the Witness Self even while outspread without limit in unending Space and Time, he can enjoy in the world the freedom of the Timeless. One-pointed towards some ineffable Transcendence, casting away his personality, shedding from him the labour and trouble of the universal Dynamis, he can escape into an inexpressible Nirvana, annul all things in an intolerant exaltation of flight into the Incommunicable.

But none of these achievements is enough for one who seeks the wide completeness of an integral Yoga. An individual salvation is not enough for him; for he finds himself opening to a cosmic consciousness which far exceeds by its breadth and vastness the narrower intensity of a limited individual fulfilment, and its call is imperative; driven by that immense compulsion, he must break through all separative boundaries, spread himself in world-Nature, contain the universe. Above too, there is urgent upon him a dynamic realisation pressing from the Supreme upon this world of beings, and only some encompassing and exceeding of the cosmic consciousness can release into manifestation here that yet unlavished splendour. But the cosmic consciousness too is not sufficient; for it is not all the Divine Reality, not integral. There is a divine secret behind personality that he must discover; there, waiting in it to be delivered here into Time, stands the mystery of the embodiment

of the Transcendence. In the cosmic consciousness there remains at the end a hiatus, an unequal equation of a highest Knowledge that can liberate but not effectuate with a Power seeming to use a limited Knowledge or masking itself with a surface Ignorance that can create but creates imperfection or a perfection transient, limited and in fetters. On one side there is a free undynamic Witness and on the other side a bound Executrix of action who has not been given all the means of action. The reconciliation of these companions and opposites seems to be reserved, postponed, held back in an Unmanifest still beyond us. But, again, a mere escape into some absolute Transcendence leaves personality unfulfilled and the universal action inconclusive and cannot satisfy the integral seeker. He feels that the Truth that is for ever is a Power that creates as well as a stable Existence; it is not a Power solely of illusory or ignorant manifestation. The eternal Truth can manifest its truths in Time; it can create in Knowledge and not only in Inconscience and Ignorance. A divine Descent no less than an ascent to the Divine is possible; there is a prospect of the bringing down of a future perfection and a present deliverance. As his knowledge widens, it becomes for him more and more evident that it was this for which the Master of Works cast down the soul within him here as a spark of his fire into the darkness, that it might grow there into a centre of the Light that is for ever.

(C 23: 258-59)

The Ashram and the Nirvana aim

Even in the Ashram there are extremely few who have reached or tried to reach even up to the Nirvana level. Even to reach Nirvana one has to give up desire, duality and ego and establish a certain amount of equanimity and peace. Could it be said that a sufficient number of Sadhaks in the Ashram have succeeded in doing so? At least everybody must be making some effort to do this. Why then are they not successful? Is it that after some time they forget the aim and live here as in ordinary life?

I suppose if the Nirvana aim had been put before them, more would have been fit for it, for the Nirvana aim is easier than the one we have put before us — and they would not have found it so difficult to reach the standard. The sadhaks here are of all kinds and in all stages. But the real difficulty even for those who have progressed is with the external man. Even among those who follow the old ideal, the external man of the sadhak remains almost the same even after they have attained to something. The inner being gets free, the outer follows still its fixed nature. Our Yoga can succeed only if the external man too changes, but that is the most difficult of all things. It is only by a change of the physical nature that it can be done, by a descent of the highest light into this lowest part of Nature. It is here that the struggle

is going on. The internal being of most of the sadhaks here, however imperfect still, is still different from that of the ordinary man, but the external still clings to its old ways, manners, habits. Many do not seem even to have awakened to the necessity of a change. It is when this is realised and done, that the Yoga will produce its full results in the Asram itself, and not before. (C 35: 590-91)

Nirvana business — a most difficult job

All authorities assure us that the exclusive Nirvana business is a most difficult job (*duḥkham dehavadbhiḥ*, says the Gita), and your own attempt at suppressing the others [*the many personalities in the disciple*] was not encouraging, — according to your own account it left you as dry and desperate as a sucked orange, no juice left anywhere. If the desert is your way to the promised land, that does not matter. But — well, if it is not, then there is another way — it is what we call the integration, the harmonisation of the being. That cannot be done from outside, it cannot be done by the mind and vital being — they are sure to bungle their affair. It can be done only from within by the soul, the Spirit which is the centraliser, itself the centre of these radii. In all of them there is a truth that can harmonise with the true truth of the others. For there is a truth in Nirvana — Nirvana is nothing but the peace and freedom of the Spirit which can exist in itself, be there world or no world, world-order or world-disorder. Bhakti and the heart's call for the Divine have a truth — it is the truth of the divine Love and Ananda. The will for Tapasya has in it a truth — it is the truth of the Spirit's mastery over its members. The musician and poet stand for a truth, it is the truth of the expression of the Spirit through beauty. There is a truth behind the mental affirmer; even there is a truth behind the mental doubter, the Russellian, though far behind him — the truth of the denial of false forms. Even behind the two vital personalities there is a truth, the truth of the possession of the inner and outer worlds not by the ego but by the Divine. That is the harmonisation for which our yoga stands — but it cannot be achieved by any outward arrangement, it can only be achieved by going inside and looking, willing and acting from the psychic and from the spiritual centre. For the truth of the being is there and the secret of Harmony also is there. (S 22: 53-54)

Personality and the Impersonal — solution of the riddle of existence

. . . it is behind the mystery of the presence of personality in an apparently impersonal universe — as in that of consciousness manifesting out of the Inconscient, life out of the inanimate, soul out of brute Matter — that is hidden the solution of the riddle of existence. Here again is another dynamic Duality more pervading than appears

at first view and deeply necessary to the play of the slowly self-revealing Power. It is possible for the seeker in his spiritual experience, standing at one pole of the Duality, to follow Mind in seeing a fundamental Impersonality everywhere. The evolving soul in the material world begins from a vast impersonal Inconscience in which our inner sight yet perceives the presence of a veiled infinite Spirit; it proceeds with the emergence of a precarious consciousness and personality that even at their fullest have the look of an episode, but an episode that repeats itself in a constant series; it arises through experience of life out of mind into an infinite, impersonal and absolute Superconscience in which personality, mind-consciousness, life-consciousness seem all to disappear by a liberating annihilation, Nirvana. At a lower pitch he still experiences this fundamental impersonality as an immense liberating force everywhere. It releases his knowledge from the narrowness of personal mind, his will from the clutch of personal desire, his heart from the bondage of petty mutable emotions, his life from its petty personal groove, his soul from ego, and it allows them to embrace calm, equality, wideness, universality, infinity. A Yoga of works would seem to require Personality as its mainstay, almost its source, but here too the impersonal is found to be the most direct liberating force; it is through a wide egoless impersonality that one can become a free worker and a divine creator. It is not surprising that the overwhelming power of this experience from the impersonal pole of the Duality should have moved the sages to declare this to be the one way and an impersonal Superconscience to be the sole truth of the Eternal.

But still to the seeker standing at the opposite pole of the Duality another line of experience appears which justifies an intuition deeply-seated behind the heart and in our very life-force, that personality, like consciousness, life, soul, is not a brief-lived stranger in an impersonal Eternity, but contains the very meaning of existence. This fine flower of the cosmic Energy carries in it a forecast of the aim and a hint of the very motive of the universal labour. As an occult vision opens in him, he becomes aware of worlds behind in which consciousness and personality hold an enormous place and assume a premier value; even here in the material world to this occult vision the inconscience of Matter fills with a secret pervading consciousness, its inanimation harbours a vibrant life, its mechanism is the device of an indwelling Intelligence, God and soul are everywhere. Above all stands an infinite conscious Being who is variously self-expressed in all these worlds; impersonality is only a first means of that expression. It is a field of principles and forces, an equal basis of manifestation; but these forces express themselves through beings, have conscious spirits at their head and are the emanation of a One Conscious Being who is their source. A multiple innumerable personality expressing that One is the very sense and central aim of the manifestation and if now personality seems to be narrow, fragmentary, restrictive, it is only because it has not opened to its source or flowered into its own divine truth and fullness packing itself with the universal and the infinite. Thus the world-creation is no more an illusion, a fortuitous

mechanism, a play that need not have happened, a flux without consequence; it is an intimate dynamism of the conscious and living Eternal.

This extreme opposition of view from the two poles of one Existence creates no fundamental difficulty for the seeker of the integral Yoga; for his whole experience has shown him the necessity of these double terms and their currents of Energy, negative and positive in relation to each other, for the manifestation of what is within the one Existence. For himself Personality and Impersonality have been the two wings of his spiritual ascension and he has the prevision that he will reach a height where their helpful interaction will pass into a fusion of their powers and disclose the integral Reality and release into action the original force of the Divine. Not only in the fundamental Aspects but in all the working of his sadhana he has felt their double truth and mutually complementary working. An impersonal Presence has dominated from above or penetrated and occupied his nature; a Light descending has suffused his mind, life-power, the very cells of his body, illumined them with knowledge, revealed him to himself down to his most disguised and unsuspected movements, exposing, purifying, destroying or brilliantly changing all that belonged to the Ignorance. A Force has poured into him in currents or like a sea, worked in his being and all its members, dissolved, new-made, reshaped, transfigured everywhere. A Bliss has invaded him and shown that it can make suffering and sorrow impossible and turn pain itself into divine pleasure. A Love without limits has joined him to all creatures or revealed to him a world of inseparable intimacy and unspeakable sweetness and beauty and begun to impose its law of perfection and its ecstasy even amidst the disharmony of terrestrial life. A spiritual Truth and Right have convicted the good and evil of this world of imperfection or of falsehood and unveiled a supreme good and its clue of subtle harmony and its sublimation of action and feeling and knowledge. But behind all these and in them he has felt a Divinity who is all these things, a Bringer of Light, a Guide and All-Knower, a Master of Force, a Giver of Bliss, Friend, Helper, Father, Mother, Playmate in the world-game, an absolute Master of his being, his soul's Beloved and Lover. All relations known to human personality are there in the soul's contact with the Divine; but they rise towards superhuman levels and compel him towards a divine nature.

(C 23: 126-29)

The foundation of a new consciousness on earth

What we are doing, if and when we succeed, will be a beginning, not a completion. It is the foundation of a new consciousness on earth — a consciousness with infinite possibilities of manifestation. The eternal progression is in the manifestation and beyond it there is no progression.

If the redemption of the soul from the physical vesture be the object, then there

is no need of supramentalisation. Spiritual Mukti and Nirvana are sufficient. If the object is to rise to supraphysical planes, then also there is no need of supramentalisation. One can enter into some heaven above by devotion to the Lord of that heaven. But that is no progression. The other worlds are typical worlds, each fixed in its own kind and type and law. Evolution takes place on the earth and therefore the earth is the proper field for progression. The beings of the other worlds do not progress from one world to another. They remain fixed to their own type.

The purely monistic Vedantist says, all is Brahman, life is a dream, an unreality, only Brahman exists. One has Nirvana or Mukti, then one lives only till the body falls — after that there is no such thing as life.

They do not believe in transformation, because mind, life and body are an ignorance, an illusion — the only reality is the featureless relationless Self or Brahman. Life is a thing of relations; in the pure Self, all life and relations disappear. What would be the use or the possibility of transforming an illusion that can never be anything else (however transformed) than an illusion? There is no such thing for them as a “Nirvanic life”.

It is only some yogas that aim at a transformation of any kind except that of ignorance into knowledge. The idea varies, — sometimes a divine knowledge or power or else a divine purity or an ethical perfection or a divine love.

What has to be overcome is the opposition of the Ignorance that does not want the transformation of the nature. If that can be overcome, then old spiritual ideas will not form an obstacle.

It is not intended to supramentalise humanity at large, but to establish the principle of the supramental consciousness in the earth-evolution. If that is done, all that is needed will be evolved by the supramental Power itself. It is not therefore important that the mission should be widespread. What is important is that the thing should be done at all in however small a number; that is the only difficulty.

If the transformation of the body is complete, that means no subjection to death — it does not mean that one will be bound to keep the same body for all time. One creates a new body for oneself when one wants to change, but how it will be done cannot be said now. The present method is by physical birth — some occultists suppose that a time will come when that will not be necessary — but the question must be left for the supramental evolution to decide.

The questions about the supermind cannot be answered profitably now. Supermind cannot be described in terms that the mind will understand, because the terms will be mental and mind will understand them in a mental way and mental sense and miss their true import. It would therefore be a waste of time and energy which should be devoted to the preliminary work — psychicisation and spiritualisation of the being and nature without which no supramentalisation is possible. Let the whole dynamic nature led by the psychic make itself full of the dynamic spiritual light, peace, purity, knowledge, force; let it afterwards get experience of the intermediate

spiritual planes and know, feel and act in their sense; then it will be possible to speak last of the supramental transformation. (S 22: 10-12)

“I have not written the history of my sadhana . . .”

If the Supramental Divine himself differentiates between work and concentration and finds it difficult to radiate his force among the few sadhaks contemporaneously with his work of correspondence, etc., what about undivines and inframentals like us?

Between concentration on correspondence alone and the full many-sided work — not between work and correspondence.

It does not mean that I lose the higher consciousness while doing the work of correspondence. If I did that, I would not only not be supramental, but would be very far even from the full Yogic consciousness.

[Sri Aurobindo underlined the phrase “contemporaneously with his work of correspondence” and commented:]

Say “by correspondence alone”. If I have to help somebody to repel an attack, I can’t do it by only writing a note. I have to send him some Force or else concentrate and do the work for him. Also I can’t bring down the Supramental by merely writing neatly to people about it. I am not asking for leisure to meditate at ease at a blissful indolence. I said distinctly I wanted it for concentration on other more important work than correspondence.

The ignorance underlying this attitude is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between works and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have been declaring all along an Integral Yoga in which Knowledge, Bhakti, works — light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works — meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the Arya all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge — both are equal.

Another thing — it is a mistake to argue from one’s own very limited experience, ignoring that of others, and build on it large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through work and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them — elsewhere and here too in

the Asram? That has no value? You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time tonight.

Do not conclude however that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really when I am told that my own case disproves my whole spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible. (N: 79-80)

A difficult yoga

This yoga is certainly difficult, but is any yoga really easy? You speak of the lure of liberation into the extra-cosmic Absolute, but how many who set out on the Path of Nirvana attain to it in this life or without a long, strenuous and difficult endeavour? Which of the paths has not to pass through the dry desert in order to reach the promised land? Even the path of Bhakti which is said to be the easiest is full of the lamentations of the bhaktas complaining that they call but the Beloved eludes their grasp, the place of meeting is prepared but even now Krishna does not come. Even if there is the joy of a brief glimpse or the passion of *milana*, it is followed by long periods of *viraha*. It is a mistake to think that any path of yoga is facile, that any is a royal road or short cut to the Divine, or that there can be, like a system of “French made easy” or “French without tears”, also a system of “yoga made easy” or “yoga without tears”. A few great souls prepared by past lives or otherwise lifted beyond the ordinary spiritual capacity may attain realisation more swiftly; some may have uplifting experiences at an early stage, but for most the *siddhi* of the path, whatever it is, must be the end of a long, difficult and persevering endeavour. One cannot have the crown of spiritual victory without the struggle or reach the heights without the ascent and its labour. Of all it can be said, “Difficult is that road hard to tread like the edge of a razor.”

(S 24: 1629-30)

Technique of a world-changing yoga

What is a perfect technique of yoga or rather of a world-changing or Nature-changing yoga? Not one that takes a man by a little bit of him somewhere, attaches a hook, and pulls him up by a pulley into Nirvana or Paradise. The technique of a world-

changing yoga has to be as multiform, sinuous, patient, all-including as the world itself. If it does not deal with all the difficulties or possibilities and carefully deal with each necessary element, has it any chance of success? And can a perfect technique which everybody can understand do that? It is not like writing a small poem in a fixed metre with a limited number of modulations. If you take the poem simile, it is the Mahabharata of a Mahabharata that has to be done. And what, compared with the limited Greek perfection, is the technique of the Mahabharata? (S 22: 12)

Our object is a spiritual change

I do not know that any except a very few great yogis have really changed their outer nature. In all the Ashrams I have seen people were just as others except for certain specific moral controls put on certain kinds of outer action (food, sex etc.), but the general nature was the human nature (as in the story of Narad and Janaka). It is even a theory of the old yogas that the *prārabdha karma* and therefore necessarily the permanent elements of the external character do not change — only one gets the inner realisation and separates oneself from it so that it drops off at death like a soiled robe and leaves the spirit free to enter into Nirvana. Our object is a spiritual change and not merely an ethical control, but this can only come first by a spiritual rejection from within and then by a supramental descent from above. (S 22: 96)

This yoga and the new birth

The soul, the psychic being is in direct touch with the divine Truth, but it is hidden in man by the mind, the vital being and the physical nature. One may practice yoga and get illuminations in the mind and the reason; one may conquer power and luxuriate in all kinds of experiences in the vital; one may establish even surprising physical Siddhis; but if the true soul-power behind does not manifest, if the psychic nature does not come into the front, nothing genuine has been done. In this yoga the psychic being is that which opens the rest of the nature to the true supramental light and finally to the supreme Ananda. Mind can open by itself to its own higher reaches; it can still itself and widen into the Impersonal; it may too spiritualise itself in some kind of static liberation or Nirvana; but the supramental cannot find a sufficient base in a spiritualised mind alone. If the inmost soul is awakened, if there is a new birth out of the mere mental, vital and physical into the psychic consciousness, then this yoga can be done; otherwise (by the sole power of the mind or any other part) it is impossible. . . . If there is a refusal of the psychic new birth, a refusal to become the child new born from the Mother, owing to attachment to intellectual

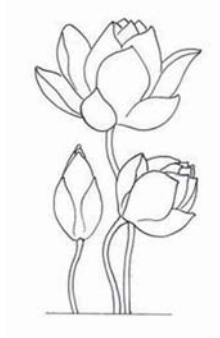
knowledge or mental ideas or to some vital desire, then there will be a failure in the sadhana. (S 24: 1095-96)

The sadhak of the integral yoga

The sadhak of integral yoga who stops short at the Impersonal is no longer a sadhak of integral yoga. Impersonal realisation is the realisation of the silent Self, of the pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in itself without any perception of an Existent, Conscient, Blissful. It leads therefore to Nirvana. In the integral knowledge the realisation of the Self and of the impersonal Sachchidananda is only a step, though a very important step, or part of the integral knowledge. It is a beginning, not an end of the highest realisation. (S 22: 107-08)

Ascent accompanied by Descent

What the psychic realisation does bring is a psychic change of the nature purifying it and turning it altogether towards the Divine. After that or along with it comes the realisation of the cosmic Self. It is these two things that the old Yogas encompassed and through them they passed to Moksha, Nirvana or the departure into some kind of celestial transcendence. The Yoga practised here includes both liberation and transcendence, but it takes liberation or even a certain Nirvana, if that comes, as a first step and not as the last step of its siddhi. Whatever exit to or towards the Transcendent it achieves is an ascent accompanied by a descent of the power, light, consciousness that has been achieved and it is by such descents that is to be achieved the spiritual and supramental transformation here. (C 35: 172)



NIRVANA AND THE ALL NEGATING ABSOLUTE

(From *Savitri* — Book Seven, Canto Six)

Aloof and standing back detached and calm,
A witness of the drama of herself,
A student of her own interior scene,
She watched the passion and the toil of life
And heard in the crowded thoroughfares of mind
The unceasing tread and passage of her thoughts.
All she allowed to rise that chose to stir;
Calling, compelling nought, forbidding nought,
She left all to the process formed in Time
And the free initiative of Nature's will.
Thus following the complex human play
She heard the prompter's voice behind the scenes,
Perceived the original libretto's set
And the organ theme of the composer Force.
All she beheld that surges from man's depths,
The animal instincts prowling mid life's trees,
The impulses that whisper to the heart
And passion's thunder-chase sweeping the nerves;
She saw the Powers that stare from the Abyss
And the wordless Light that liberates the soul.
But most her gaze pursued the birth of thought.
Affranchised from the look of surface mind
She paused not to survey the official case,
The issue of forms from the office of the brain,
Its factory of thought-sounds and soundless words
And voices stored within unheard by men,
Its mint and treasury of shining coin.
These were but counters in mind's symbol game,
A gramophone's discs, a reproduction's film,
A list of signs, a cipher and a code.
In our unseen subtle body thought is born
Or there it enters from the cosmic field.
Oft from her soul stepped out a naked thought
Luminous with mystieried lips and wonderful eyes;

Or from her heart emerged some burning face
 And looked for life and love and passionate truth,
 Aspired to heaven or embraced the world
 Or led the fancy like a fleeting moon
 Across the dull sky of man's common days,
 Amidst the doubtful certitudes of earth's lore,
 To the celestial beauty of faith gave form,
 As if at flower-prints in a dingy room
 Laughed in a golden vase one living rose.
 A thaumaturgist sat in her heart's deep,
 Compelled the forward stride, the upward look,
 Till wonder leaped into the illumined breast
 And life grew marvellous with transfiguring hope.
 A seeing will pondered between the brows;
 Thoughts, glistening Angels, stood behind the brain
 In flashing armour, folding hands of prayer,
 And poured heaven's rays into the earthly form.
 Imaginations flamed up from her breast,
 Unearthly beauty, touches of surpassing joy
 And plans of miracle, dreams of delight:
 Around her navel lotus clustering close
 Her large sensations of the teeming worlds
 Streamed their dumb movements of the unformed Idea;
 Invading the small sensitive flower of the throat
 They brought their mute unuttered resonances
 To kindle the figures of a heavenly speech.
 Below, desires formed their wordless wish,
 And longings of physical sweetness and ecstasy
 Translated into the accents of a cry
 Their grasp on objects and their clasp on souls.
 Her body's thoughts climbed from her conscious limbs
 And carried their yearnings to its mystic crown
 Where Nature's murmurs meet the Ineffable.
 But for the mortal prisoned in outward mind
 All must present their passports at its door;
 Disguised they must don the official cap and mask
 Or pass as manufactures of the brain,
 Unknown their secret truth and hidden source.
 Only to the inner mind they speak direct,
 Put on a body and assume a voice,
 Their passage seen, their message heard and known,

Their birthplace and their natal mark revealed,
And stand confessed to an immortal's sight,
Our nature's messengers to the witness soul.
Impenetrable, withheld from mortal sense,
The inner chambers of the spirit's house
Disclosed to her their happenings and their guests;
Eyes looked through crevices in the invisible wall
And through the secrecy of unseen doors
There came into mind's little frontal room
Thoughts that enlarged our limited human range,
Lifted the ideal's half-quenched or sinking torch
Or peered through the finite at the infinite.
A sight opened upon the invisible
And sensed the shapes that mortal eyes see not,
The sounds that mortal listening cannot hear,
The blissful sweetness of the intangible's touch;
The objects that to us are empty air,
Are there the stuff of daily experience
And the common pabulum of sense and thought.
The beings of the subtle realms appeared
And scenes concealed behind our earthly scene;
She saw the life of remote continents
And distance deafened not to voices far;
She felt the movements crossing unknown minds;
The past's events occurred before her eyes.
The great world's thoughts were part of her own thought,
The feelings dumb for ever and unshared,
The ideas that never found an utterance.
The dim subconscious's incoherent hints
Laid bare a meaning twisted, deep and strange,
The bizarre secret of their fumbling speech,
Their links with underlying reality.
The unseen grew visible and audible:
Thoughts leaped down from a superconscious field
Like eagles swooping from a viewless peak,
Thoughts gleamed up from the screened subliminal depths
Like golden fishes from a hidden sea.
This world is a vast unbroken totality,
A deep solidarity joins its contrary powers;
God's summits look back on the mute Abyss.
So man evolving to divinest heights

Colloques still with the animal and the Djinn;
The human godhead with star-gazer eyes
Lives still in one house with the primal beast.
The high meets the low, all is a single plan.
So she beheld the many births of thought,
If births can be of what eternal is;
For the Eternal's powers are like himself,
Timeless in the Timeless, in Time ever born.
This too she saw that all in outer mind
Is made, not born, a product perishable,
Forged in the body's factory by earth-force.
This mind is a dynamic small machine
Producing ceaselessly, till it wears out,
With raw material drawn from the outside world,
The patterns sketched out by an artist God.
Often our thoughts are finished cosmic wares
Admitted by a silent office gate
And passed through the subconscious's galleries,
Then issued in Time's mart as private make.
For now they bear the living person's stamp;
A trick, a special hue claims them his own.
All else is Nature's craft and this too hers.
Our tasks are given, we are but instruments;
Nothing is all our own that we create:
The Power that acts in us is not our force.
The genius too receives from some high fount
Concealed in a supernal secrecy
The work that gives him an immortal name.
The word, the form, the charm, the glory and grace
Are missioned sparks from a stupendous Fire;
A sample from the laboratory of God
Of which he holds the patent upon earth,
Comes to him wrapped in golden coverings;
He listens for Inspiration's postman knock
And takes delivery of the priceless gift
A little spoilt by the receiver mind
Or mixed with the manufacture of his brain;
When least defaced, then is it most divine.
Although his ego claims the world for its use,
Man is a dynamo for the cosmic work;
Nature does most in him, God the high rest:

Only his soul's acceptance is his own.
This independent, once a power supreme,
Self-born before the universe was made,
Accepting cosmos, binds himself Nature's serf
Till he becomes her freedman — or God's slave.
This is the appearance in our mortal front;
Our greater truth of being lies behind:
Our consciousness is cosmic and immense,
But only when we break through Matter's wall
In that spiritual vastness can we stand
Where we can live the masters of our world
And mind is only a means and body a tool.
For above the birth of body and of thought
Our spirit's truth lives in the naked self
And from that height, unbound, surveys the world.
Out of the mind she rose to escape its law
That it might sleep in some deep shadow of self
Or fall silent in the silence of the Unseen.
High she attained and stood from Nature free
And saw creation's life from far above,
Thence upon all she laid her sovereign will
To dedicate it to God's timeless calm:
Then all grew tranquil in her being's space,
Only sometimes small thoughts arose and fell
Like quiet waves upon a silent sea
Or ripples passing over a lonely pool
When a stray stone disturbs its dreaming rest.
Yet the mind's factory had ceased to work,
There was no sound of the dynamo's throb,
There came no call from the still fields of life.
Then even those stirrings rose in her no more;
Her mind now seemed like a vast empty room
Or like a peaceful landscape without sound.
This men call quietude and prize as peace.
But to her deeper sight all yet was there,
Effervescing like a chaos under a lid;
Feelings and thoughts cried out for word and act
But found no response in the silenced brain:
All was suppressed but nothing yet expunged;
At every moment might explosion come.
Then this too paused; the body seemed a stone.

All now was a wide mighty vacancy,
 But still excluded from eternity's hush;
 For still was far the repose of the Absolute
 And the ocean silence of Infinity.
 Even now some thoughts could cross her solitude;
 These surged not from the depths or from within
 Cast up from formlessness to seek a form,
 Spoke not the body's need nor voiced life's call.
 These seemed not born nor made in human Time:
 Children of cosmic Nature from a far world,
 Idea's shapes in complete armour of words
 Posted like travellers in an alien space.
 Out of some far expanse they seemed to come
 As if carried on vast wings like large white sails,
 And with easy access reached the inner ear
 As though they used a natural privileged right
 To the high royal entries of the soul.
 As yet their path lay deep-concealed in light.
 Then looking to know whence the intruders came
 She saw a spiritual immensity
 Pervading and encompassing the world-space
 As ether our transparent tangible air,
 And through it sailing tranquilly a thought.
 As smoothly glides a ship nearing its port,
 Ignorant of embargo and blockade,
 Confident of entrance and the visa's seal,
 It came to the silent city of the brain
 Towards its accustomed and expectant quay,
 But met a barring will, a blow of Force
 And sank vanishing in the immensity.
 After a long vacant pause another appeared
 And others one by one suddenly emerged,
 Mind's unexpected visitors from the Unseen
 Like far-off sails upon a lonely sea.
 But soon that commerce failed, none reached mind's coast.
 Then all grew still, nothing moved any more:
 Immobile, self-rapt, timeless, solitary
 A silent spirit pervaded silent Space.

In that absolute stillness bare and formidable
 There was glimpsed an all-negating Void Supreme

That claimed its mystic Nihil's sovereign right
To cancel Nature and deny the soul.
Even the nude sense of self grew pale and thin:
Impersonal, signless, featureless, void of forms
A blank pure consciousness had replaced the mind.
Her spirit seemed the substance of a name,
The world a pictured symbol drawn on self,
A dream of images, a dream of sounds
Built up the semblance of a universe
Or lent to spirit the appearance of a world.
This was self-seeing; in that intolerant hush
No notion and no concept could take shape,
There was no sense to frame the figure of things,
A sheer self-sight was there, no thought arose.
Emotion slept deep down in the still heart
Or lay buried in a cemetery of peace:
All feelings seemed quiescent, calm or dead,
As if the heart-strings rent could work no more
And joy and grief could never rise again.
The heart beat on with an unconscious rhythm
But no response came from it and no cry.
Vain was the provocation of events;
Nothing within answered an outside touch,
No nerve was stirred and no reaction rose.
Yet still her body saw and moved and spoke;
It understood without the aid of thought,
It said whatever needed to be said,
It did whatever needed to be done.
There was no person there behind the act,
No mind that chose or passed the fitting word:
All wrought like an unerring apt machine.
As if continuing old habitual turns,
And pushed by an old unexhausted force
The engine did the work for which it was made:
Her consciousness looked on and took no part;
All it upheld, in nothing had a share.
There was no strong initiator will;
An incoherence crossing a firm void
Slipped into an order of related chance.
A pure perception was the only power
That stood behind her action and her sight.

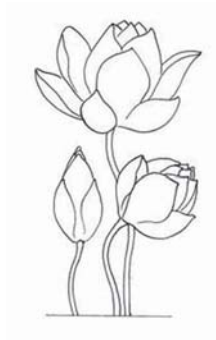
If that retired, all objects would be extinct,
Her private universe would cease to be,
The house she had built with bricks of thought and sense
In the beginning after the birth of Space.
This seeing was identical with the seen;
It knew without knowledge all that could be known,
It saw impartially the world go by,
But in the same supine unmoving glance
Saw too its abysmal unreality.
It watched the figure of the cosmic game,
But the thought and inner life in forms seemed dead,
Abolished by her own collapse of thought:
A hollow physical shell persisted still.
All seemed a brilliant shadow of itself,
A cosmic film of scenes and images:
The enduring mass and outline of the hills
Was a design sketched on a silent mind
And held to a tremulous false solidity
By constant beats of visionary sight.
The forest with its emerald multitudes
Clothed with its show of hues vague empty Space,
A painting's colours hiding a surface void
That flickered upon dissolution's edge;
The blue heavens, an illusion of the eyes,
Roofed in the mind's illusion of a world.
The men who walked beneath an unreal sky
Seemed mobile puppets out of cardboard cut
And pushed by unseen hands across the soil
Or moving pictures upon Fancy's film:
There was no soul within, no power of life.
The brain's vibrations that appear like thought,
The nerve's brief answer to each contact's knock,
The heart's quiverings felt as joy and grief and love
Were twitchings of the body, their seeming self,
That body forged from atoms and from gas
A manufactured lie of Maya's make,
Its life a dream seen by the sleeping Void.
The animals lone or trooping through the glades
Fled like a passing vision of beauty and grace
Imagined by some all-creating Eye.
Yet something was there behind the fading scene;

Wherever she turned, at whatsoever she looked,
It was perceived, yet hid from mind and sight.
The One only real shut itself from Space
And stood aloof from the idea of Time.
Its truth escaped from shape and line and hue.
All else grew unsubstantial, self-annulled,
This only everlasting seemed and true,
Yet nowhere dwelt, it was outside the hours.
This only could justify the labour of sight,
But sight could not define for it a form;
This only could appease the unsatisfied ear
But hearing listened in vain for a missing sound;
This answered not the sense, called not to Mind.
It met her as the uncaught inaudible Voice
That speaks for ever from the Unknowable.
It met her like an omnipresent point
Pure of dimensions, unfixd, invisible,
The single oneness of its multiplied beat
Accentuating its sole eternity.
It faced her as some vast Nought's immensity,
An endless No to all that seems to be,
An endless Yes to things ever unconceived
And all that is unimagined and unthought,
An eternal zero or untotaled Aught,
A spaceless and a placeless Infinite.
Yet eternity and infinity seemed but words
Vainly affixed by mind's incompetence
To its stupendous lone reality.
The world is but a spark-burst from its light,
All moments flashes from its Timelessness,
All objects glimmerings of the Bodiless
That disappear from Mind when That is seen.
It held, as if a shield before its face,
A consciousness that saw without a seer,
The Truth where knowledge is not nor knower nor known,
The Love enamoured of its own delight
In which the Lover is not nor the Beloved
Bringing their personal passion into the Vast,
The Force omnipotent in quietude,
The Bliss that none can ever hope to taste.
It cancelled the convincing cheat of self;

A truth in nothingness was its mighty clue.
 If all existence could renounce to be
 And Being take refuge in Non-being's arms
 And Non-being could strike out its ciphered round,
 Some lustre of that Reality might appear.
 A formless liberation came on her.
 Once sepulchred alive in brain and flesh
 She had risen up from body, mind and life;
 She was no more a Person in a world,
 She had escaped into infinity.
 What once had been herself had disappeared;
 There was no frame of things, no figure of soul.
 A refugee from the domain of sense,
 Evading the necessity of thought,
 Delivered from Knowledge and from Ignorance
 And rescued from the true and the untrue,
 She shared the Superconscient's high retreat
 Beyond the self-born Word, the nude Idea,
 The first bare solid ground of consciousness;
 Beings were not there, existence had no place,
 There was no temptation of the joy to be.
 Unutterably effaced, no one and null,
 A vanishing vestige like a violet trace,
 A faint record merely of a self now past,
 She was a point in the unknowable.
 Only some last annulment now remained,
 Annihilation's vague indefinable step:
 A memory of being still was there
 And kept her separate from nothingness:
 She was in That but still became not That.
 This shadow of herself so close to nought
 Could be again self's point d'appui to live,
 Return out of the Inconceivable
 And be what some mysterious vast might choose.
 Even as the Unknowable decreed,
 She might be nought or new-become the All,
 Or if the omnipotent Nihil took a shape
 Emerge as someone and redeem the world.
 Even, she might learn what the mystic cipher held,
 This seeming exit or closed end of all
 Could be a blind tenebrous passage screened from sight,

Her state the eclipsing shell of a darkened sun
On its secret way to the Ineffable.
Even now her splendid being might flame back
Out of the silence and the nullity,
A gleaming portion of the All-Wonderful,
A power of some all-affirming Absolute,
A shining mirror of the eternal Truth
To show to the One-in-all its manifest face,
To the souls of men their deep identity.
Or she might wake into God's quietude
Beyond the cosmic day and cosmic night
And rest appeased in his white eternity.
But this was now unreal or remote
Or covered in the mystic fathomless blank.
In infinite Nothingness was the ultimate sign
Or else the Real was the Unknowable.
A lonely Absolute negated all:
It effaced the ignorant world from its solitude
And drowned the soul in its everlasting peace.

(C 34: 538-50)



HERE TO FULFIL HIMSELF WAS GOD'S DESIRE

(From *Savitri* — Book Three, Canto Two)

A stillness absolute, incommunicable,
Meets the sheer self-discovery of the soul;
A wall of stillness shuts it from the world,
A gulf of stillness swallows up the sense
And makes unreal all that mind has known,
All that the labouring senses still would weave
Prolonging an imaged unreality.
Self's vast spiritual silence occupies Space;
Only the Inconceivable is left,
Only the Nameless without space and time:
Abolished is the burdening need of life:
Thought falls from us, we cease from joy and grief;
The ego is dead; we are freed from being and care,
We have done with birth and death and work and fate.
O soul, it is too early to rejoice!
Thou hast reached the boundless silence of the Self,
Thou hast leaped into a glad divine abyss;
But where hast thou thrown Self's mission and Self's power?
On what dead bank on the Eternal's road?
One was within thee who was self and world,
What hast thou done for his purpose in the stars?
Escape brings not the victory and the crown!
Something thou cam'st to do from the Unknown,
But nothing is finished and the world goes on
Because only half God's cosmic work is done.
Only the everlasting No has neared
And stared into thy eyes and killed thy heart:
But where is the Lover's everlasting Yes,
And immortality in the secret heart,
The voice that chants to the creator Fire,
The symbolled OM, the great assenting Word,
The bridge between the rapture and the calm,
The passion and the beauty of the Bride,
The chamber where the glorious enemies kiss,

The smile that saves, the golden peak of things?
 This too is Truth at the mystic fount of Life.
 A black veil has been lifted; we have seen
 The mighty shadow of the omniscient Lord;
 But who has lifted up the veil of light
 And who has seen the body of the King?
 The mystery of God's birth and acts remains
 Leaving unbroken the last chapter's seal,
 Unsolved the riddle of the unfinished Play;
 The cosmic Player laughs within his mask,
 And still the last inviolate secret hides
 Behind the human glory of a Form,
 Behind the gold eidolon of a Name.
 A large white line has figured as a goal,
 But far beyond the ineffable suntracks blaze:
 What seemed the source and end was a wide gate,
 A last bare step into eternity.
 An eye has opened upon timelessness,
 Infinity takes back the forms it gave,
 And through God's darkness or his naked light
 His million rays return into the Sun.
 There is a zero sign of the Supreme;
 Nature left nude and still uncovers God.
 But in her grandiose nothingness all is there:
 When her strong garbs are torn away from us,
 The soul's ignorance is slain but not the soul:
 The zero covers an immortal face.
 A high and blank negation is not all,
 A huge extinction is not God's last word,
 Life's ultimate sense, the close of being's course,
 The meaning of this great mysterious world.
 In absolute silence sleeps an absolute Power.
 Awaking, it can wake the trance-bound soul
 And in the ray reveal the parent sun:
 It can make the world a vessel of Spirit's force,
 It can fashion in the clay God's perfect shape.
 To free the self is but one radiant pace;
 Here to fulfil himself was God's desire.