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# THE SOUL'S JOURNEY TO ITS DESTINY

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SWAMI ASHOKANANDA



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Swami Ashokananda




Advaita Ashrama.  
(Publication Department)  
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Calcutta 700 014

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We are happy to present another book of the lectures of Swami Ashokananda. The previous book, *Meditation, Ecstasy, and Illumination*, which was first published by Advaita Ashrama in 1990, consisted of a collection of eight lectures that together constituted an overview of Vedanta—its history, its philosophical theories, and the various practices by which its goal might be attained by the individual aspirant, whatever his or her particular path.

The present book comprises a series of eight lectures that was delivered by the Swami in San Francisco in 1953. The series explains in detail the Vedantic concept of the origin of a human being, his constitution, the causes behind his present state of existence, his development, and his ultimate fulfillment. So thorough an elucidation of the Vedantic view of the individual soul necessarily involves an explanation of Vedantic cosmology,



## WHAT MAKES A MAN

### 1

Under this title I want to talk about the constitution of man: how he originated and what makes him what he is. Certain things about a human being are obvious; other things, of course, are buried in profound mystery. However, I shall try to give you the main facts about the origin and nature of man as taught by our Vedanta philosophy.

I think we can begin profitably with some general statements. For example, if you don't want to be too logical or superfine about it, you can say that man is made up of three entities: body, mind, and Spirit. Of course, the question at once arises how these three dissimilar entities could be combined. That there is a sort of opposition between

mind and matter we recognize. Through the ages of philosophical inquiry efforts have been made to derive matter from mind or mind from matter so that a kind of basic unity between them could be established. Some of these efforts to merge mind in matter or matter in mind have been partially successful, but truly speaking, none have really succeeded. As regards the Spirit, many people have wondered if there is any such entity at all, whether it is not simply the most essential part of the mind itself. Some would like to think that if mind has come out of matter, Spirit also has come out of matter; that is to say, mind evolved, and afterwards from mind Spirit evolved; so all three things are really matter. Others have said that originally there was Spirit and then mind evolved from it and from mind, matter.

If you ask where the Spirit originated—that is, if you admit that man is Spirit essentially—then in different religions, or theological systems, you have different answers. Some have maintained that the Spirit has no origin at all; it is without beginning and also without end; it is eternal. Others have said that God Himself makes the soul and that the soul in its pure state is or becomes what we call Spirit. Thus God is the origin of the Spirit. Whether this last account is logical and whether it can be justified by other evidence we do not know, but it is a view held by many. All such matters are, I admit, in the realm of speculation.

So for now let us leave this question about how three dissimilar entities can be combined, and in our inquiry into the origin and nature of man let us try to begin with something concrete. To take an uncritical view, we have to admit that if we are not all body, we are at least in part physical; therefore, let us begin by considering our physical being. We know this body originates with its parents and inherits certain physical characteristics from them. It has been found that these characteristics are also the basis of certain mental characteristics. It can even be shown that a person has a particular temperament because of certain minute particles in the cells from which his body originates. Thus, those who believe that the mind is the product of matter say that a human being inherits not only what he is physically but also what he is mentally from his ancestors. That there is some causal connection between the physical characteristics of the child and of the parents cannot be denied, but I think it has not yet been proposed that everything about a person is derivable from parental characteristics. But however that may be, from one point of view our physical being can certainly be thought of as derived from its parents.

From another point of view, it can be seen as a part of and dependent on a vast world of matter. For example, if there is any vital change around me my body will be destroyed. Suppose the

atmosphere changes and there is more weight on me than at the present time: probably my body will be crushed to pieces. Or if the weight of the air decreases, then also this body will not remain as it is: it will just burst. Temperature, air pressure, all these things are necessary in their present condition if my body is to be maintained. I might say—although it sounds a bit theoretical—that every physical particle exists in relation to the rest of the world of matter, and if there is any profound change anywhere, then this little particle, my body, is also bound to change. So in this respect, my physical being is a part of universal matter, and in order to explain it, I shall first have to explain the origin of the material universe.

I could also think in this way of my mind. Where does the mind come from? Does it come only from the parents? You all know that some of the characteristics of the mind are derived from the parents, because there are certain similarities, sometimes startling, between child and parent. However, in the majority of families the similarities are not obvious. There are many things in an individual's mind that cannot be traced to his ancestors. There is a great deal in a person that cannot be considered hereditary at all, much that is purely individual. Furthermore, if you say that the mind of the child is always derived from its parents then how do you explain a Shakespeare from inconspicuous parents? In fact, how can you

even say there is the possibility of progress for anyone? All would be repetition: the parents repeated in the children, the children repeating themselves in their own children—down through the generations, no change anywhere. If, on the other hand, you think that in every person infinite possibilities are latent, that some of those possibilities can become actualities in the children, then you must admit that, to begin with, matter has in it the potentiality of infinite mind, even of infinite Spirit. Well, if you want to take that view of matter, I have no objection, but then you should be more careful about your language. If you think of matter as something in which infinite Spirit and infinite intellectual talents are involved, then you should give it some other name. Don't call it "matter," because matter as it is usually understood is not what is meant by mind or by Spirit. And of course there will still be the question how these three dissimilar things can be contained in one thing, whether that "thing" is matter or not. That question will have to be answered at one time or another.

So, you see, when you try to think of the origin of the mind in the same way as you have thought of the origin of the body, from the parents, you come across great difficulties. I might as well tell you the Vedantic view in this regard. We say the mind is not derived from the parents. Body is derived from parents, but mind is our very own,

just as Spirit is our very self. We ourselves are the Spirit; it is neither derived nor created. Similarly, the mind is our own; it is not anybody else's or derived from anybody else. In another respect the individual mind is a part of the cosmic or the universal mind. Some of you might wonder if the supposition of a universal mind is justified. We do not see mind everywhere; for example, we do not see mind in matter. We see it only in living beings. Are all these individual minds joined together? If so, how are they joined together? Between one thinking being and another there seems to be a gap that is filled by dead matter; there is no mind in that gap. Yet, I think we have to admit that insofar as minds exist at all, they are interrelated or connected, not only in and through the medium of matter, but directly. I think today enough research has been done in parapsychology to prove that minds are related to one another independently of matter.

Is there, then, a cosmic mind? I think we can infer that there is. If you look upon this universe as a system, as a cosmos, and if you consider the presence of life, of mind, of consciousness here, however spotty their presence may be, you have to admit that the power that holds this universe together in an ordered cosmos must be at least mind. Otherwise you could not explain how mind, life, and consciousness are held in their proper place and given scope for proper function. We have

at least to assume that there is a cosmic mind, a conscious mind.

So now we come to consciousness itself. That consciousness cannot be considered to be the same as mind is proved by the fact that there is such a thing as the unconscious mind. If consciousness is essential to the mind, then wherever there is mind there should be consciousness. But modern psychologists and our own experience confirm that our whole mind is not conscious. It is as though part of a mansion were lighted up, leaving the rest in darkness. If light were an essential ingredient of the building, then the whole building would necessarily be illuminated. But since part is in darkness, light must be something separate from it. Similarly, consciousness must be something other than mind. Vedantic philosophers have always maintained that consciousness is not essential to the mind, consciousness is a thing apart. They have ascribed consciousness to Spirit—neither to mind nor to body.

Let us think now of the Spirit. Or for practical purposes it will be well to think of the soul first, then the Spirit. How shall we describe the soul? The soul is what we call in Sanskrit *jīvātman* or *jīvātmā*, which is usually translated as individual soul. But that doesn't help much. The term *individual soul* is, of course, used in contrast to the term *universal Soul*, which means God. But what is the individual soul? One explanation that is

offered by a prominent school of Hindu thought might serve our purpose. According to it, the soul in its own true nature, which is Spirit, is pure and perfect, but for some reason it becomes associated with the mind and the body, and such an association clouds its glory. Just as dependence on other people is a sign of weakness, because it is out of weakness that the desire, the necessity for dependence, and the actuality of dependence come, in the same way this association of the soul with mind and body presupposes a certain weakness or lack in the soul.

"But," you may ask, "if the soul is here presumed to be perfect and pure, then how can it have any weakness in it?" The way we explain this weakness in the soul is very simple: it is a fact. As Swami Vivekananda once said in a lecture in America, we Hindus are not ashamed to admit that not every problem is capable of solution. Not every question that is taken up philosophically can be given an adequate answer. To assume that it can is itself dogmatic. What we can do, however, in our pursuit of truth, is to ascertain facts. Whether these facts can be brought under a logical construction is a secondary consideration; we should first become aware of them.

Now, these are the facts: while the soul in its true nature is indeed pure, when we look at the soul as associated with the body and the mind, we do not find it so. That is a fact. Moreover, the very

fact that the soul is associated with the body and mind and dependent upon them presupposes some kind of weakness, some kind of limitation in it. That also cannot be denied. If you say it is a kind of contradiction, we shall accept that contradiction. We have a certain word for it: we call it *avidyā* or *māyā*, which is sometimes translated as ignorance. It is not a simple ignorance; it is an ignorance that is a sort of hallucination, or delusion, or mistake. We illustrate it by telling of the illusion or delusion one has when in the dusk one mistakes a rope for a snake. It is not, you see, a very straightforward ignorance—not just a lack of knowledge. If somebody should ask me, “Did you know that the Pacific Ocean is so many feet deep in such and such a place?” I could say, “No, I was ignorant of that.” That is one kind of ignorance; it is another kind when I have some idea of a thing, but not the correct idea. Why am I mistaken about it? Why do I not see a certain thing for what it is? Here is a rope lying across the road; I could see it as a rope. Why do I mistake it for a snake? That is the peculiar kind of ignorance that we have called *māyā*.

There is no reason why the soul should not know itself as what it is—pure and endowed with all perfection and, therefore, independent, without any necessity to depend upon the mind or the body or to derive something from its association with them. And yet the soul does not have that

knowledge. Somehow it has bungled there. Rather, it seems to have bungled; for when a philosopher comes across the soul after having waded through the body and the mind, when he sees the soul face to face, the soul smiles at him. "Did you say that I bungled? Look at me. Do I look like a bungler?" "No, you look all right"; he has to say that — "You look all right."

Yes, when you have penetrated the barriers of body and mind and have faced yourself, when you have known yourself directly without this intervention and confusion caused by body and mind, you have not the least doubt that you are all right. And then, as it is said in one book, you will exclaim, "*Aho aham namo mahyam*"<sup>1</sup> — "Oh, how wonderful I am! Salutations to myself!" You often find such statements in our religious literature. There is no egotism or boastfulness about it. There is just the recognition of a wonderfulness about oneself. When a person knows himself, when he comes upon himself suddenly, he is stunned by the glory of himself. He finds himself to be this infinite Being, an infinite ocean in which universes are rising and falling like waves. All ideas of pettiness and puniness, of limitation and dependence, of struggle and frustration—all these things drop off; one cannot even remember them. Or if one does remember them, one knows they

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1. *Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā*, 2.11.

never belonged to oneself. One smiles at all these things, just as a grownup man, remembering, smiles at the timidities and fears of his childhood.

Well, there it is. Yes, I admit that in the juxtaposition of these three principles—matter, mind, and Spirit—there is still involved a contradiction, but these are the facts.

Now let us continue. We say that the soul, or *jīvātmā*, is the Spirit involved in matter and mind. It is this involvement that gives one a sense of self-identity. When I say, "I am this, I am that; I was born in such and such a place; I want to do this in future years; I like this person, I don't like that person," and so on, I am thinking of myself as an individual, as a soul, and I am thinking of others also as souls. The soul in this sense is of course not the final entity. In fact, you might say that I have introduced a fourth principle here, since formerly I spoke of the Spirit. But at this stage I have to do it for practical purposes. It is not that there are really four distinct things, but that here the Spirit is not standing separate from body and mind, and so we explain it as the soul.

Where does the soul come from? And where does it go? If we consider the soul as being associated with the mind and the body, it is enough to say, as we said with regard to the mind, that it is not derived from parents. The soul and the mind remain together, and they come and go; that is to say, they are born in the body and they go out of

the body at death. But this association of the soul, or of the Spirit, with the mind and with this changing body takes place only in the state of ignorance; as long as ignorance persists, as long as *māyā* persists, this condition will also persist. That is the Vedantic view.

If, on the other hand, you realize yourself as the Spirit, you will feel that you have nothing to do with this body or with the mind. Actually, you will feel yourself as separate from the body. One illustration is given of a sword within its scabbard, and another of a dried kernel of a nut within its shell, entirely separate from the shell, but enclosed within it. In the same way the Spirit becomes separated from the body and can go out and come back as it pleases.

Now, some of you will say, "Well, all that sounds a bit superstitious." Ah! Don't think you are so superior! You see, we moderns think we are so, so enlightened! And oftentimes the truth is just the opposite. In the effort to educate everyone, in trying to bring a certain amount of knowledge to vast masses of people, many of us have suffered a real dearth of knowledge. The extraordinary advances in scientific knowledge require great specialization, and therefore even great scientists and scholars have sometimes remained in abysmal ignorance in other respects. These are the necessary evils of the present state of knowledge. So we need not think this separation from the body

is all superstition. It is not. If I am the Spirit—let us assume that I am—then I should recognize myself as such. And if I am Spirit, I am not the body. Then why should I feel stuck to the body? It is only natural that I should feel separate from it, that I could exist without it; if I am Spirit, that would be the natural conclusion.

Of course, you will say that is just a theory. Yes, if I cannot prove it to myself through direct experience I shall have to admit that it is just a theory. But it so happens that I have known people who have proved it to themselves, and so I don't doubt it. If you say, "Well, you may have known of one or two cases," I will point out that if there is just one such case, then the truth of the theory is proved. Just one case. If one man goes to the moon and returns and proves to you that he has been there, then you cannot deny that men can go to the moon. It is not numbers that prove a theory, it is the actual fact of its being experienced that proves it. I have known people who were separate from the body; therefore I cannot accept the view that we are stuck to it.

Let us say, then, to summarize, that these things are true: About the body, it has an origin and it also has a certain position in the expanse of matter. About the mind, it does not originate from parents or some other source—it is always there, and as will become clear later on, it is part of a larger mind. And about the Spirit, when it is

known by itself it is perfect; it need not be explained in relation either to time or space or to circumstance. But if we speak of the Spirit as the soul—that is, as bound up with mind and matter—then we should say it comes and goes, and yet the soul also is not derived from parents. Its presence in time and space, however, requires explanation.

So this is the situation: in order to explain a man's body we need to explain the origin of matter. The moment we think in these terms, the problem becomes highly philosophical and metaphysical. You see, we cannot just start with matter, we have to start with something else. Why? Because whenever we want to think about something, our starting point has to be the mind. We can't start with the body, with the brain; we must start with the mind. Further, since mind itself is not always conscious, it is the conscious mind with which we must start. Some would say, therefore, that we must start with consciousness, not even with mind. This conclusion is further strengthened if we recognize that for the conscious mind to fulfill its function rightly—that is to say, for it to judge rightly, to get at the truth, to make an intelligent estimate of whatever fact is brought before it—it must have a sense of value, and it is in consciousness—neither in the body nor in the mind—that all values are to be found. Consciousness is the domain of value. Therefore our philosophers have always asserted that the proof of a thing does not come from the

mind, nor from such operations of the mind as deduction and induction, which can be considered mechanical efforts—indeed, today we know that machines can do more and more of the same kinds of things and do them more accurately and quickly than the human mind. What is it, then, after one has gone through the whole mechanism of reasoning—what is it that at last feels, “Yes, it is proved, it is right, it is true” —what is it that says that? It is consciousness that says it.

Consciousness (*caitanya* in Sanskrit) is its own proof. There has to be some principle that does not require to be proved but that is itself the proof of everything else. Our philosophers say consciousness is that principle. If you say it is just an assumption that consciousness does not require to be proved, all right, tell me if there is any further principle beyond consciousness. If there is, then we should take recourse to that to prove the truth of consciousness. But there is nothing else. Consciousness is truly self-existent; it has been found by experience to be beyond any conditions, beyond any possibility of mutation; it is imperishable and eternal, and when it is realized as such, one of course can think of nothing beyond it. Therefore, those who experience consciousness in itself find that it is its own proof. Just as the sun does not need the help of a candle to show itself—its own light reveals it and reveals other things as well—so consciousness is its own proof,

its own validation, and it is this consciousness that is required to prove the value and validity of the workings of the mind. So if we are to think correctly about what is taking place in this universe, we should not start with matter, but with consciousness. That is how our philosophers start, and I think you will admit the justice of such an approach.

## 2

Let me give you now a general idea of the statements our Vedantic philosophers make about how a human being comes into existence. As I have already indicated, you cannot explain man as separate from the rest of the universe, as separate from the world of matter or the world of mind, or from the infinite Spirit, God. You will have to assume the existence of all these things. Further, it is desirable that at the very beginning we understand a principle of parallelism between the individual and the universal, which seems to be essential to the philosophical statements Vedantists make about the origin of man. I have already in effect explained this parallelism in relation to our present physical existence: Here is my body, which is individual. It is the individual who takes the food by which this body is nourished. When

My organs remain healthy the body remains healthy. The cause of the disintegration of the body is also ascribed to me. If you say that outside things can kill me, yes, they may kill me if something vital within me is affected. If that vital thing in me can resist this onslaught from the outside, then however I may suffer, my life will not go out. So here we see that within this vast world of matter there are, as it were, an infinite number of little islands of matter that seem to be autonomous; not completely autonomous, because, as I have already indicated and as all of you know, my autonomy is dependent upon the prevalence of certain conditions outside of me—heat and cold, air, light, and so on—any change in which would bring about a change in my body. Still this principle cannot be denied: an infinite number of autonomies exist within this universal economy of matter. And I might say the same thing is true of the life principle. My life has its own autonomy; it is functioning for my own individual purposes. It seems to stand apart from all other fragments of life and sometimes even to be in conflict with them. Yet it is not completely independent of them; it depends on them also. You may speak similarly about the mind and also about the soul. So here you have a general principle of parallelism between the individual and the universal—the individual, who is, as it were, the subject, and the universal, which is the object. Our philosophers have said this

parallelism pervades the whole creative process.

The modern tendency is to explain everything objectively, that is to say, as a process within the object and not as a parallel process in both subject and object. This makes things very easy. If you want to put it in a theological way, you say that God created this world; He breathed life into it; He made life, He made mind, He made consciousness, He made souls, He put them here and there—finished. Whether you are a scientist or just an ordinary unreflective man, your whole approach is objective, which means, as Vedantists see it, that your whole approach is one-sided. If you try to explain me, you explain me as a product of all these larger, external processes that are going on. You virtually deny the autonomy that I enjoy, which autonomy cannot be proved by an objective approach at all. Now, think about it and see if I am not right. I am not saying anything very profound. But I do say that in modern thinking the parallelism between the autonomous individual subject and the external objective universe is not given the recognition it should have if we are to understand fully the facts of our existence. This parallelism goes to the very root of reality; it is not evident merely in our present state and nonexistent in deeper states. Therefore a purely objective approach is bound to fall short of the truth.

I must confess that even in our own Vedanta system some philosophers—no doubt for the ease

of their exposition, or at least for the ease and comfort of those for whom they wrote—have contented themselves with an objective approach to cosmic evolution. I do not say they have always done so; in vital things they have clearly stated this parallelism, as, for instance, in their concept of the cosmic process, or process of creation, which I am about to explain to you.

Now, in their cosmological system Vedantic philosophers start, as I said earlier, with consciousness or Spirit. They first assume this infinite Spirit, which they call Brahman; literally Brahman means the Infinite, the Vast—the vast Spirit about whom nothing can be said. Why can nothing be said? Because our thought, our language are limiting and relative, and since Brahman is absolute, any ascription to It of our thought or our language would be untrue of It. The Absolute can be spoken of and referred to only negatively: "It is not this, not this" —that is all that can be said of It. Of course, when Brahman alone exists, there is no individual; so there is no man or anything of the kind to be explained. But you have to start with this basic indescribable existence; if you don't, you will be starting with a part of creation itself.

What is the next step? In the next step they say that this infinite Spirit is to be considered cosmically, and in Its cosmic aspect It is called *Īśvara*, which literally means the Lord, the Ruler. Oddly enough, that name is not altogether

justified, because there is not much that He can be ruling at that time. Creation has not yet taken place; so in relation to whom can He be the Ruler? Individual existences, living and nonliving, that the Divine Lord is supposed to be administering—creating, maintaining, dissolving—have not yet appeared. So oftentimes I have thought that this term is somewhat unfortunate, though there is some validity in it.

Let me explain. What is the nature of *Īśvara*, as our philosophers understand it? *Īśvara* is all knowing, all Spirit—for it is the very nature of God that He is Spirit, He is all light, all good, absolutely pure Being; all perfection can be ascribed to Him, as long as we do not make any reference to creation. When we think of God as the Creator and Ruler, He is always related to His creation, and many of our philosophers have thought that His being so is itself a disqualification for His being truly God. For to be related to creation is a sort of bondage. True, He is not engulfed or overwhelmed by this relationship. Nevertheless, it is a relationship that cannot be denied of the Creator God. And that which cannot be denied of God has to be considered, logically speaking, as a sort of disqualification, for if God *must* be related to creation, then He is not absolutely independent. Many of our philosophers have thought, therefore, that *Īśvara*, being unlimited and perfect, is beyond the Creator.

The beautiful thing to notice in the story of the creation of man that Vedanta unfolds is that, collectively speaking, *Īśvara* is one Being undivided and unrelated to creation, and yet the same *Īśvara* is also, as it were, made up of an infinite number of effulgent souls, individual souls. While the name *Īśvara*, or the Lord, is given to the collective Being, the individual spirit is here given the name *Prājña*. The word *Prājña* combines *pra*, that is to say, "completely, fully," and *jña*, "knowing, enlightened"; so *Prājña* means fully enlightened. At that level of creation there is no darkness in the individual souls. And yet somehow a sort of division has, as it were, taken place within *Īśvara*.

Before I proceed any further, I want to put one thought before you, and I would like you to remember it always. Consider how it is when you see a play on the stage: in the beginning you know you are seeing a play, but if it is really well produced, you very soon become absorbed in it and forget it is only playacting. Yet in the back of your mind I think you are aware that you are seeing a play and not actuality. Similarly, in understanding this theory of creation as presented by our philosophers you should always remember that the whole thing is *as it were*. It is a sort of seeming, an appearance; it is not an actuality at all.

You may say, "Well, that is a very funny thing to say to us! Here we are, and you are trying to

explain us, and to do so you say, 'Oh, it is all just an appearance; it is not an actuality!'" But think about it. Are you sure that it is all real for you even now? Are you sure? I have explained to you that when we consider the three principles that we think make up our existence, we come across certain contradictions or paradoxes. We have said man is made up of mind and body, but how do we know that mind and body can be brought together? Our philosophers maintain that as long as you are identified with the body it seems to you that your mind and your soul are really related to the body, but if you go beyond the sphere of the body and are no longer mixed up with it, you become more mind than body. Then, oddly enough, you feel that the body has nothing to do with you—you actually feel like that.

Just as we naturally think now that everything we perceive here through the senses is made of matter, so there is a realm of experience where we naturally see and feel that everything is made up of thought. It is very difficult to explain that experience or even to make a clear statement about it. But if you have reached it, you will understand what I am talking about. Otherwise you will say, "Of course I know we have ideas and thoughts about things." I do not mean that. We all have thoughts about things, but the things themselves are apart from our thoughts of them. In this other state reality itself is made up of

thought. That is how you see it to be. Well, in that state you don't feel that you are bound to the body.

So here you have a contradiction of your previous position. You started with the idea that you are made up of three things. Now you find you are made up of only two. And when you go a little higher, you are not identified even with the mind. You are surprised to find that you are pure Spirit; there has not been any mixture at all with body or mind. So you see, if you object to my saying it is all an appearance, then I shall answer, "No, I have a right to say that." Even a little thought about your present situation convinces you that your assumption that body and mind are real and that they and the soul are actually mixed together is not correct.

Our philosophers always want us to remember this *as it were*, and I shall apply it to what I was telling you: *Īśvara*, has as it were become divided into an infinite number of fragments. As it were, because if He were actually broken into fragments then nothing would remain of Him. Further, how can the Infinite be broken up? If It were actually divisible, then It would be dead. Only dead things can be divided; truly living things cannot be divided. So there must be a sort of *as it were* about it. Please always remember this: the whole of creation is an appearance, an *as it were* affair. Yes, that may seem a strange attitude to take, but if you think, you will find it is the only

attitude you can take. Even science, as it probes into things, finds that in their deeper nature they are quite different from what we think them to be; they are something else altogether.

Let us return now to *Īśvara* remembering this as it were. What do we find? Nothing but *Īśvara* and the souls—except for this one other thing: the very fact that Brahman has become *Īśvara* that there has been a sort of appearance, a seeming, means that a certain principle has crept in, the principle of *māyā* or *avidyā*. Our philosophers say that now the conscious principle, God, has become fragmented, as it were, into an infinite number of knowers, an infinite number of subjects—individual spirits or souls. And from where comes the knowable, the object, of which this vast world of matter is the present representative? It is the degradation or, if you prefer, the transformation of the principle of *māyā*. *Māyā* provides these two things: it brings about an apparent fragmentation in the infinite, conscious Being, and it also becomes that which is the opposite of the conscious principle. I know I am sounding awfully dogmatic, but if you proceed even from your present standpoint with these fundamental ideas, you will get a better explanation of this universe than you would otherwise. Anyhow, this is what is happening: On one side there has been a fragmentation into infinite beings; they are still luminous, they have not

become enshrouded in ignorance. On the other side an evolution in *māyā* is taking place in the so-called objective world—an evolution in which *māyā* ultimately becomes the objects of sense, that is to say, the objects of our vision, objects of our hearing, and so on.

We have five senses of perception, and therefore, our philosophers say, there are also five objects of perception—that is, there are five original principles that are derived one after the other from the original principle of *māyā*. They say that first from *māyā* comes the principle of ether, or *ākāśa*; from the principle of ether comes the principle of air; from the principle of air comes the principle of fire; from the principle of fire comes the principle of water; from the principle of water comes the principle of earth. Although these principles are given concrete names for the sake of convenience, they are not the elements as we perceive them here—air, fire, water, and earth. Not at all; they are very fine principles. Then these five very fine principles get mixed together, and out of that mixture several things come about. On one side, the subject side, the intelligence, mind, ego, vital principle, senses of perception, and senses of action develop. And on the other side, the object side, there develop the objects of these same senses. I know this is becoming very complex. But, then, you are very complex beings. If an explanation of yourself is oversimplified, it would

not be an explanation of you, it would be an explanation of something else.

So here you are, the Spirit, the Knower, the conscious Being, and here is this body, which you might say is an object, like any other object that you know in the world, except that it is living. But notice this: between the body and the Spirit there is the mind. Partly the mind is allied with the knower, and partly with the knowable. It is partly associated with the subject and partly with the object. Isn't it true? Our own ego sense, our intelligence, our mind with which we think, even our senses—all these seem to be part of ourselves. And notice this also: I told you that each of the five original principles stands for one sense perception and therefore one possibility of the sensible. Therefore, these five principles are of a dual nature: as they develop they become partly identified with the object and partly with the subject. It is for this reason that you find the happy peculiarity that the world of objects lends itself to our knowing.

Why do you think that just because you have good eyes you will be able to see things? Things might be so made that they wouldn't lend themselves to our vision. How does there happen to be a sort of mutual adjustment of our perceptive powers and the objects we perceive? This is how our philosophers have explained it: the objects and the senses with which we perceive them have

come out of the same original five principles. The same is true even of thinking about things, reasoning about them, understanding them, organizing them, subsuming them under some general laws; all this is possible because intelligence, mind, and senses all come from the original five principles, which themselves are derivatives of *māyā*, the principle of plurality—apparent plurality—the principle of division, of distinction and variety. You see, it is because on the one side these basic principles become allied with the object and on the other side with the subject that with the help of my intelligence, my ego, my mind, my thought, my senses, my living forces I am able to perceive things that have color, that produce sound, that have taste, and so on.

There is this parallelism between subject and object, and, as I said, this is really a better way of understanding creation than the purely objective way, which misses a great deal. By understanding the parallelism between the nature and development of the subject on the one side and of the object on the other, you can know and understand reality, even without any knowledge of science. It would be an entirely different way of knowing. For instance, you might ask a person, "Are you hungry?" and he might answer, "Yes, I am famished; I have had no food for two days." Or you could bring out all your instruments and tap him here and tap him there, record his reactions, make

a lot of graphs, and then come to the conclusion, "This man lacks food." That is one way of knowing reality—the purely objective, scientific way of approaching it. But I think the other way, the subjective way, is also pretty good—I should say even better. You know hunger; it is not something alien to you. Reality is not alien to you, you are mixed up with it, you are a part of it; then why can you not know it through your own inner principles?

## 3

Now let us return to the account Vedanta gives of creation or, rather, of cosmic evolution. We were at a stage where an infinite number of effulgent souls had come into existence. Cosmic intelligence also comes into existence in relation to the cosmic Being; and in relation to the particular individual beings, individual intelligence comes into existence. Individual minds come into existence by the same process as that by which the cosmic mind comes into existence. Also, individual lives come into existence, or I should say, vitality comes into existence, because life is related not only to this physical body, but also to the senses and the mind. *Prāṇa* is the word we use for life or energy, and it is a very inclusive term. In relation to matter, you call it the life principle;

when that disappears, cellular matter disintegrates and death comes—death of the body. Similarly, when vitality goes out of the mind, the mind can no longer think, the senses become dead: the eyes cannot see, the ears cannot hear, intelligence cannot function; everything is, as it were, dead—stopped short, frozen. So the principle of cosmic *prāṇa* evolves and in parallel with it, individual *prāṇa*. All this—intelligence, mind, *prāṇa*, and so on—has come into existence by this creative process, or cosmic evolution.

Let me repeat here that while thinking of creation or evolution there are two things you must never forget: one is the parallelism of the universal and the individual, and the other is that this evolution is only apparent, not real. Apparently the universal Soul has become an infinite number of individual souls; apparently there has been a simultaneous and parallel evolution within the objective world—apparently so, not really so. Yet in this appearance there is a sort of method, a method in this madness.

From *Īśvara*, we come to what is called the world of mind, or the subtle world, the subtle level of existence. Here the cosmic Being or God is given other names: *Sūtrātmā* or *Hiraṇyagarbha*. *Sūtrātmā* means “thread soul” and *Hiraṇyagarbha* means “golden-wombed.” I should mention here that we always think God has two aspects. One is outside the form, controlling it from the outside;

another is controlling it from the inside. At this stage that I am speaking of, when infinite subtle forms have come into existence, God, as it were, enters into every form and becomes its "thread soul." Just as a thread passes through every pearl to form a necklace, in the same way, in this second or subtle stage, God, being the inner being of every form, threads it, holds it to all the others by his own being; He is the heart of everything. That is why He is called *Sūtrātmā*, "Thread Soul."

Why is He called *Hiraṇyagarbha*, "Golden-wombed"? Because the concrete world has not yet been born; it is, as it were, in the womb. And because the world is still subtle, because it is not yet concrete, not yet dark; it is still shining; it has not lost its luminosity. As a whole the cosmos in its subtle aspect is a shining thing; and that is why the cosmic Being at this stage has a womb that is golden. In His womb God contains this golden universe, contains it within Himself. This is God considered as outside His creation. And, as I have already explained, He is also *Sūtrātmā*; He is also inside everything in this shining, subtle universe.

At this level the individual soul is also shining and is called *tajasa*, means "shining, fiery." Why? Because his glory is not yet obscured by the physical body and by the degradation of the mind—that is, by the enslavement of this mind to the physical universe. If, for example, you become free of this physical universe and also, therefore, of

your physical body, you will be a luminous being. Inwardly you will feel a sense of great effulgence. Even physically there will be a shining quality about you; you will have a luminosity about your face. Well, that is one explanation of why the soul in that state is called *tajjasa*, fiery or shining.

So far, then, this is what we find: In the first stage, when *Īśvara* has come into existence, everything is in a cosmic form, unbroken into any differentiation, except that God has become divided, as it were, into an infinite number of individual souls. But they are so close to God that they feel their unity with one another and with Him. You hear of mystics, or saints and sages who through devotion and spiritual effort have reached a state of perpetual divine communion; they feel at one with God and at the same time at one with all beings. That is the way it is in the beginning before the souls become degraded. Externally or objectively considered, creation has not taken place; there has not yet been any differentiation; so there is a tremendous bond of unity between the infinite number of souls and God.

Coming down to the second or middle stage, the souls become associated with intelligence, mind, vitality, and the beginning of the senses. As a result of this association, the sense of separation among them becomes quite pronounced. Although they are still luminous, they are independent individuals. And as regards their union with God,

that also has suffered impairment; they no longer feel so close to Him. On the other side, an infinite number of differentiated, though subtle, objects have now come out of this undifferentiated objectivity. This is the state of things in the middle stage.

You find, therefore, in the process of evolution or "creation," a degradation of the soul, a loss of the soul's original nature and its identity with God. At the same time you find diminishing glory in the universe, because God Himself becomes, as it were, contracted; He becomes more and more concrete. But, mind that, in so becoming He has not lost His own original nature. The Absolute is not gone. *Īśvara* is not gone. When God becomes *Hiraṇyagarbha*, *Sūtrātmā*, there is still *Īśvara*, and there is still the Absolute.

Now, from the middle stage another, grosser, aspect of divinity emerges, and we find that the world of objectivity becomes more and more pronounced and demands more and more attention of the individual soul. That is our present stage. Here the five original principles have, as it were, become gross. As I explained earlier, a certain compounding and mixing takes place in the five original elements of this material universe. You understand, these original elements are not atoms or elements from a chemical point of view. The whole approach to creation here is not objective at all. Rather, you might say that these principles are the five possibilities of sense perception.

The universe is nothing but a compound of sensibles. That is the Vedantic approach. A thing is nothing but its capability of being perceived by the senses. That is all there is to it. So at this stage these capabilities become gross, and out of these five gross elements the vast universe, the one that we see now, has come into existence. According to our philosophers, even those worlds that are called heavens, in which angels and gods are supposed to be dwelling, are all part of the gross universe.

And what has happened to God? He is now called *Virāt*, "the Vast One." *Virāt* is God as particularly related to this gross universe. Ordinarily people think of God as ruling this universe; if you want to give a very precise term to that aspect of God, you should call him *Virāt*. According to us, that is the lowest conception of divinity. A higher conception is *Sūtrātmā*; a still higher conception is *Īśvara* and a still higher conception is Brahman, *Nirguṇa* Brahman. That is the last, the highest Being there is; we can go no farther back than that. But here, in our gross stage, God has become, as it were, endowed with a physical body of His own. This whole universe—this terrestrial universe which we see, and also the other worlds, which gods and angels see, and if there are devils, the worlds they see—all these worlds form, as it were, the physical body of the cosmic Being, *Virāt*.

And what happens to the individual? At this stage the individual is called *viśva*. The Sanskrit hasn't any particular meaning; it can be considered to be "the all" or "the whole" or "he who contains the all." The reference is to the idea of macrocosm and microcosm. What is contained in the vast universe is in miniature contained also in this small universe, the individual. In reference to that they have given the individual person the name *viśva*, "the all." But what has happened to the individual soul? Further degradation has taken place. His mind has become the servant of his body and of the material universe to such an extent that he does not know whether his mind is independent of his body or only a by-product of it; and as regards the soul, he doubts there is a soul at all. Such is the degradation the individual has undergone. Here the soul becomes terribly swamped, and, of course, spread before him the infinite number of subtle forms have become gross.

Now, according to this scheme of creation, let us see what our present position is in terms of all these universes. Here I stand before you, apparently part of this gross material universe, and if I have no better sense than to think I am body, then I believe this is all there is. But still there is in me my higher being called *taijasa*, the effulgent self, and also my still higher being called *prājña*, that is to say, the omniscient, eternally wise one, and also in me is my yet higher self,

Brahman, the Absolute—yes, the Absolute is still there. These higher and deeper selves are unknown to me, just as many things of my physical and mental being are unknown to me. But they are still there, they are still functioning, and if I become aware of them, if my sense of I-ness shifts and becomes identified with my effulgent self, or with my omniscient self, or with the Absolute Self, at once my whole universe will change.

Suppose at this moment I lose all body-consciousness; my mind will become at once free from the imposition of this body as well as from the physical forms of this objective universe. I shall at once feel that I am a part of the middle, or subtle, universe, and I shall feel closer to God; I shall feel effulgent within; a sense of light will be always present in my thought and in my being. Suppose there is a further development in me: I shall then feel at one with all beings. The material and mental universes will disappear for me, and I shall become aware of an infinite number of spirits, who while having their individual distinctions, feel a close unity with one another and with God. And if I go still further, then all these distinctions will become lost in utter identity, and of that nothing can be said. All these things are possible just by shifting my ground.

I have explained to you that the five principles that are derived gradually from the original principle of *māyā* make up intelligence, mind, ego,

senses, and vitality and that these same five principles also make up the objects to be perceived by the senses, to be thought over by the mind, to be organized by the intelligence, to be enjoyed by the ego. All these things, subjective and objective, are related, so that when we become disidentified from the body or the senses, we become at the same time disidentified from the objective universe that corresponds to the functioning of our inner instruments. There is no wonder, therefore, that if we reach the state of total at-onement with *Īśvara* we would no longer be aware of this universe of plurality. The material universe, the subtle universe—all the differentiated universes—will disappear. There may remain a sense of otherness, a sense of *māyā*, but it will consist more in a consciousness of an infinite number of spirits than of any kind of material or mental universe.

You see how it is? I told you to remember that it is all *as it were*; it is all an appearance. If I could impress you sufficiently with the truth of what I am saying, this would be the result: you would say, "Is that right, at this moment I am also the effulgent soul? At this moment I am also the omniscient soul? At this moment I am also the Infinite, Absolute Spirit? I am? *Now*? These are not states to be acquired or developed by me? It is just a matter of relating myself to the middle state or to the first state or even to the Absolute state, and

it is done?" My friends, if I could succeed in convincing you of this, you could not live the life you are living now. This moment there would come a liberation. This moment.

There was a great sage who used to come to a king, his disciple. One day the king was dressed to go hunting. It was the duty of kings to kill harmful animals, you see; so he was getting ready to do this duty. He had just put one foot in the stirrup when the sage came, and he asked the sage, "Sir, tell me about the true nature of the Self." The teacher said, "Well, O King, if I tell you now, you will at once realize it." The king said, "Please tell me!" And the teacher told him the truth. So impressive was his teaching—and of course the king was a very enlightened person—that then and there he plunged into the consciousness of his own true Self. His body remained inert, but he himself just went beyond this physical world, beyond this mental world, into the world of undifferentiated objectivity, and then beyond that into the Absolute. The story is that there he stood, with one foot in the stirrup, still holding the reins, lost to the outside world, plunged in the consciousness of Absolute Truth and Divinity. Why should it not be?

Many of our sages have said that the means by which the highest truth is realized is the word. You have often been told of the methods of

realization given in some of the Upaniṣads: *Ātmā vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsitavyaḥ*<sup>2</sup> — “This Self should be seen, should be perceived; this Self should be heard about, thought about, meditated upon.” Why did they put hearing before thinking or meditating? Because that is the sovereign means. But both teacher and taught must be highly qualified. *Āścaryovaktā kuśalo'syalabdhā āścaryo jñātā kuśalānuśiṣṭaḥ*<sup>3</sup> — “Who can gain this knowledge, who can receive this knowledge? “He has to be very skillful, very qualified, and the teacher of this truth, also, should be *āścaryo* —wonderful, marvelous.” If there were such a marvelous teacher and he told that truth, at this very moment you would realize that this is all an appearance. If it is as flimsy as a dream, why should it not be broken as easily?

## 4

So that explains our present position. You might say, “You still haven't explained how body, mind, and soul can be combined, though you have many times asked how these three dissimilar principles can be brought together.” The answer

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2. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.5.6.

3. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.7.

is: In dream, in illusion everything is possible; all kinds of impossible things are possible. If you feel that your body, mind, and soul are mixed up together, it is just like the appearance of things in a dream, where unreal things seem to be real, where events that actually have not happened appear to have happened. The whole answer is: actually there are not these three principles, and actually they have not become mixed together. Even in our present experience, when we don't think these three to be dreamlike, we see the contradiction among them. But if you admit that the world we now experience is not real, then the question about the combination of body, mind, and soul will not arise. In this state of ignorance, of illusion and confusion, all kinds of impossible things seem to have become actual. This is the answer then: it just has not happened. If you say, "But it seems to me . . ." well, it also seems to you that you are a confused being, and when you say, "It seems to me . . .," you should remember that what appears to be actual to you is a result of your confusion. You should not make much of it.

So, then, if we remember that our present state is an appearance only, we shall have the answer to all our questions: we don't have to answer them. We just have to remember the true state of things, and we shall realize that these three—body, mind, and spirit—have never been combined. Get rid of this mixed up condition of

your intelligence, and the answer is there: you are the Spirit; you are neither the mind nor the body. Only when you are mixed up do you find yourself to be part of this vast universe—the physical universe, the mental universe, the intelligence universe.

There still remains one point to be discussed. What about the history of a soul? A part of that history we know: a person becomes conceived in the mother's womb, his body begins to grow and is born on this earth; then we see him maturing and aging until he dies. This much we see. But where does this soul come from? And where does it go? I think it is quite evident from what has been said that Vedanta will not accept the view that the soul is created in the mother's womb. Our understanding is that the soul, associated with the mind—and, of course, with intelligence, the senses, and vitality—comes to the womb and there derives material particles from the parents; out of these it weaves a body around itself, and when the body becomes mature enough to appear on this earth, it is born. That is the way we explain it.

Here we come to the principle of what we call reincarnation. I shall speak of this in another lecture of this series; so I need not dwell upon it here. It is enough to say that by the time we are ready to depart this world our existence in this objective universe often seems to have been unsatisfactory. I am born, I want so many things

in this life—I want wealth, I want beauty, I want health, I want enjoyment, I want prosperity, name, fame—all these things. How few of us can say when the time of death comes that our desires have been fulfilled! And so the soul dreams of coming back to this terrestrial plane; it wants to become a part of it again, and therefore this transmigratory movement takes place, in which the soul, associated with the mind, departs this body, goes to the other side, waits for a time, and again assumes a physical body. It goes on like this in a circular movement from life to death, from death to life, until it has satisfied its desire for possessing and enjoying things in this plane of existence.

This, then, is the causal force that brings about birth here. We say the history of the soul on this particular level consists of life in a concrete world—either on this earth or on some similar planet—and of then going beyond into another world after death, a world commensurate with its achievements here. There the soul mulls things over, enjoys or suffers, but cannot acquire anything new. Then again it desires to come back to this world where it can achieve anew. Why should there be this attraction to the concrete world? It is because the soul has given this world a certain importance. If you see a pile of imitation gold and think you have found a big store of real gold, then you would like to possess it. Although

it is imitation, you don't know it. So, as long as we think this is a desirable world, we shall come back here. If you ask, "Since our higher self is involved within us, would it not prevent us from coming back?" I would say that just as an intelligent person sometimes becomes so overwhelmed by cupidity and greed that he forgets his own greater wisdom, in the same way as long as this terrible greed and attachment prevail, our higher self and its wisdom are as good as nonexistent for us; we are governed by our present appetites. And so we come back and go away and come back again. That's the history of the soul at present.

Here I think I should briefly mention another idea, the idea of evolution. Modern thinkers like to put the individual and life itself against the background of universal evolution. For example, we think that somehow in infinite space matter begins to appear, then a gaseous ball starts to congeal, and eventually we have this earth. After millions and millions of years, the earth gradually cools down, and eventually life appears. Then gradually higher and higher beings arise until man evolves. Some have even thought that the same process of evolution will continue and will produce still higher beings. Although I have a little hesitation in accepting this idea of evolution in toto, let us accept it for now; it will not alter man's place in *cosmic* evolution. I have explained how God as it were passes through several stages until we have

this material universe. This material universe is, as it were, woven into time and space, and here change takes place, an infinite number of patterns are being formed by what we call natural law. It is in this stage—when the universe has assumed concrete form—that you can think of the process of material evolution as taking place.

Only the other day I read that more and more astronomers are coming to the conclusion that the whole starry universe is not the product of one evolutionary process. Rather, in this vast universe of stars many stages of creation are going on—in one part new stars are being born, in another, old stars are dying out. In other words, these astronomers are seeing this material universe as a whole; in one part they find a process of evolution, in another part a process of involution. But this gross universe came into existence by the metaphysical process I have described, and you should not think of the chronology of that process in terms of our present time; that would be a mistake. Time itself is part of the gross universe and is therefore the product of this whole cosmic evolution, this divine mystery, which our minds cannot conceive.

But the souls are beginningless. While this particular earth was coming into existence, the soul may have been somewhere else in some other part of the gross universe that was already evolved. But inasmuch and insofar as the soul

comes into this universe to be born, it subjects itself to the conditions of this universe; it suffers from them and enjoys them. If we hold ourselves down to this universe, we are part of its evolution; we are subject to its conditions, ruled by its laws. That is what the natural man is, that is what we ordinarily think ourselves to be, and that is what we usually try to explain in explaining ourselves.

But I remind you again, and I shall conclude with this reminder: there is no true objective universe at all. All things are related to your own condition. There is no pure objectivity in this universe. If you maintain a certain state of mind, if you want to remain part of this gross level, you will have the gross universe, a gross state of mind, and the sufferings and enjoyments of that universe. But such a gross universe and state of mind are not compulsory for you; even while you are behaving as though they were, you are still the subtle soul, still the causal or finer soul that is at one with God, and finally, you are still the Absolute Spirit. And it is given to you to choose which you want to be. If you want to be at this moment the Absolute Spirit, and if your will is really undivided, if you are truly convinced that you are that Spirit, at this moment you will find all your bondages are broken. There is nothing that will be able to hold you here. You will just be taken up to the Absolute—by what has been called the grace of God.

Many religions speak of the grace of God, that

is, of a peculiar power emanating from God by which the impossible becomes possible, by which things happen in a very short space of time that ordinarily would take ages and ages to accomplish. Miracles happen by the grace of God, but because we the Spirit are the same as God the Spirit, divine grace is also our own grace. If we would just affirm that we are Spirit, at this moment we would become free.

That is what makes a man—all this that I have explained. What kind of man you will be, it is for you to choose.

# THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF THE MIND

## 1

For quite some time, as we all know, there has been in the West a great deal of interest in the study of the mind; a great deal has been learned about its so-called normal and abnormal states. One has to admit, however, that this study has suffered from certain deficiencies. First of all, I do not think enough attention has been given to the mind in its higher aspects. And because we cannot really form a correct idea of any part of a thing unless we know that thing in its entirety, I think that an understanding of the mind in what is called its natural state has suffered from this lack

of knowledge of its higher states. As a consequence there has been a great deal of misinterpretation and misunderstanding about what the mind is and about how it should be controlled and directed in order that our best interests as persons can be served. In this lecture I would like to tell you briefly what our Vedantic philosophers and our spiritual teachers think about the mind.

I have sometimes told you that those who have traversed the whole path, from the ordinary or natural state to the state of illumination, or God-realization, have achieved an acquaintance with the mind in its various aspects. But it must be admitted that even a spiritual aspirant, however advanced he might be, is not always very observant. His attention is directed towards God; what happens in his mind he does not always observe or, having observed it, does not always form a true idea of it. Still, he cannot escape forming some idea of the general states of the mind and of its different levels, because such knowledge is bound up with his search for God. So it can be said in general that wherever there has been a growth of spiritual knowledge or knowledge of God there has also been a growth of the knowledge of the mind in its totality. Details may be missing, but as regards the general features of the mind, there cannot be any doubt that all knowers of God have had knowledge of them.

Modern psychology often suffers from

ignorance of this basic knowledge of the mind, and so you find many strange things being taught even by intelligent psychologists. I think it would not be wrong to say that the majority of psychologists of the present day have given a peculiar turn to human life—if I may say so, an earthly turn. They think that the mind should learn to adjust itself to what is called "the reality of this life"; if the mind turns away from that reality then the mind becomes "abnormal." The other day a teacher of psychology came here to one of the classes and rather sharply told me that we should not teach concentration or meditation because it takes a person away from reality. I ought to have asked him, "But what, to begin with, is your idea of reality?" I am quite sure he would have said, "I am not concerned with that; I am concerned with the mind." And yet everything psychologists teach about the mind presupposes definite ideas about life, about the person, about the world, about the future—all these things are implied in their interpretations of the mind.

I have read works of some psychologists in which they have vehemently denied that they were involved in speculation in any sense; they were scientists. They were not concerned with metaphysics; they studied mental phenomena, and if you were a student of science you would understand what they were talking about. Of course, I am not a student of science; so I always

fail to understand what they are talking about. To my uninformed mind it seems that any interpretation of mental phenomena always presupposes many things that belong to the realm of philosophy. First, for instance, you have to have a sense of value; only then does interpretation become possible. How can you tell a person to train his mind in a certain way unless you think that the result of such training is really desirable?

One of the things, for example, that the modern person wants to avoid is conflict. But not all conflict is bad; conflict about *what* is the question. How can there be any growth without conflict? If you are as complacent as the proverbial cow, how can you ever grow any better than you are? Always there has to be some conflict: you attain to a certain state of knowledge, and then your mind begins to wonder if that knowledge is not imperfect. Maybe there is a higher truth or a higher state to reach, and you begin to inquire about it. The moment you find that there is something superior to your present existence, you try to rise up to it. But of course you cannot do so at once, because you are held down to your present position by past habit; without a struggle you cannot extricate yourself. So of course conflict comes. I do not say that every conflict is desirable, but if you want to eliminate all conflict from your life, what will you be? And who told you that if you adjust yourself to everything around you, you will

achieve anything or arrive anywhere? Everybody knows that the majority are ignorant. Only a handful of people are possessed of truth—or of some truth. Most of us are totally ignorant. How can I, in all conscience, ask a person to adjust himself to the majority? It would mean asking him to become foolish. You see, there are these strange ideas in modern psychology.

In India, in the age of the Upaniṣads, which began at least five thousand years ago, we had many sages and seers. They were not bound by dogmas or creeds; nor were they under the pressure of any community to hold on to certain religious beliefs lest they be hanged or mobbed. They were given absolute freedom to think, to speculate, to investigate, and to discover truth. They were called *ṛṣis*, which sometimes is translated as “seers.” Of course, you should not understand the word seer in the usual sense but as seer of supernatural realities or truths, for they had direct experience of such things. During this period, which I think lasted for at least two thousand years, innumerable men and women investigated and experienced spiritual reality, compared notes, and came to certain general conclusions about their own Self, about the creation of man and the creation of the world, about the nature of God, and of course about the nature of the mind and the means of knowledge by which one could actually come to direct perception of

one's own Self and the Self of this universe, God. They became, therefore, well acquainted with the mind. And being very rational, they went straight to the point; they were very free in their thought. They had not the slightest fear of following the trail of logic to its conclusion: wherever truth led, there they went. And so they have given us a great deal of knowledge about the human mind.

Later, two or three centuries before the Christian era, there came a man whose name was Patañjali. He was a very extraordinary man; no doubt most of you are acquainted with his classical work called *Yoga Sūtra*, or Aphorisms on Yoga, a beautifully written book. Although many other works are available on the same subject, his still occupies the supreme place. He wrote chiefly about the mind, for yoga is concerned with the training of the mind and, through such training, with the finding of ultimate Truth. So we have here another monumental study of the mind. If you read the aphorisms by themselves, you will probably think there is not much in them, because in ancient times, when writing was not known in India, it was the custom to compose such aphorisms in the briefest form possible, and then the teachers would give voluminous oral explanations of them. These explanations came to be known as *bhāṣyam*, that is to say, expositions or commentaries. If anything was lacking in these commentaries, then commentaries were

composed on the commentaries, and then commentaries on those commentaries; it went on until everything was explained in the greatest detail, all doubts were resolved, and the clearest exposition given. Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtra* has many such commentaries.

And yet it must be said that greater knowledge of the mind is not to be had through the study of these books; for in India even now the oral tradition is given the greater place. For example, many things that Sri Ramakrishna used to say or his disciples used to say about the mind or about the Self, about the nature of God and the various stages of spiritual growth, you will never find in any books. And that is quite right, because it is in accord with our traditions that such knowledge should be oral, not written; the qualified person should learn from the qualified teacher. That has been the tradition and that is still the tradition, for where great things are taught and learned, where a subtle mind must be at play, the oral tradition is the only one worthwhile.

However that may be, since ancient times in India there have been all kinds of spiritual and philosophical studies. Not a century has gone by in which fresh studies have not been made. And from those ancient times, about two or three thousand years before Christ, up to the present day all of our philosophers and seers and sages have agreed on certain fundamental facts about

the mind. It is these facts I would like to tell you.

## 2

In order to speak of those things, however, we must have an idea of the philosophical background of these philosophers and of their understanding of the mind. This is not to say that if you have a different system of philosophy you will be justified in interpreting the mind in a different way. No, for what we in India call philosophy is nothing but a systematic statement of facts. You might say, "But the followers of different systems have been just as dogmatic about their own philosophy, and different philosophers have quite different views. Some accept one; others accept another—who knows which is correct?" But you see, our systems of philosophy are not speculative: we do not speculate, we practice, we experience; and that experience forms the basis of our philosophy. We say we are right because our statements never have contradicted any other system that is based on experience. Systematizations have differed because some have incorporated more facts than others. A dualist, for example, may base his thought on experience; but if he hasn't had certain higher experiences, then he will systematize his experience in one way, and it is there that those

with higher experiences will join issue with him and say, "Get more experience, then the interpretation and systematization of your facts will be different."

So I shall begin by giving a very brief idea of the philosophical background of the Indian concepts of the mind. First of all—and this may sound very strange to you—we maintain that the mind is not necessary, that it is really a nuisance. Through some inadvertence we have become victims of the mind, we have become attached to it, but it does not contribute anything at all. In the beginning—that is to say, before we became involved in the mind and the senses and all the rest—we were perfect; when we will get rid of the mind, we shall again attain the same state of perfection.

If you ask, "How is it, then, that we got involved in the mind? There must have been some purpose in it," I shall ask how you can assume that there is purpose in a mistake; that is equivalent to saying it is not a mistake. But we do make mistakes all the time; as I have said, the majority of us are ignorant. Our present state, in which we find our mind thrashing about so much, is a state of ignorance, and since this is so, then this mind itself must be a product of ignorance or an ally of ignorance. What is the wonder, then, that we hold the mind to be not worthwhile, that we say it is not necessary? Further, if you consider yourself an entity different from the mind, then

you must admit that the mind cannot be a necessity; to say that mind is necessary is to maintain the position that you and the mind are in perpetual alliance. And that is to say that you are not one person at all. You are Siamese twins. What an awful situation! You cannot get rid of the mind; it is perpetually attached to you. Then what are you? You are only half a being.

If you want to take that position, by all means do so, but then you will have to answer this question: if you and the mind are two separate entities, what is it that has brought the two together? What is the connecting link between these two entirely different entities? If you say, "My mind and I are not two entirely different entities," I shall ask, "Then why call them two? Why not call them one?" If you say, "No, they are the same and at the same time different," then I should say that your proposition does not make sense. That which is different from you does not belong to you, and that which is the same as you is one with you. Further, if you admit that a state of perfection is possible to you, then you have to admit that you are just yourself, you are not yourself plus something else. This might sound like hairsplitting logic, if it were not continually being confirmed by experience. Our own being (or as we are inclined to say, the Self, because that is a literal translation of the Sanskrit word *Ātman* or *Ātmā*) is a spiritual substance; it is not mind; it is not the body; it is

perfect, and it exists in its own glory. It does not have to borrow glory from anywhere else; glory and effulgence are its very nature. The *Ātman* or Self is the Light of lights, and it is ever shining.

Well, as it happens, in our present state we seem to be somehow associated with the mind and body, and outside of us we see a vast universe extended. To that let us add the other universes that we cannot perceive by means of the senses but that nevertheless exist—those subtler universes in which subtler, finer beings dwell. All of these constitute the objective universe. And here we are, or here I am—I who am bound up with the mind and the body—and here is this universe to be known by me, to be possessed by me. Yet I cannot say that in my present state I am free from ignorance. As a matter of fact, if I take the position of a person of average knowledge, I should say that I know very little, and whatever I do know is not true knowledge, it is confused knowledge—if such an expression is permissible. So if we accept this fundamental position that our present state is a state of ignorance, then it is clear that our whole effort should be given to spiritual life. Why? Because spiritual life is the life that is dedicated to the finding of eternal truth, final truth. Religion is not one of many functions of a man, coordinated with his other functions. Not at all. All other functions are functions in error, whereas religion is the finding of truth. And in religion, in spiritual

endeavor, the great teachers always say, "Discover your inner consciousness, make the mind subtle and high, quiet the mind, and then only will you find spiritual truth."

Patañjali, to whom I just referred, begins his book by saying this. Explaining what yoga means, he says in the second aphorism, *Yogaścittavṛtti nirodhaḥ*<sup>1</sup>— "Where there is not the slightest movement in the mind, that is the state of yoga." If you ask, "What is this mysterious state in which mind stops functioning altogether?" he says, *Tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam*<sup>2</sup> — "There the seer, or the perceiver [that is to say, the subject, the conscious being] exists in his own true state." That is the highest state. Patañjali does not say that there one knows God, but only that there the knower—that is to say, you or I—exists in his own true nature. Here he speaks from a highly philosophical standpoint, the standpoint of the inquirer after truth.

What happens when we do not have this yoga, that is, when the mind has not stopped functioning? *Vṛtti-sārūpyamitaratra*<sup>3</sup> — "In other states we become identified with the movements of our mind." Whatever rises in the mind, we become bound up with it, and that is the state of bondage, not of freedom. For example, say your body has a

1. Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, 1.2.

2. *Ibid.*, 1.3.

3. *Ibid.*, 1.4.

condition that you interpret as pain, and when that condition becomes reflected in your mind, you say, "Oh, I am so full of pain." Why do you say that? You could say the body is full of pain—or could you? Unless you had identified yourself with that which was reflected in your mind, you could not call it pain; you could only say the body had this kind of change in it. Just consider what a wonderful state that would be! If a tooth begins to ache and you could say, "No, there is no such thing as an ache; it is just that the tooth has this change in it," you would be a healthy man. When that identification has not taken place and you are established in your own true nature, then you are the perfect, effulgent being; you are limited by neither time nor condition, even though apparently you are living in this body. But because we become identified with changes in the mind, we are in this peculiar state of existence, this relative state, and although we are apt to see many differences and degrees of value in it, the only true statement about it is this: it is a nuisance. It doesn't matter in which condition of mind we are—what is the sense of comparing one condition with another? It is as though twenty people had been put in a prison, and each was claiming that he had the best corner, that no one else had such a nice corner, and they were fighting over whose corner was superior and whose inferior, forgetting that all of them are prisoners. Our present state

is no better than that. That is what we are really doing, comparing one state of mind with another and saying, "Oh, this is a good state; that is a bad state." Of course we have a right to do it; everyone has a right to be foolish. But you know, it leads nowhere.

### 3

Let us accept the fact that this mind is not necessary, but there it is. Somehow we have been caught up in it, and it is causing all our trouble. Let us see, then, what this mind is. Actually, it is not definable to you unless you have learned to become a little separated from it. It has been found that only when a person has realized a certain detachment from the mind can he begin to get an idea of it. If you ask such a person what the mind is, he will probably tell you that the best that can be said about it is that it is the sense of otherness. To speak a little more clearly: the mind is non-Self—*anātmā*; I am the Self and this mind is non-Self or part of the non-Self. But even that does not give you a very good idea of what the mind is.

Let me try to explain it a little further. If you admit that in the beginning, in the true state, there is one infinite Being—which you are, or God is, or both are—there is then no sense of otherness.

There cannot be anything other than the infinite, can there? If there were something else, the infinite would no longer be infinite; the very existence of something outside of it would give a boundary, a limitation to it, and therefore both would become finite. So you have to admit that in that infinite state there is no 'other'. But when we lose the consciousness of our own eternal sovereignty, of our infinite nature, there is simultaneously a consciousness of the 'other'. This 'other' cannot be explained. Some have said it is both existent and at the same time non-existent. Existent, because in our present state we are forced to acknowledge its existence: I feel there is so much to be known by me, which I think is separate from me, different from me—and this is what I call the 'other'. But if I realize my own pure nature, my infinite nature, there will not be any 'other'. Now, when I say realize, I do not mean that at present my true nature is gone and I shall have to produce it in the future. No, it is just that for the time being I am ignoring it, though it is still there. So even now, logically speaking, I have to say that this 'other' does not exist; it exists in one respect, but in another respect it does not exist. That is the peculiar thing.

If you say that this is mysterious and contradictory language, I shall answer, "Well, if you are suffering from ignorance, what do you expect?" Ignorance always says all kinds of peculiar things.

That is why it is ignorance. Our philosophers, therefore, are not in the least fazed by this kind of accusation. They say, "About error anything can be said, and it can be of any nature." You see a dream; when you come out of the dream, it seems incoherent. And yet in the dream it seemed all right—yes, because it was a dream; it was the product of illusion. Of our present state they say the same thing.

This sense of otherness has been called *māyā*. If you ask, "Where does *māyā* come from?" we say we don't have to explain it. It is not a positive or independent existence that has to be explained. Our present state, as we have said, is an ignorant state. Ignorance fumbling within its own darkness has to assume an origin of its own condition, and that origin is called *māyā*. And mind has come out of that. Out of the sense of otherness mind originates, and mind is the instrument by which this otherness is perpetuated; mind is also the instrument by which this otherness is fought, and mind is the instrument by which this otherness is eventually conquered. And when it is conquered, the mind itself is also conquered and destroyed. This is the general state of things as regards the mind.

Now, let us see the consequences of this sense of otherness. If I think that there is something other than me, I have a sense of limitation; further, I have the feeling that if I could possess this 'other',

then the two together would produce fulfillment. You see, I am saying that I myself and this 'other', the two together, constitute the whole of reality. So here is this peculiar situation: because of this otherness I set up a movement within myself; I do not remain content with the recognition that there is something other than me; I continually try to know it, to enjoy it, to possess it, to test it. And further, this sense of otherness does not remain static; it begins to degenerate.

In the preceding lecture I explained to you how Brahman becomes *Īśvara* and that in *Īśvara* there are innumerable souls, almost perfect souls; then I told you how *Īśvara* becomes, as it were, degenerated into *Hiraṇyagarbha* or *Sūtrātmā*, the Cosmic Soul presiding over all subtle phenomena, and that at the same time the soul becomes degenerated into what is called in Sanskrit *taijasa*, the effulgent being; and then finally how *Hiraṇyagarbha* becomes degenerated into the status of *Virāṭ*, the Vast Being presiding over this gross universe, while the soul becomes degenerated into its present state, our individual self, which has been called *viśva*. There has been this series of degenerations. The subject becomes degenerated and the object becomes degenerated; the causal universe becomes the subtle universe, the subtle universe becomes this gross universe. It is quite possible to imagine that a further degeneration has taken place and that there may

be no end to it. It is possible to think of the soul in a state in which it realizes itself as inferior even to the worst of men or the worst of any living beings we know here and of the universe becoming much worse than we know it to be. We cannot really form any clear idea about it, because our human consciousness does not permit it, but I think the possibility is there. It is out of the sense of this possibility that there are ideas in almost every culture about demons and all kinds of other dark beings who live in the nether world, who live in darkness and function essentially in the spirit of evil—that is, evil as understood by human beings.

Any how, the degeneration which has taken place because of the sense of otherness doesn't remain static; it becomes worse and worse, worse and worse. And on the part of the individual soul there is a more and more frantic effort to possess this exterior universe. You see what has happened? The world of objects has become more and more alienated from the individual knower. In the beginning the objective world was almost of the same nature as God or the Spirit; there the subject and object were almost equal; although there was some distinction, both were of the same spiritual substance. But through this degradation, the individual begins to realize himself first as a mental being and then as a physical being. And the world of objects also changes; instead of Spirit it becomes first a world of ideas, and then a world of

matter; and at last the two, subject and object, become widely separated. At the present time, therefore, we find the world of objects and the knower face to face with each other, and each is opposed to the other. Matter is opposed to consciousness and consciousness to matter. And the more alienated this world of objects has become from the knower, the more frantic are our efforts to become united with it. It is because of this that you find the average man wants to possess wealth, wants to grab things. That is what people do. You can explain all the common efforts of the human mind in terms of what I have just now said.

## 4

Vedanta philosophers say that the mind in all the different levels—the material level, the subtle level, as well as higher levels—has four aspects to it. The highest aspect is intelligence or *buddhi*. *Buddhi* represents complete knowledge or understanding, as in a judgment or percept of which you have no doubt. It does not necessarily follow that your judgment is correct, but you think you have a correct judgment, a complete understanding or perception. There is a state preceding this, which is called *Manas*. *Manas* is translated as “mind,” but it is also used in a rather limited sense to mean

the state of indecision or half knowledge, as when you do not see a thing very clearly. For instance, in the twilight you don't see clearly, and you don't know what a thing really is; sometimes you think it is one thing and sometimes another. But when you switch on the light, you say, "Oh, it is this"—there you have a functioning of the *buddhi*. The third aspect of the mind, which is not lower than the other two but a distinct function, is called egoism, *ahamkāra*. It is the sense of 'I' that we all have.

Ego is a very subtle thing to comprehend, and although I have just said it is one aspect of the mind, that is not a complete statement about it. It is a complicated subject, and since I hope to discuss it in a coming lecture, I won't dwell too much on it here. But let me say this much: the ego is really a compound; it is not a simple thing. The self in all of our egoistic consciousness is always identified with a predicate, with a state of the mind. For example, the moment we have the sense of 'I' we also have the sense of I am this, I am that, I am the other thing. I cannot think of myself as the pure 'I' in this present state. Always there is a predicate attached to this 'I', and the 'I' is the subject of the predicate. The ego has been spoken of as a part of the mind because its predicates are all derived from the mind. The mind reflects some condition, and I identify myself with that condition and say I am happy,

or I am miserable, or I am doing this or doing that.

I say, "I am speaking to you on the subject of the mind." Am I, really? That's an incorrect statement. I am not speaking at all; it is the body that is speaking. Nowadays you have no doubt about it, particularly when you listen to the radio or watch television. It is all mechanical: speech, action, everything is mechanical. It is no explanation to say that these things originated from actual living creatures somewhere. That has nothing to do with what you are presently seeing and hearing. Those people may be dead and gone; in any case, they are not connected with the television set at all. You think you hear a beautiful living voice, but in reality it is just mechanically produced. Similarly, what you consider to be functions of yourself are not functions of yourself at all but functions of something mechanical. So I shouldn't say that I am speaking. The Spirit doesn't speak; that which speaks is the non-Spirit, the non-Self. However, the ego or the 'I' has generally been spoken of as a part of the mind, an aspect of the mind.

Then there is the fourth and lowest part of the mind, which is called *citta*. Now, *citta* is a very comprehensive term; like the word *manas*, it may represent the whole of the mind. But here it is being used in a technical sense. In this sense it has sometimes been interpreted as that aspect or part of the mind that is seeking happiness, seeking joy, seeking satisfaction or gratification. Still, that

does not tell you everything about this aspect of the mind. For our purpose I think it will be enough if I say that it is the basic part of the mind, the part of the mind that is not usually known to us and that receives the impact of the senses from the outside.

You see, all your perceptions start with the body, with the sense organs, but how these sensations become transformed into perceptions you don't know. Somewhere in the mind this process of turning sensations into perceptions must begin. Suppose somebody pinches me. The pinch would be in the body, wouldn't it? It has nothing to do with the mind. Yet almost simultaneously I cry out in pain. What has happened? How has the sensation in the body become communicated to the mind? That is, where? There must be somewhere a point of contact. I am not trying to explain how this contact is made. That's a very complicated subject. Briefly, our philosophers have said there is an intermediary thing, which they call *tanmātra*. *Tanmātra* literally means "that only"—that which has no definition. *Tanmātras* are the subtle sources of matter and are much closer to mind than to gross matter; it is through these *tanmātras* that sensations pass in order to reach the mind. Well that is really no explanation, since you can still ask, "Is a *tanmātra* matter or mind?" I won't try to answer that inconvenient question, because I am concerned here with the mind only. Suffice it to

say that sensations communicate themselves first to that part of the mind called *citta*.

“Why, then,” you might ask, “has *citta* been defined as that part of the mind which is seeking gratification or happiness?” Because our philosophers—you may also call them psychologists—think that the continuous movements of the mind, conscious or unconscious, have a purpose behind them. What is that purpose? To realize the supreme value, that in which the mind’s greatest satisfaction or happiness lies. As I have told you, the mind has proposed to itself the ‘other’ and thereby has caused a self-division in the ultimate Being, the Spirit. And because I believe that I am not complete in myself and that there is something else to attain, I am continually running after that ‘other’, trying to possess it, and when I possess it there is satisfaction, there is happiness. So you have to say that the first effort of the mind begins with an idea of gaining gratification, satisfaction, or fulfillment. Therefore that basic part of the mind called *citta* has for its function the search for happiness, the search for fulfillment.

It is also in the *citta* that all the contents of the past are stored. Why do you think you have a memory? Why do you think that you have karma? You know what karma is: When you experience something it leaves an impression on the mind; that impression goes below the threshold of consciousness and remains stored up there; then at

a convenient opportunity it comes out again and clamors for objectification, for projection into the outside. And why do you think we have all these stored impressions? The reason is this: we have all kinds of experiences, and we feel there is some use for them. If we could tell ourselves we no longer have any use for any experience of the outside world, then the mind would no longer remember any of those things; it would no longer be bound by the impressions of past experience. The whole universe would just drop out of our vision. It is as simple as that. If you doubt it, just practice it a little. In one moment you can send this universe into nothingness. Yes! And that is the goal of man. We can attain to a state in which we can send this whole vast universe into nothingness. That is the state called *samādhi*. You cannot believe it until you have come very near the possibility of it. You think, "What! This vast universe I can send into nothingness!" My friends, how do you know it is not made of nothingness? It is made of nothingness.

Well, however that may be, the present fact is that we have not come to the end of our experiences. Therefore memories remain, impressions remain stored up in the *citta*, and we constantly compare these impressions with what we are about to experience. The ordinary person cannot do anything about what enters his *citta*. As he gains more and more control of himself he can

control the *citta* also; sensations will still be presented to the eyes and the nerves and brain cells, but if he wishes he can prevent them from going into the *citta*. If he has not gained that control, everything just comes into the *citta*, and all kinds of things take place there. Sensations are organized, and then those sensations appear in the higher part of the mind, *manas*, the phase of twilight knowledge, uncertain knowledge, where ideas have not yet become quite clear. Finally they come to the highest part of the mind, the *buddhi*, and you have a clear perception or thought. If it is a thought in which there is no sensation from the outside, just something evoked from memory, that thought also passes through the phase of uncertainty; then it comes to the phase of certainty, where the *buddhi*, or intelligence, functions, and there the mental process stops.

In the meantime, what happens to the 'I'? It becomes identified with both these phases of the mind—that in which there is uncertainty and that in which there is certainty. If you wonder whether you are seeing Mr. Smith or Mr. David, or if you say, "I see Mr. Smith"—in both cases the 'I' has to be there. It is you who have this knowledge: first uncertain and then certain. The 'I' tacks itself onto the function of *manas* and the function of *buddhi*; it does not seem to have any function of its own; it always identifies itself with either of these two phases of the mind.

Well, that is how the mind functions on this level. Why does it behave like this? Because it is the only way in which you can come into contact with what you feel as the 'other', the objective phase of reality, which you have determined you should try to know and possess. As long as you have that obsession the mind will go on doing these things in this way.

But if you say, "There is nothing I want to run after; there is no such thing as the 'other'," then all these different functions of the mind will stop. When the mind has reached a condition where it is not vulnerable to sensations, when it can say, "I don't have to receive the sensations of vision, or sound, or form, or colors, or tastes. I don't have to do it"; when we can say, "I have done with this phase of experience, I don't need it," then the subconscious and unconscious will become cleared out, and we won't be forced to receive the impact of sensations into our consciousness. Then when the sensation of, say, hunger along with food is presented before you, your mind will not go towards it. That state of mind is the state of quietness. There the mind says, "No, I don't want it. Let the body have all kinds of sensations, I don't want them. I don't need them." Then the mind becomes truly still. There will not be *citta*, there will not be *manas* with its uncertainty, there will not be *buddhi*, there will not be *ahamkāra*: there will just remain the pure mind, which by itself is

full of certainty. It does not have to search for anything; therefore there is no possibility of its making any mistake; it just exists in its own true nature.

When our philosophers have been asked about the nature of the mind in its truest form, some have said it is really not mind any more, it has become Spirit, or rather, it is Spirit. Others say, "No, it is still mind, but it is so fine, so subtle, that one cannot distinguish it from the Spirit." What does it do then? Being transparent it reflects the Spirit in all its glory; it does not distort that reflection in the slightest. And so one cannot distinguish one from the other, mind from Spirit. That is the mind in its true nature—just the pure, homogeneous mind, filled with the glorious reflection of the Spirit. And that is what the mind really is.

Sri Ramakrishna often used to say that pure mind, pure ego, and pure *buddhi* are the same as the Ātman. There is no difference. One day a boy who had read in the Upaniṣads that God is beyond the reach of mind and speech asked Sri Ramakrishna if it was not true that God cannot be known with the mind. Sri Ramakrishna was a little annoyed: "Now, let me tell you, my boy, one cannot understand the true significance of the scriptures unless he has practiced spirituality a little. Pure mind, pure *buddhi*, and pure Self are the same." As a practical approach, that is the truth.

Philosophically, you might object, "No, you cannot say that—the Upaniṣads don't say that." But if you have reached the state of pure mind, you don't say that the Spirit is beyond the reach of the mind; you just cannot say that.

## 5

Now, I have told you the present situation of the mind and its phases, and here I should like to go back to Patañjali, because he contributed something; I won't say it was anything new, but he mentioned it specifically and thereby gave it a certain emphasis that is of great practical value. As I told you earlier, he said that all the movements or modifications of the mind must be stopped. It is as though the surface of a lake were not allowed to break into even the slightest ripple; it must remain absolutely calm. In Sanskrit this breaking into waves is called *vṛtti*. *Vṛtti* is from the verb root *vṛt*, to become. Normally, mind breaks into thoughts—movements. Well, you stop that. You remember Patañjali said that when all these *vṛttis* stop, then the knower exists in his own true nature; and also the other way around: when there are these *vṛttis*, then the knower becomes identified with them, he becomes mixed up with them.

Infinite are the number of these *vṛttis*. Infinite!

There is no counting them. Why? Because there are infinite moments of knowing in which an infinite number of objects are presented. You may say that we know only a few things: because the same things come repeatedly to us—though not in exactly the same form. However, from one point of view, the modifications or movements of the mind are infinite, according to the infinite number of things, repeated or not, that we are trying to know. But the *vṛttis* can be classified, and Patañjali has classified them under five headings.

One of these is *pramāṇa*. *Pramāṇa* means correct knowledge. It could be perceptual knowledge, inferential knowledge, or scriptural knowledge; but there is a sense of certainty about it. You think, "This is true." That is one kind of *vṛtti*.

Another classification is *viparyaya*. *Viparyaya* means incorrect knowledge, error. If you know a thing differently from what it is, that is error. Or if you fail to know a thing entirely as what it really is, that also is error. There are many variations of error. If there is any kind of incorrect knowing or incorrect thinking it would come under the heading of the *viparyaya* modifications of mind. If it is Mr. Smith who is coming and I think it is Mr. David, that is *viparyaya*. If I recognize that it is Mr. Smith, that would be *pramāṇa* or correct knowledge.

If we apply these two categories to large things as well as to small, we shall see that *pramāṇa*, or

correct knowledge about reality, is a very big thing indeed. If you ask me, "What is truth, what is the real?" and if I apply this category of *pramāṇa* in its comprehensive form, then your question becomes the biggest of all metaphysical questions, doesn't it? If I know the real as it is, I become an illumined soul, I become a Buddha. What is the real? The Infinite Spirit is the real; Brahman is the real. You could think similarly of *viparyaya*: if I know Mr. Smith as Mr. Smith, from a lower standpoint that is correct knowledge, that is *pramāṇa*, but from a higher standpoint it becomes *viparyaya*, error. Mr. Smith is not Mr. Smith; Mr. Smith is God Himself. If I look upon him as an embodied being, a limited being, I am really mistaking God for a man; I am suffering from error. Or if you point to the ocean and ask, "What is that?" and I answer, "It is the Pacific Ocean," you could say, "Right! I shall give you a hundred points for that." But from another standpoint you could say, "No, that's false! You are wrong." Why? Because it is God Himself; it is not water; it is not the Pacific Ocean or any other such thing. You see, in the application of these categories of *vṛttis* we classify the same experiences differently according to our mental or spiritual status.

The third group of *vṛttis* has been called *vikalpa*. *Vikalpa* is something that raises in your mind a thought or an idea that you think is a piece of knowledge but for which there is no

corresponding object. Yoga philosophers claim we say many things which produce such *vikalpa vṛttis*. I shall give you one tricky kind of example. You say, "Oh, I have a headache." I think you could say that "I have a headache" is a good grammatical sentence. But is it really true? You think, "Here in my mind is a piece of knowledge; so I could call it *pramāṇa*." But from another standpoint you could say, "No, it is not *pramāṇa*, it is *vikalpa*," because there is no such thing as your having a headache. Consider: can the head be related to this 'I'? And if a head is not related to the 'I' can it have any ache in it? When you examine these different components of the sentence and relate one to the other, trying to understand the meaning of the sentence, you find the whole thing is riddled with contradictions; there is no such thing at all as your having a headache. And therefore it might be said, from a very high standpoint, that almost everything we say is an example of *vikalpa*, of a *vṛtti* or movement of the mind that is produced by using certain words for which there is no corresponding reality. If you don't want to be metaphysical, an ordinary example is *vandhyā-putra*, "the son of a barren woman." Of course there can be no such thing as a barren woman's son. If she is barren she cannot have a son, and if she has a son, then she is not barren. Words have a way of producing certain thoughts in your mind. But it may be that one word produces a thought that is contradicted

by a compound of the same word or by other words in the same sentence. All such self-contradictory movements of the mind have been classified under the heading *vikalpa*.

Then there is a fourth kind of *vṛtti* called *nidrā*, or deep sleep. Deep sleep is not the absence of thought. There is a *vṛtti* there, but the only thing that *vṛtti* says is, "I am not knowing anything." A person on entering a dark room may say, "Oh, it is so dark I cannot see anything." Now, these Yoga philosophers say that your not seeing anything is a positive kind of knowledge, a positive piece of information, and the mind raises an equivalent movement or mode within itself to represent this piece of positive information. In the same way, they have considered that *nidrā vṛtti* is a movement of the mind. The practical implication of this is that you should not identify unconsciousness or deep sleep with the state of yoga that is a cessation of all movement of the mind. Many of you say about the practice of yoga, "All I have to do is just make my mind vacant." Well, I think you cannot just make your mind vacant, or if you can, that vacancy has nothing to do with spiritual attainment; it is not the calmness of the mind that is meant by yoga or *samādhi*. Many people have said, even thoughtful people—and I have sometimes been puzzled by seeing even Indian philosophers (modern vintage, of course)—speak of this highest state of yoga as a state of abstraction or of unconsciousness. When

they talk like that you know they haven't the slightest idea of what they are talking about, however intellectual they may be. In the *nidrā vṛtti* all that you can say is that you are not seeing anything that you see in the waking or ordinary states. But in the highest state of yoga there is no movement of the mind at all, just utter silence of the mind, an infinite calmness of the mind. It is called *vṛtti nirodha*—a state in which the mind is incapable of raising any ripple or wave, and in that condition you have just the opposite state of the lack of knowledge: you have complete knowledge.

The fifth *vṛtti* is *smṛti*, memory. Of course, we all know that memory raises movements in the mind; I need not go into it.

So Patañjali has classified all these movements of the mind into five groups—correct knowledge, error, verbal delusion, deep sleep, and memory. Further, in the same aphorism in which he says there are these fivefold *vṛttis* or movements of the mind, he also says they are either *kliṣṭa* or *akliṣṭa*.<sup>4</sup> He has really classified the movements of the mind according to two standards. According to one, the movements of the mind are divided into five groups; according to the other, they are classified into two groups: *kliṣṭa*—that is to say, the *vṛttis* that produce in the knower the state of *kleśa*, suffering or pain, either immediately or later—and

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4. *Yoga Sūtra*, 1.5.

*akliṣṭa*—those that produce happiness, true happiness.

The commentators have been very cautious in interpreting *kliṣṭa* and *akliṣṭa*. They say that *kliṣṭa* should be understood in this way: even if a movement of the mind is pleasurable at first but afterwards causes pain, then both the pleasurable and the painful movement should be classified as *kliṣṭa*, painful. On the other hand, if the movements of the mind create pleasure immediately and also afterwards, or if they create pain in the beginning and pleasure—lasting happiness—afterwards, then both movements of the mind should be classified as *akliṣṭa*, that is, as a happy or pleasurable *vṛtti*. As is said in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in the beginning spiritual activities are perhaps somewhat painful, but afterwards they are full of joy. And about unspiritual experiences or activities it is said that in the beginning they are often pleasurable but very soon they become infinitely painful.<sup>5</sup>

The principle that governs this twofold classification of the functions of the mind is that the *kliṣṭa* type of experience or mental movement is that which cramps or limits the soul, and the *akliṣṭa* type is that which takes the soul out of bondage and lifts it higher and higher until it becomes free from the mind altogether. In other

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5. *Śrī mad Bhagavad Gītā*, 18: 37-38.

words, the experiences that lead us into greater and greater bondage and grosser and grosser states of existence are the *kliṣṭa* or painful *vr̥ttis*; the experiences that take us into higher and higher states so that we become free from the bondages of the body and the whims and habits of the mind, that make the mind calmer and therefore capable of perceiving a superior state of ourselves and of everything else—those are the *akliṣṭa* or pleasurable *vr̥ttis*. This, then, is the other way in which the Yoga philosophers have classified the movements of the mind.

## 6

Now, from these discussions I think several points have emerged that are of importance. First of all, we have seen that the mind is not necessary. In its present state, the mind is identified with the sense of otherness and non-Self and is busy trying to repossess this 'other' through experience. It has evolved different functions within itself to help with this repossession of reality, and therefore so long as it remains in this state the mind will continue to function in the way it is functioning and will continue to remember the things it has experienced. It will keep notes of those things. Only when you have memories that are capable of being

evoked under any condition, at any time, can you say, "No, I have experienced that; it does not give me what I want. I don't have to experience it again." Therefore the mind keeps a record of its experiences; and in doing so it has landed us in the greatest misery. Out of those records has come what is called the law of karma. If the mind could say, "Oh, I don't think I shall keep any notes; I don't want to remember this" —if it could just say that and really forget, then we would not be bound by things. If we could really forget an experience, if no impressions of it were left anywhere in *citta*, we would get rid of it. But mind doesn't want to give it up.

As long, therefore, as we try to grasp the 'other', as long as we want this present kind of experience, the mind will function according to its machinery. It will raise all kinds of *vṛttis*: it will experience, it will think, it will remember, it will make mistakes. Mistakes are the *viparyaya* or *vikalpa vṛttis* that we spoke of. *Viparyaya vṛtti* is knowing something for what it is not, or failing to know something for what it is. Why does the mind make that kind of mistake? Why is there that peculiar phase of the mind, *manas*, where sure knowledge does not come? And even when sure knowledge comes in *buddhi*, one is not really certain that it is a correct perception or a correct evaluation. Maybe after fifteen years one will find that one's conclusion was all wrong, one's judgment was all wrong. Why? Because, you see, the mind is

born in mistake or error; therefore it is bound to make mistakes. Let me repeat: the forgetting of one's own true nature, the forgetting of the infinite, transcendental quality of reality, and the identification of oneself with that state of forgetfulness produces the sense of otherness or non-Self, and then the mind becomes the instrument by which this 'other' may be again possessed. So we find that as long as the mind is at this level, it goes on behaving in this way; sometimes it is right, sometimes it is wrong, but even when it is right, it is right only within the frame of reference of one particular state of existence. When it has exhausted this state of existence, when it rejects it and begins to think there is a higher state, a higher world, and goes into that higher world; then it finds that all it thought it knew—even the sure and correct knowledge of the lower world—was wrong. The whole thing was wrong. Even *pramāṇa* was *viparyaya*; even correct knowledge was error.

As long as the mind continues to be the instrument of a soul suffering from error, it will continue to make mistakes. Even remembering its experiences, the mind will repeat one thing over and over again. What a stupid thing this mind is, my friends! Why can it not hop and skip along? Why must it go after little change, little change? Yesterday I sampled the same reality I sample today—the same city, the same sky, the same fog, the same heat, everything. Yes I admit that today it is

slightly different. But there is the same food, the same breathing—pumping of the air out and in—the same sleeping, the same snoring. Yes, slightly different, but why do you think the mind has to go so slowly? The stupid mind has done the same thing over and over again. In every incarnation it has gone after a mate, married a man or a woman, brought children into the world. In this life it wants to do the same thing. It cannot just say to us, “Well, I have tasted it all before; a little difference doesn’t make much difference; it is all of the same nature, always.” After Sri Ramakrishna had returned from a pilgrimage he said, “Everywhere I found the same bricks and mortar and the same trees. Everywhere the same things.” So he was finished with it all. They say that a spiritually awakened person can leap ahead like that; the mind does not repeat; it makes great strides.

There is a story of a war between the gods and demons. The reading or telling of this story takes probably half an hour. And yet it covers the births, the long reigns, the wars, and the death of two demon kings—thousands of years at a stretch. Sri Ramakrishna once said, “When I was a little boy, they read this story to me, and at once the evanescence of everything became clear to me. I saw the birth and death of things, the whole universe that rises and falls; in half an hour the whole story is finished.”

Friends, what do you think we have been

doing? Life after life we have been going through almost the same experiences, all fundamentally of the same nature, but let there be just a little variety, a little different kind of sauce, and we glory in it. Why do you give so much importance to little things? Why not hop over big slices of time, take big strides—you won't lose anything. What is the mind experiencing here that is so valuable anyway? If you could say to yourself, "I know all this, I have done all these things in my past incarnations many, many times. The whole world has been doing the same things over and over again. Why should I repeat this nonsense?"—if you could throw it all off, the mind would stop tumbling. You think you have to think! You should be ashamed! You should say, "What! I have to think? It is a degradation! I who am all consciousness, all truth, have to think for years and years to get a little particle of truth—and I imagine I am thereby doing a wonderful thing! What an insult to the greatness of man!" My friends, you should not submit to this mechanism of the mind. You don't have to do it.

There is a way by which you can become free. But there are preconditions to this way. Patañjali himself said, *abhyāsa-vairāgyā-bhyām tan-nirodah*<sup>6</sup>—"The cessation of the mind is brought about through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*." *Abhyāsa* means that instead of thinking all this nonsense

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6. *Yoga Sūtra*, 1.12.

you let the mind continually dwell upon the true nature of reality. Just let the mind do that. It does not have to go through this laborious process of *citta* and *manas* and *buddhi* and ego, of sensation, transformation, comparison, organization, systematization, of error and knowledge, and being kicked around for ages and ages—and in the end, after a long, long period of human history, gaining two or three pieces of truth. No. Let the mind at once turn and dwell upon the nature of reality. Human civilization has gone far ahead; today many people know the nature of that reality; it is not a completely unknown territory. Let the mind dwell upon it. That is *abhyāsa*.

Then there is *vairāgya*. *Vairāgya* means dispassion. You don't have to hang on to these miserable things. What do they give you? You are born naked, you will die naked. And what do you gain in the meantime? Nothing. Everything is worn out—senses, mind, body all worn out, and you go out of this life jaded and exhausted. Nothing have you gained out of it. Of course you could write big books glorifying every little dish you ate, every nice little talk you had with your neighbor, and somebody might like to read those books. But what good would that do you, and what good would it do the reader? No good comes out of repeating all these things. Don't be attached to the small, for then you are bound to this miserable mind. So by the sovereign means of *vairāgya* and

*abhyāsa* the necessity of going through all these experiences over and over is obviated.

Then there grows within oneself a peculiar power called *pratibhā*. *Pratibhā* means the flashing of an inner light in reaction to any reality that is presented, and that light never gives you wrong knowledge. It is truly a flash of light like a lightning flash. The moment you hear something, there is this flash in response. Perhaps somebody is trying to ask you a question; it may take him four or five minutes to ask it, but before he has spoken two or three sentences the whole thing flashes in your mind, and along with it the answer also flashes—you almost think that lightning has flashed within yourself, and suddenly the whole answer is there. *Pratibhā* is sometimes translated loosely as genius, which is really not a bad translation. A genius does not go through the laborious, elaborate processes of ordinary thinking; knowledge comes to him without any intermediary steps. That is why he is called a genius. Anyhow, it is said that this state, which probably you would call intuitive, comes only when you are free of the compulsion to seek the 'other'; it comes only in freedom, when that need has gone. At our present level it is not possible for us to practice dispassion, to say, "No, I don't need anything here; there is no truth in it. I shall not let my mind break into waves; it does not have to." Why is it not possible for us? Because for us reality is here, not somewhere else.

But in truth, beyond all these forms is the real, and when the mind goes there and is established in that state, then this peculiar condition comes; like a lightning flash knowledge comes. It is correct knowledge and nothing is lacking in it. You find, as it were, from behind you masses of knowledge are being rushed towards you. You have that sense. Now, this is not speculation; these things happen, they are real. Nor are they abnormal; they are normal to every person who wants to avail himself of them.

## 7

When I consider the peculiar states of mind from which we ordinarily suffer, my conclusion is this: Because we do not have a total view of our mind and of our existence, because we are too impatient, because we are too much bound up with the small, because we do not remember what we are and what we are trying to gain—for these reasons our mind continually bogs down, repeating itself over and over. You may not agree with me, but my view is that most of the people who suffer from mental troubles—I do not mean all, but most of them—suffer because they have been deprived of this correct way of thinking. They do not see the complete picture; they do not know

their place in the scheme of things, therefore they cannot make the mind function at its best. You don't really need all kinds of psychoanalysis and such things. So much has been said by present-day psychologists about the psyche, about the mind, about what makes it move, whether consciously or unconsciously—all kinds of things have been said. But the simple fact is that the mind is one; it is trying to regain its oneness, trying to reflect the one reality. The mind itself, in its highest nature, does not want to be the instrument of self-division.

If you give it a little chance, the mind will regain its own healthy nature. In the beginning it is hard to change, because you have had wrong habits for such a long a time. It requires a little struggle before you can regain your own true nature and the mind can become healthy and wholesome. After that, you find the movement of the mind is clear, the mind is peaceful, and larger and larger vistas open before you. You will be surprised at what happens. But I know that when I say these things at least some of you are thinking, "Oh, this is too good to be true. And even if it is true, it seems like too much hard work." Then many others think, "Well, it is a kind of negative philosophy. All this world, everything he wants us to give up! No. We won't do it."

To such people the only answer that can be given is, "Then go on experiencing." The mind is

fundamentally good, and soon a time will come when it will rebel against its employment in this whole nefarious business. The mind will become so sick, so poisoned that it will try to kill you if you don't employ it in a better way. It will compel you to seek relief from this preoccupation with what you call your real world. What is there in that "real world" anyhow? There is nothing in it. What you think is in it, is really not there at all; when you try to grasp it, it is not there. In order to find what you think is there, you have to go within yourself. Nothing is in the outside. The mind will compel you to see that in time. But human beings are considered to be rational and capable of wisdom, and wisdom lies in thinking these things out and not in going through all kinds of experiences to learn a simple lesson that you can learn here and now.

Well, that is a little about the mind. I shall say a great deal more about it when I speak on "The Birth and Death of the Ego."

## WHY WE ARE WHAT WE ARE

### 1

In the previous two lectures of this series I tried to give at least a partial explanation of the present status of the soul from the standpoint of the Vedanta philosophy. As you will remember, Vedanta says that the Self, or the true man, actually is and always has been of the nature of divinity. In other words, he is perfect, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, eternal. Yet our experience contradicts this statement—at least so we think—because we feel the opposite. You will also remember that the Vedantic explanation of this contradiction is that it is through the influence of *māyā* that man seems to have lost his divine

nature. Now, this *māyā*, this element of ignorance or illusion, has been thoroughly investigated and has been found to have the power of dynamism—that is to say, it does not remain static; it produces all kinds of things, and out of it the vast manifold universe has evolved. (Always remember, however, that *māyā* does not function alone; behind it is the presence of the knowing soul—knowing and yet apparently self-forgetful.) *Māyā* works its changes in two different ways: along one line it becomes objective; along a parallel line it produces within the individual souls a series of evolutes. On one side, the objective universe begins as a very fine, luminous, almost perfect manifestation of Divinity; it has been called causal because it is the first evolute, the first change brought about in *māyā*. From this state there is a gradual degeneration until we have this gross universe, which is very gross indeed. On the other side, the subjective side, there is also the first causal manifestation, which is a perfect state of the mind—pure intelligence. This is followed by other general phases of the mind; then there is the life-force, and there are the senses. You cannot say that all these things, which evolve in each individual, are altogether subjective. They are instrumental and are therefore partly objective, and yet in our present experience they are so mixed up with ourselves that we probably would be content to call them subjective. We can say, then, that just as a gradual

degeneration has taken place in the objective universe, so a gradual degeneration has taken place within ourselves: the mind has become more and more gross and more and more limited until we have our present state. We are born with a body, or in a body—or some people would say we are born as bodies—and we all seem to have been given a certain status in the scheme of things; our minds and bodies function in a sort of predestined way, subject to some established pattern. That is how we live here.

But even if we don't remember the metaphysical background that is given by Vedantic philosophers and that I have just recounted to you in very brief form, many questions come to us. After all, we continually ask questions about whatever we want to understand: we want to know its cause, or at least its previous history; we want to know what it is made of and what it is doing here; we also want to anticipate its future. All these are natural and legitimate questions that proceed from the principle of reason, which seems to be a part of our consciousness. Such questions should be asked also in regard to ourselves: What purpose do we serve here? Why do we have to be here at all? Where have we come from? Where are we going from here? Why are we tied to a body—supposing the body to be different from ourselves? Why have we been born under circumstances which rarely anyone can call perfect? Why does

our mind behave as it does? And why do we not possess talents and powers with which we could do much better than we are now doing? If we believe there is a God looking after us, the kindest thing we can say of Him is that He is a practical joker. But if this human life is a joke of His, it is really not a pleasant joke for us. And if we think He is serious about it, we do not know what epithet to give Him. For all these problems we have to have some explanation.

There have of course been philosophers, such as the Buddhists, who have not felt it necessary to bring God into the affairs of man; they have explained things without assuming the existence of a God. The Jains also have done that, and among the orthodox systems of Hinduism, the Sankhya philosophers have felt that everything can be explained without the assumption of a God. I think there is something wholesome about such an attitude. If you think God created the world and then created man and subjected him to all kinds of suffering, the plain fact remains, whatever arguments you might give, that He could have done better. Those who do not assume the existence of God can at least feel comfortable in this regard. But however that may be—whether God exists or not—questions arise regarding the inequalities and sufferings and ignorances to which we seem to be subject, and my purpose in this lecture is to present to you the general views by

which our philosophers explain them.

Now, in these explanations, the background assumption must never be forgotten. I always emphasize this point, and I think a repetition is not uncalled for: the whole process of creation and evolution is based on our self-forgetfulness—our ignorance, or *māyā*. If you say it is very difficult to feel that such terrible consequences can follow from just a little bit of self-forgetfulness, which is no crime, I still say that this little bit of self-forgetfulness has produced such consequences. Even in our everyday experience we find that just a little mistake can lead us astray and can produce disastrous results. And in dream experience we find it clearly demonstrated that our self-forgetfulness is the precondition of building up different situations for ourselves. Unless we have forgotten ourselves in sleep, we cannot enter into our dream world. Our philosophers maintain, therefore, that ignorance has two powers: one is called *āvaraṇa-śakti*, the power by which it covers, as it were, the consciousness of one's own true self; and the other is *vikṣepa-śakti*, the power by which it projects another kind of consciousness in place of our real consciousness and another world in place of the real world. This should be remembered.

It should be further remembered that just as one may wake up from a dream even before the dream has come to a reasonable conclusion, so the soul can wake up from this terrible dream of

relative existence any time it likes. Before a person falls asleep, he tells himself, "I must get up at four o'clock." If he can bury this thought in his consciousness, at the right time the thought will come up and waken him. Similarly, we can inject into our relative consciousness the thought of our own transcendental existence. This is called the practice of religion. When we practice religion we remind ourselves of our eternal status beyond this state of ignorance and bondage, and if we do this we can make ourselves wake up from this world of relative existence any moment. The story of relative life does not have to be finished. As a matter of fact, the story has no end at all. It is somewhat like a soap opera — episode follows episode five days a week, and it never comes to an end. Many people think, "We should finish enjoying the world; we should see things through. Then we shall seek God." But, you see, there is no finishing this business at all. That the mind thinks such things is itself a part of this nonsensical dream. The thought that something will end is a by-product of relative existence. Eternity never ends. In fact, if you examine it, you will find that the idea that something will end is itself the basis of your ignorance. Therefore, as long as you hold that thought you will be tied down hard to this relative existence and will never wake out of it.

However, the point I am making here is that you cannot understand the true import of Hindu

teachings in connection with relative existence if you do not always bear in mind these background assumptions: first, that whatever is said of relative existence is true only as long as you remain forgetful of the ultimate truth of your own being, and second, that at any time you can wake up. The finding of ultimate truth is not the result of some process; suddenly you come to it. Nor has our bondage been produced out of our freedom, or our ignorance out of our knowledge. Ignorance has come—or so it seems from our present viewpoint—but it has no origin, nor can it be explained causally; it is just there. We feel it and we suffer from the consequences of it, but it is just as tenuous, as weak, as frail as a dream; at any moment we can wake out of it. But as long as we are not awakened, we will see this terrible dream.

## 2

Let us see if there is any method within this dream. Here, as some of you may have guessed, I want to tell you about the laws of karma and reincarnation, because it is through these two doctrines that the Hindus explain the present condition of any individual. The deeper processes by which the independent, free soul has been reduced to this state of bondage or relative

existence I explained in the lecture "What Makes a Man," and so I won't go into that now. Let us just assume that I am what is called a *jīva*, or individual soul. That is to say, I am that same free, independent Spirit, filled with all perfection, eternal and infinite in nature, but now I have, as it were, endowed myself with a mind and a body and find myself a part of this vast physical universe and mental universe. I find that I am subject to change, and that I have been born and shall die. As to what happens after death, the Hindus believe that when we die we go to a world for which we have fitted ourselves here by our own actions and experiences, and there we bide our time. Just as in our daily life we go to work and then come home and spend the night resting and preparing ourselves for another day of labor, so the souls dwell in some other world until they are ready for another existence similar to this, where they will go on with the job they are seeking to do.

Now, what is it that the soul is trying to achieve here? Forgetting for the moment all the theological doctrines about the purpose of life that have been imposed on our minds by tradition, I think we can truly say that we are here to experience life and reality. Probably some of you would like to say that we are here to enjoy life, to enjoy reality, to enjoy the world. The trouble is that "enjoy" is not an altogether honest description. The word *experience* is better, for while some of

our experiences bring enjoyment, others bring the opposite. But experience there is. Our search for knowledge, even our curiosity about things, is impelled by the desire to know, to experience. There seems to be an almost infinite world of reality, external as well as internal, that we can experience, and this is what we are trying to do. We are trying to know ourselves; we are trying to find our own nature and our own mind; we are trying to extract the last drop of juice out of our own being; and we are trying to grab hold of everything on the outside that we can. That seems to be the general tendency of the soul.

Even from a philosophical point of view, I think that is a good description. As I said in "What Makes a Man," the very fact that we seem to forget ourselves produces at once the sense of duality, poses the existence of the 'other'. If I, the Infinite One, forget myself, what will be the inevitable consequence? I shall begin to think myself finite. Of course, if I could forget myself entirely there would be nothing, but the joke is that since the Self is all-consciousness it cannot be unconscious of itself altogether. All it can do is bring about a twist in this all-consciousness: it at once begins to think in terms of its opposite. The soul is infinite, but it begins to think of itself as finite. Yet it cannot forget its infinitude; so it has to think of a boundless reality outside of itself. The soul is eternal, but when it forgets itself it at once produces the sense

of time—eternal time. The soul is unconditional, uncaused; so it proposes conditions and causes, out of which come all kinds of forms and all kinds of laws and all the possibilities of change. So, you see, having denied ourselves, we yet cannot fully deny ourselves. By the recognition of the 'other' we have, as it were, made up a kind of artificial infinity, artificial eternity, and so on. The soul, not entirely forgetting its true nature, is continually running after what is called the 'other', that is to say, the objective world, and so its experience can never come to an end. Only when the soul becomes conscious that the sense of self-division, the sense of finitude and limitation are part of an illusion and that everything is already within itself—only then will its desire for experience stop.

Hindus sincerely believe, therefore, that the soul has to go repeatedly through this process of life and death, incarnation and reincarnation. Because of its circular movement, this process has been called *samsāra-cakra*, the wheel of *samsāra* or transmigration. Here we are born with a body, we leave the body behind and go beyond life, and then we come back into life again. And so it goes on. The purpose of this incessant movement of the soul is, as I said, to become acquainted with the whole of reality, to experience phenomenal reality more and more, more and more, until a sense comes to the soul that what it has been seeking is not to be found in the outside but has to be

perceived within. Eventually it begins to understand that to seek reality in the outside is to fall again and again into the same terrible error; it learns that the sense of finitude itself has to be completely abrogated before true experience can be had and that the highest experience is the experience of its identity with all that is. It senses that when that identity has been reached there will not be any necessity for reincarnation; there will be no necessity for change; there will not be any mistakes, any suffering. The soul will rest in its own eternity and infinitude, its own omnipotence and omniscience. In other words, the soul will wake up from its dream.

Yes, that is bound to happen. Fortunately this phenomenal reality that we are trying to experience is, as such, finite; so it soon becomes possible for the soul to come to the conclusion that there is not very much to it. It is as if you had met a person who seemed so wonderful that you sought his acquaintance. You see him day after day, week after week, but after a year or so you find that he says the same things, does the same things; you have plumbed his depths and have found there is nothing more to be known in him. Then you give him up and go out in search of a more wonderful man. We are like that, continually seeking to experience the highest values in the outside world. But we soon find there is nothing much to it; and then it becomes possible for the soul to wake up.

It is not that all souls are in the same condition. Many people think that all souls were created at the same time, and so they are faced with the problem of explaining the inequalities of individual souls at any given point in time. The fact is that this idea of the soul's creation is itself illogical. It presupposes that creation took place in time, whereas time itself is only a by-product of the process by which the souls came into existence. You cannot speak of the origin of the soul in terms of time. Then how are you to think of the origin of the soul? Hindus are drastic in this regard: you just don't think about it, that is all. Those who do are like little children who lean against their father's knee and retort to anything he says with "Why-y-y?" That is a profound question, you have to admit. But just because we can ask a certain question does not mean that in our present state we are capable of understanding the answer. If you still want to ask these questions, by all means do so: but I shall say that you like to waste your time; you are not serious. There are certain things which just cannot be explained in logical terms. All we can do profitably is to study the present.

The present state is this: we do find inequality among individuals, but if we analyse the present condition of any particular person, we can also find what is sustaining the differences which cause inequality. Take a person who is going after

all kinds of material things. You may say to him, "Don't you think there are better things for you to do? The things you are running after don't last. Whatever you gather here you will have to leave behind. Why don't you acquire something permanent?" He probably will agree with you. "Just so. What you say is right." Then he begins to yawn, and the moment you leave him he will go his own way again. That is his nature. His intellect may understand a little and agree a little, but his nature does not agree, his nature follows its own course. Why is it so? If you ask a Hindu why a man is worldly or unscrupulous or full of sense desires, he will simply say it is his karma. Karma is not fate, and it is not *kismet*. These two words do not come from India. The notion of a fixed or *fated* portion you get from the Greeks, and *kismet* comes from the Mulims. It is true that all three concepts seem to contain the idea of something which is of tremendous resistance and implacability, but there is this difference: whereas you cannot deny or frustrate either fate or *kismet*, you can deny karma and nullify it if you want to, although if you don't, it will have its way. Hindus have never taught that the doctrine of karma makes a man accept his present status without any struggle to improve it if improvement is called for. Nor have we thought that karma has bound us hand and foot. Nevertheless, we have accepted karma as something that has to be reckoned with.

When a Western psychologist says of a man, "You cannot change him; these traits are too strongly ingrained in him. Let him alone," what he is saying is that certain tendencies in the person are instinctive with him; he cannot control them before they become operative in his life. Almost everyone has some of these compelling instincts within him, and they are what the Hindus call karma. And not only do the Hindus give these instincts a name, they try to explain what this karma is—that's the beauty of it.

### 3

In order to explain karma we must understand the nature of the mind. In the previous lecture of this series I spoke about the mind—"The Mysterious Ways of the Mind." I said that the mind is continually raising waves within itself; it is dynamic—not fully dynamic or equally dynamic at all times, but dynamic nevertheless. Even in sleep it is dynamic, and this not only when it creates dreams. Even when you are profoundly asleep the mind produces one wave within itself because of which you know you have slept; otherwise you could not know it. The dynamism of the mind is of various natures. I also told you that there are four phases of the mind. There is *buddhi* or

intelligence, which gives sure knowledge, or at least knowledge that has the appearance of surety. There is *manas*, a phase in which mind is unsure. There is *ahankāra*, or egoism, which always accompanies the first two phases. And there is *citta*, or the mind stuff, which seems to be buried so deep that we are usually not aware of its activities. It is in *citta* that the mind receives the impact from the senses, and these sensations are transformed into finished percepts or concepts by the time they reach the highest aspect of the mind—*buddhi*. *Citta* also evokes memories, ideas, desires, images, and fancies from within its capacious storehouse and brings them into the conscious part of the mind.

Now, all the thought waves or ideas produced by the mind can be classified under five different headings: correct knowledge, error, verbal knowledge (knowledge which has no counterpart in reality but is only an idea produced by words), memory, and sleep. These are the five *vṛttis* or natural movements of the mind which Patañjali speaks of, and they are more or less beyond our conscious control. I briefly explained all that to you, but what I did not elaborate on, is that the mind of an individual who is no longer bound down by this gross aspect of reality behaves differently from that of the average person. His mind is no longer absolutely beyond his control but functions to a great extent under the control of his own will.

What will the movements of the mind of such a person be? For one thing, his sleep will be of a different kind from that of an average man. I told you that, according to our psychologists, in deep sleep there is just one wave of the mind. In an ordinary person that movement brings only a sense of vacancy and nonexistence, as if there were nothing there; although he feels refreshed after he wakes up, he has had no experience. But when the mind of one who is established in meditation produces the movement called sleep, he does not have the sense of unconsciousness. He has, rather, a sense of superconsciousness, of meditative consciousness. The mind, being free from the necessity of attending to any outside objects, goes back, under the impact of its own desire for spiritual knowledge, into the thought of God. The body, being inactive, might not register anything from the outside and the person might therefore appear to be unconscious, but inwardly, consciousness is awake. Such a person rarely dreams, but if sometimes he does, these dreams also partake of the nature of meditative consciousness.

More important to mention is that the knowledge of such an individual is always accurate knowledge. When he looks at a person, he will at once recognize whether that person is addicted to evil-doing or is always thinking good and doing good; one glance will be enough. In other words, his

knowledge is sure, there is no possibility of error in it; therefore the second and third kinds of mental movements—that is to say, error, which is perceiving or thinking something to be what it is not, and verbal knowledge, which is being befuddled by a word or phrase that can have no corresponding reality—these are not possible to him. Further, his whole mind in all its four aspects or phases—*buddhi*, *manas*, and so on—is so full of sure knowledge that it no longer dwells on anything small or gross, but only on superior things.

As I told you in my previous lecture and should mention again, what we ordinarily call *pramāṇa* or “correct knowledge,” is not necessarily correct. We think it is correct, that is all. For example, I might know from inquiry and other means that a certain man is a plumber, and I would consider that to be sure knowledge. Yet from a higher standpoint even such knowledge is mistaken. If I could see that he is not a man at all, but pure Spirit, although apparently endowed with a mind and body, then my sure knowledge would be: “Here is God Himself in the form of a man.” To call him a plumber would be a great mistake. Or if I still call him a plumber, I will say, “Here is God going about in the form of a plumber.” You see, then, that when you think you know everything rightly your knowledge is not necessarily right. While you may have all kinds of ways by which to determine the correctness of the data

upon which you build up your world of knowledge, these ways themselves may be full of error. Whether or not they are correct depends upon the standpoint from which you are looking at the world.

The person of whom I was speaking has seen through things; he has come to the conclusion that that which he has been seeking does not exist in the outside world. He has actually reached the condition in which he can say, "Sense knowledge, sense perception, sense enjoyment—these lead nowhere, I don't want them." If I know a person only with my eyes and ears, I know very little of him. Only when I know him through intuitive knowledge and see him through intuitive vision and spiritual insight as the Spirit, which he really is, can I say I have seen him. Those who give up the idea that the senses bring true knowledge will never remain satisfied with seeing things superficially. They will not be content even if they see every part of another's mind. They will be satisfied only when they perceive him for what he essentially is—Spirit, a fragment of Divinity Itself.

The mind of such a person — a person of spiritual insight — has undergone a profound change. He is not governed by memory or past impressions; his sleep has undergone a change—although apparently he sleeps, still it is not sleep; he does not make errors, nor does he indulge in verbal fancies; and his correct knowledge is always

of a spiritual nature. That is the kind of man he has become.

What will be the conduct of such a person? You will find that he is no longer seeking any experience of the world, but is diving deep. There is a sort of inward look in his eyes, as though his attention were withdrawn from outside things. Sri Ramakrishna often used to give the illustration of a bird sitting on its eggs to describe the condition of a God-conscious man. He would say, "If you look at the bird's eyes you will find a vacant look in them. The bird is not seeing anything outside, because its whole mind is on the eggs. Such also are the eyes of a person who has attained to union with God—they have this inward look." The moment such a person is free from any necessity for attention outside, his mind goes within.

That "going within" does not mean that he does not see the outer reality. This so-called objective reality has an inwardness also, and that inward essence of objective reality is perceived not by looking outside, but by looking within. One's own heart is the door through which one passes in order to enter into the heart of the whole universe of reality. That is the way. Yes, it is an odd way: if I am to see you properly I have to close my eyes. But that is what happens with such a person; he has come close to the consciousness that this world as it appears is a reversal of what it really is. There is only one reality—the Divine Reality.

It is possible for every one of us to realize this state. Through some mischance, there has come the sense that there is something outside yourself, but the consciousness will come from time to time that it is not really true, somewhere there has been some mistake. And one day you will find that mistake is just rent asunder for good. After that you will never make it again: even if you see this universe before you, you will understand it for what it is. You will know there is just one Reality, and that Reality will be perceived in your own inner consciousness. You will no longer be under the compulsion of this peculiar power called *māyā*.

## 4

But let us now think of a person who has not reached that condition, who thinks that this material world is the reality. He will not even question it, he will just say, "Yes, there is this world. I see it. Here it is." He never thinks that he is separate from the body. If he believes that he has a soul or consciousness or some such thing, he thinks of it as somehow mixed up with his body; he will not agree that body and soul can be separated. Most Western philosophers are of that school. It is very difficult to call them philosophers. They have a brain and they write big books full of arguments,

but their starting point, as well as their ending point, proves that their perception of reality is sense-bound, no more than that. Yet they have to explain consciousness and mind, and they will tell you all kinds of things that do not make any sense, even to themselves. For the most part, they say that mind comes out of matter and consciousness comes out of mind. If they are asked how, some say that suddenly out of matter springs life, and suddenly out of life springs mind. Suddenness is no explanation. Here is a clear example of the connection between the perception of a person and his state of inner growth, or, you might say, inner degradation. You cannot take his sense of reality away from him. The real can never be proved; it can only be perceived. I perceive my reality in one way, another perceives his in another way. But it has been found that people in search of reality go through experiences of reality in many different phases, and among such people there is so much agreement that they have come to an understanding that this is lower, this higher—and so on.

Now, if a person is held in this low state, if he is sense-bound, he naturally thinks the sense world is real. *Māyā* has full sway over him, and therefore he is subject to all its effects. As I told you, first *māyā* produces self-forgetfulness, and then it imposes the sense of limitation; out of this sense all kinds of laws and conditions and forms are produced for him and dominate him. How can

such a person expect to escape from the effects of law?

You might ask, "Are not great souls also subject to law?" No, they are not. For them there is no necessity of law, for in the highest consciousness there is no law. Then can a great soul do anything and everything he likes? Well, you see, doing things takes place under the influence of law; it is itself a by-product of this bondage. "But," you may object, "if I can do whatever I like, isn't it freedom? Even though you call it license, you must admit that there is some freedom in it." No, doing as you like is not a sign of freedom; there is no freedom in it, there is only compulsion. The lower instincts have taken hold of you and are compelling you to run around like a madman. Do you think that is freedom? The Yoga books liken the mind in the lowest state, when it is scattered and bound, to a mad and drunken monkey: you know what a restless creature a monkey is; then it is given a dose of hard liquor so that it is jumping around still more; next it is stung by scorpions, and after that it is whipped. You can well imagine how restless it is then. The mind is like that. Would you call it free? When we think that we are acting freely because we are doing as we like, all such freedom means is that we are being maddened and whipped and stung. When you are really free, the question of whether you can do anything and everything does not arise. Yet there is no law there.

The more unconscious you are of the true Reality and of your true Self, the more you are under the influence of ignorance and bound by the laws of the gross plane. If you are bound by laws physically, you are also bound by them mentally and morally; therefore what you experience has a peculiar effect upon you. It requires a sturdy mind to be able to see and experience all kinds of things and let them pass over without leaving any impression. A free soul can do this, but not a bound soul. A soul whose status is low has to be very careful what he experiences, since he will not be able to throw off its effect. His experiences will stick to him because he is bound by law. The law here is that your mind receives the impression of whatever you experience, good or bad, and will retain that impression; it will put it away somewhere in the unconscious—in the *citta*. These impressions are all stored up there for you, and you cannot give them up. One could also say that as long as you are seeking experiences in the outside world, you need all these impressions; you are not sure of anything, and therefore you are as it were keeping notes of whatever you experience and those impressions remain stored in your unconscious.

Let us see what takes place. To put it in simple language, every karma or action (the word karma really means "action"—physical or mental) makes an impression on the mind, and, as I said, that

impression remains in the unconscious. Now, when impressions of the same or similar experiences are repeated and you accumulate a number of impressions of similar nature, they all naturally join together and become a power—they become what we call a *samskāra*, or tendency. This is the difference between an impression and a *samskāra*. Both *samskāras* and impressions presuppose or have behind them a certain view of life and reality. For instance, a person who is very much sense-bound will always want sense experience. Some of these experiences may be repeated again and again, while others may not; nevertheless both one-time and repeated experiences proceed from the same state of mind and have the same characteristics. However, the experiences that are often repeated become stronger; they become *samskāras*—tendencies or habits. *Samskāras* seem to have a sort of precedence over all other impressions; they have greater power to come up to the conscious mind and compel us to act according to them, whereas those impressions that have not become strengthened by repetition cannot always come to the surface.

Now, just imagine this, if you believe the story of the soul as the Hindus recount it—that it forgot its own Self-consciousness long, long ago (excuse me for speaking of this in terms of time), that the soul did not originate with this birth but has had a past, an almost infinite past—then it must have

gone through innumerable lives in which many experiences similar in nature left their impressions on the mind. So just imagine how many tendencies have been developed and how strong they are! If you try to sort them all out and classify them, you will be surprised to find that they can be divided into two well-defined groups. One group will contain the impressions of things that are not of the world of the senses. Suppose that in some past life you came across a great knower of God. Maybe he was a neighbor of yours; you saw his smile, you saw his action, you heard his voice. These were sense experiences; but in and through these experiences you came in contact with something you did not find in other persons. It is said in one of the great hymns written by Śaṅkara that a knower of God is like "a bright light set within a pot which is full of holes."<sup>1</sup> You look at such a man and find his inner illumination shining out even through his physical appearance and his actions. You neither cared for God and God-realization, nor did you understand it; nevertheless your mind received that impression. It is a mixed impression: on the one hand, it is the sense perception of a man; yet on the other hand it contains an experience of supernatural or super-conscious reality. Or suppose in a past life you had some spiritual awakening—perhaps you went to a

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1. Śaṅkara, "Hymn to Dakṣiṇāmūrti," verse 4.

place of pilgrimage or to a temple or church and felt a stirring within yourself, a feeling you had never had before. In your mind that impression would have remained apart from the impressions you had received of mere sense experience, and it would subsequently be strengthened by the impressions of every new experience of a similar nature. We say, therefore, that the contents of the unconscious should be understood as being divided into two parts, one part consisting of impressions of the higher reality, and the other of impressions of the lower or accustomed reality. This twofold division is made according to a standard of values. Who imposes this standard? No one imposes it; it is inherent in the reality itself. Wherever there is a sense of reality there is also an instinctive sense of value; these are not two separate things at all.

Now, the impressions left by experiences of accustomed reality are themselves found to fall within three large groups. These groups are not always kept separate in our minds, but even when they are mixed up they are all labeled. One is the experience of sex and all that goes with it; another is the experience of possession—possession of your own body, of your own people and of things, as well as the desire to possess; and the third is the sense of power. In an ordinary sense-bound person the five kinds of *vṛttis* or the movements which Patañjali speaks of as continually rising in

the mind, pertain essentially to these three experiences, and as long as a person is dominated by these three, he will continue to have the same kinds of experience even if he is born a million times on this earth. There is no end to it. New installments will always be ready. Mother Nature can write wonderful scripts. As long as these three tendencies are strong, her ingenuity never comes to an end.

Let me say here that these three strong instincts are but distortions of some higher functions of our consciousness. For instance, sex, even in the lowest sense, is a desire for unity. And because the soul is the very seat of the sense of oneness, it has been found that if a person can meditate on the idea that within himself there is infinitely more of all he has been seeking in human love—more beauty, more love, more of the sense of unity—then he becomes free from the sense of sex. If some of you say, "Oh, that is just that sublimation business," I say it is not sublimation business at all; it is going back to the truth. If an error has produced all these troubles for you, go back to the truth and you will become free from the consequences of the error; its power will no longer be able to affect you. It goes without saying, however, that the ordinary gross-minded person is not capable of listening to such advice, much less of practicing it, and so he will continue to be dominated by his lower instincts and will keep

repeating sense experiences. These impressions will become bound up with corresponding tendencies, and these, with repeated experience, will become stronger and stronger. So, under the impulsion of the three essential tendencies, the soul goes through life after life, life after life, seeking the same things. Fortunately, as I said earlier, this reality is limited, and therefore, even if we remain unsatisfied, we are eventually, perhaps after many lives, forced to come to a conclusion; there comes a sort of awakening. Meanwhile, however, the person is bound by laws—by these karmas.

Now, regardless of their character, the karmas or impressions left by our experiences fall into three general categories. In one, they are lying totally inactive: they will not be used for a long, long time, and so they are just packed and stored away in a corner. These are called *sañcita*, "stored up." Another group of impressions and tendencies is composed of karmas which are active in the individual's life at the present time. These are the activities in which he is very much involved and to which all his energies and thoughts are devoted. These are called *prārabdha*, "begun," because they have already begun to function. Lying between these two extremes is a third or middle group of tendencies, which are called *āgāmi*, "coming." They are neither active at the present time nor stored away in a remote corner of the mind, but are on the threshold of consciousness, semiactive,

waiting for an opportunity to come out and become active in life. For example, a person says, "You know, I have always wanted to paint, but I have been so busy that I just haven't found time for it. Maybe when I retire I can start." This means that just back of his active life this desire is lurking, and when he is free from his other activities, it will seize the opportunity to come to the forefront and will compel him to buy canvas and pigments and brushes and begin to paint.

You might ask here how this threefold classification of impressions is determined in any individual case. I think the explanation can be found by studying our life even as it is now. When a certain desire is very strong, its opposite generally does not have a chance. I must admit, though, that the mind is a very peculiar thing: sometimes a certain tendency of the mind has a way of producing exactly the opposite tendency; for instance, you sometimes find complete reversals in people, as when an evildoer suddenly changes his way of life. But generally speaking, you find that the opposite of the present tendency is cornered, it hasn't a chance to express itself; only those that are similar to one's present tendencies can come into the middle group, where they have some chance of coming to the conscious state.

A sort of selection like this happens at the time of death. It is said that when a soul is going to leave this body it will carry all its impressions with itself.

At death only the physical body is left behind; the mind goes with the soul, and these impressions are, of course, in the mind. At that time a kind of instinctive sorting takes place; it is not a conscious, deliberate effort on the part of the individual. Certain ideas, generally those that are similar to the ideas of this life, come to the forefront and take precedence. These are the forces which, in the next incarnation, will occupy center stage of conscious existence, while others remain in the background. That is the explanation given by Hindu philosophers. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, for instance, Sri Krishna says that whatever thoughts become dominant at the dying moment, those will determine the character of the next birth.<sup>2</sup>

I think there is good reason for thinking it to be true. It is as though a person who has worked the whole day in an office will arrange his files and papers when he is about to leave for home. This is not only a clearing up and filing away of the papers pertaining to the day that has just ended, but also an arrangement of things pertaining to the next morning, so that what he wants to work on will be at hand. Similarly, it is reasonable to think that at the dying moment, when all the impressions of the mind come to the surface, a sort of arrangement should take place, not only to put away what is not necessary, but also to bring to the forefront

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2. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, 8:6.

and make easily available what will be necessary in the next birth. It is also reasonable to think that the impressions that come to the forefront are those that have been closest to your conscious mind, waiting for an opportunity to find expression. During your lifetime they weren't given a chance, so now when you are dying, they come to the forefront. Further, just as a man, while at home, reviews his day's work at the office and decides how he should proceed the next day, and the following morning on his way to work begins to make definite plans, so the soul, during the period of post-mortem existence, reviews its past. Then, when the time for rebirth comes and it begins to think about its next life, certain ideas come to the fore, and it is born according to those ideas. Often these are the same ideas that had come to the fore at the dying moment of the previous life. They now become predominant in the next life; they are the *prārabdhas*, the karmas that have begun to function.

## 5

The thing to remember about impressions is that each one is a power unit. If mind is power, then mind is dynamic; and the mind certainly is powerful — intensely powerful. One man's mind can arouse and activate immense physical energy.

A dictator, for example, may be so governed by the idea of conquest that huge armies and armaments are built up, and for years whole nations engage in war—all out of one thought, one *vṛtti*, or power complex, in his mind. Just imagine what power is in the mind! Mind is power. The all-powerful Being, God, through the degenerative process, first becomes mind, then He becomes matter; thus more power is evident in mind than in matter. Everything in the mind is powerful. It is through power that I experience things; it is through power that I receive the impression of things.

Every impression is like a charged battery marked with a certain stamp; and although you have put it away, it is a power unit. That is why it has such dynamism, why it wants to come forward, and why, even when it is lying in the unconscious, it goes through a tremendous process of organization, during which, as I have told you, similar impressions all become joined together into a tendency. Who joins them together? You don't do it; after you have experienced them, you forget them; you have more things to experience. It is like swallowing a dinner; the digestion of it is a physiological process that you are not aware of. Similarly, what takes place in the unconscious, we don't know. But the mind classifies all these experiences and impressions, marks them, forces them up. There is a subtle calculation going on there. Just consider how a thought, buried deep

down, comes to the surface at the slightest opportunity and overwhelms you in one moment. Through what process does it come? If you study those things, you will understand what a tremendous, dynamic power is working in the unconscious. I am telling you this to impress on your mind the idea that karma is powerful, impression is powerful, and tendency is powerful. Karma is not just something you can laugh off and forget. If it were that easy, the whole world would appear as nonsense. But, you see, there is a lot of method in the madness of this world. Since karma is power, you have to deal with it in such a way that it will become transformed or nullified by another kind of power; otherwise you cannot get rid of it.

In Hinduism as well as in Christianity there is the doctrine of divine grace, of redemption. A Christian would say that through divine grace one becomes free of sin; a Hindu would express the same idea by saying that through grace one becomes free from the bondage of karma. The psychological effect of the different words may be different, but the facts are the same. Why did Christ have to shed his blood for the redemption of man's sins? He could have said, "Your sins are forgiven"—finished. No, that would not have been enough. He had to suffer for what he was redeeming. You see, he redeemed the souls, but he had to take their bondages and sins upon himself; he had to pay for it. That is vicarious

atonement. Someone has to pay for it. We are paying for our sins now, but in the very paying we are acquiring more sins, more karmas; so we are always in debt. When Christ, on the other hand, took the sins of others on himself he did not incur more sin, because he was divine, he was free. Religions in every part of the world have had doctrines similar to the Christian doctrine of redemption by vicarious atonement. Long before the birth of Christ it was known in India that a Divine Incarnation can take away the sins or karmas of others—that is one of the signs of a Divine Incarnation; a lesser person cannot do it.

But if an individual is left to free himself of his own karmas, then what must he do? He must counteract the impressions of bad karmas by creating impressions of good karmas, just as to remove darkness one must light a lamp. What are the good karmas? Actions that are done not for oneself but for the true benefit of others—those are the karmas that will nullify one's bad karmas. Power acts against power and neutralizes it. Therefore Hinduism teaches that one should never take one's good actions to oneself, one should not claim their fruits; otherwise one will never be able to work out one's bad karmas. Suppose you go to a banker and say, "I want to repay my loan." He brings out your note, but when you have counted out the money you pick it up and put it back in

your own pocket. The banker will certainly not consider that you have repaid your loan. The burden of debt will still be yours. Just so, unless you perform good deeds unselfishly, without an eye to their fruits, they will not free you from the effects of bad action. This is one very potent reason that one should renounce the fruit of one's action. It has been found, however, that a person cannot really do enough good deeds or good deeds that are sufficiently selfless and powerful to counteract his bad karmas unless he actually becomes free from any motive for gain whatsoever. And of course such motivelessness does not come to a person unless he has caught a glimpse of the higher Reality, his own spiritual Self, or God. Out of that fact came the practices of nonattachment, of devotion, of meditation, and of offering everything to the Lord. There also came the extreme doctrine that a person cannot attain to the highest except through knowledge—*jñāna*. Good works alone will not liberate you; so you begin to turn your mind to the truth about things.

I have already said that knowledge of Truth is what breaks the spell of ignorance and awakens us from our own miserable dream. When we become aware of the spiritual Reality, the whole foundation of karma becomes weakened and is eventually undermined and destroyed. And then we become free. Sri Krishna said in the *Gītā*, "Just

as fire burns out wood, in the same way the fire of Knowledge will reduce all karmas to ashes.”<sup>3</sup> Patañjali said: Just as fried seeds will not sprout, in the same way, when you have looked at your own karmas through the knowledge, the experience, of your higher Self, they become, as it were, fried and cannot produce any further effect. You become free of them.<sup>4</sup>

But until then it is another story. Our work is at best only half finished by the time we have to depart this life. There are so many questions unsolved, so many desires unfulfilled that we are not yet ready to say, “Enough!” We should be able to say, “Living in the body is a pleasure, but it is followed by greater suffering. If there is youth, there is also middle age and old age; if there is health there is illness; if there is the joy of living in the body there is the pain of being separated from the body.” If through the body I have come in contact with my fellow beings and have seen this beautiful world, to be forced to leave this world is also, as it were, to be separated from my very own soul. All these contradictions are there, but we are not philosophical enough to say, “No, there is no use coming back to this order of existence.” Although suffering comes at death, very soon the

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3. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, 4:37.

4. Vyāsa's, *Commentary on Patañjali, Yoga Sūtra*, 4. 28.

memory of that suffering goes away, and again the desire arises to come back and continue with the same experience.

You may remind me here that some people believe there is no coming back; they will go to heaven, and there they will fulfill their desires. Friends, you have never experienced going to heaven, have you? If you were forced to go to heaven without being ready for it, there could not be anything more tormenting. Have you ever lived in the company of a spiritual person? If you are not ready for it, you will find it unbearable; you will feel that you might as well be burned in fire. Living in their company is like being forced to climb to the top of a mountain twenty thousand feet high; your lungs are bursting, you cannot breathe, you feel you are dying. If your mind is not ready to live in companionship with God, you will call it hell, not heaven. These things are spoken of so glibly! It is easy to be thoughtless; life is so simple when you don't have to think much. First of all, somebody else thinks for you, and then when he says impossible things, you don't want to think about them because to do so would be inconvenient. But just think a little: here you live the grossest kind of life, and then when you die you want to live with the angels in companionship with God! There has to be preparation for that. It has been rightly said, therefore, that first the soul has to pass through purgatory.

Now, what is purgatory, what is its function, and what are the conditions it must provide for the soul? Can you really satisfy a man's desire for wealth by putting him in a cell whose walls are painted with all kinds of luxurious objects? Or take a hungry man, if you place before him lifelike pictures of food, will his hunger be satisfied? If purgatory is to do good to a soul still bound by this gross conception of reality, it has to be of exactly the same nature as that which the mind of that person is seeking. In other words, it has to be an exact replica of this earth. The Hindus say we need not give two names to things that are identical; we can just call it earth. This earth is purgatory. Here the soul comes to fulfill its desires; back here the soul has to come. If there are in this universe other earthly globes—fine, it can go to them, but exactly the same conditions have to be there. Sense desire has to have opportunities for satisfaction. Through that satisfaction will come dissatisfaction; through dissatisfaction will come discontent; and discontent will bring about awakening. Then the higher life will flash before us.

This earth is a very great place; it is not only for sense-bound souls; great souls also come here until they have realized the highest. But the Hindus say that life on this earth is an absolute condition for the freedom of the soul. And this is why they believe in reincarnation; there is no other way. The very fact that the soul has come into this

body shows there is a purpose in it, and unless this is an altogether cruel universe with no provision for kindness, it is but natural to think that the soul should have an opportunity of coming here again and again, fulfilling its desires, and awakening to its higher nature. This is what life on earth is for.

So, you see, the doctrine of karma follows from the present constitution of man and all the ways in which the mind functions, and as long as these conditions exist, there will also be reincarnation. It is through these two doctrines—karma and reincarnation that we explain why we are what we are. Some of us are fulfilled, others unfulfilled; some are blinded, others half blinded; light is just breaking for some, for others it is still very dark; some have caught a glimpse of the higher reality, others are still buried deep in the darkness of the lowest reality. The condition of any given individual depends upon his present state of mind.

In closing, I shall repeat what I said at the beginning: it does not matter in what state a person is; if by some means he can be made aware of his true nature, in one moment he can wake up from his dream of this vicious reality. If you say, "Let us be practical about it," I shall concur, but I shall add, don't wait till the whole story is finished. Let the first chapter be finished if you will. After that, friends, why not wake up? This story will never come to an end; so after you have enjoyed

the first part of it you can say, "It is that kind of story; I don't have to finish it"—and wake up.

Yes, it is possible for the soul to wake up, and it is for this reason that from time to time, from Divine Providence, which is infinitely gracious, great Incarnations and Saviors, prophets, and saints are born amongst us to teach us. This is also why every civilized country has scriptural texts that contain the experiences and teachings of these great souls, and why in every civilized country there are religions and places of worship and people who can guide us to this knowledge and teach us ways and means by which it can be acquired. All these things are evidences of divine grace, and if we avail ourselves of them there is no reason why we have to go to the bitter end before we wake up; we can wake up now. After all, we have not just begun human life in this birth; many times in our past lives we have had experiences of the very things we are now running after. Friends, what is the sense of repeating them?

## THE SOUL'S JOURNEY TO ITS DESTINY

### 1

In my last lecture I spoke about karma and reincarnation and I mentioned that according to these teachings as long as the soul remains under the spell of ignorance, which is another name for spiritual self-forgetfulness, it will go from birth to death and from death to birth indefinitely. This transmigratory movement of the soul has been called *samsāra*, and since it can be graphically described as circular, it has also been called *samsāra cakra*, "the wheel of transmigration."

In our life here we try to experience reality according to our understanding and measure.

Some of the things we experience are good, others are evil; some produce pleasure, others produce pain; some are pleasurable in the beginning, painful in the end; others are painful in the beginning, happy in the end. All these experiences we are compelled to have by something within ourselves, and since our experience is neither complete nor free from error and limitation, we feel, as we live on, a certain dissatisfaction, to say the least—a certain incompleteness.

I think it can be rightly said that even if one lives the full span of life—eighty, ninety, or even a hundred years—the period of fruitful experience is short. It takes some years before our body and mind become developed enough to have a desirable experience of reality—and then we wear ourselves out. The abundance of energy we have at our command in youth seems to intoxicate us and throw us into a sort of psychical splurge in which we exhaust ourselves in fruitless endeavor. After that, we pass into the somewhat humdrum existence of middle age, in which experiences of a new kind become rather difficult: our nature has become set and can function only according to its own established and rigid outlines. And so on into old age, where energy declines, and then to death. Since by the time we die we do not feel that we have achieved the completeness of experience which, consciously or unconsciously, we sought

throughout our life, we die with a sense of unfulfillment.

It is maintained by the Hindus that although our experience of after-death existence is somewhat different from our experience in life, nothing new is achieved in the quality of experience. It is as though an ignorant man were to travel all over the world. Because of his lack of knowledge he will not be able to understand much of anything worthwhile; his experience will not differ in quality, even though in different countries it will take different forms. Similarly, when we go beyond this life, we experience a difference of form, but the quality of our experience remains the same. The world to which we go after death has been called *bhoga bhūmi*, "the world of enjoyment"—actually the Sanskrit word *bhoga* indicates both enjoyment and suffering. Only that kind of thing—the experience of pleasure or of pain—is possible in that world; there is no attainment or growth. So after being there for some time, the soul feels a desire to come back to what is called *karma bhūmi*, "the world of action," the world of further attainments and achievements. Whether the soul returns to this earth or goes to a world similar to this where it becomes endowed with flesh and comes in contact with material objects, the soul does become again incarnated, and this process has been called reincarnation. There is, as it were, a going up and a coming down, a sort of circular

motion: we come to the same state and go back to the same state, and on and on it goes.

I also mentioned in my last lecture that this movement of the soul is not considered really endless; it is indefinite because we don't know when it will stop, but it does stop. It stops when the soul recovers from the self-forgetfulness which has imposed upon it the necessity of experience. The desire for experience comes through a sense of lack, and this sense of lack comes because we have forgotten ourselves. If we could remember what we are, we would find ourselves complete and perfect, with no need for anything from the outside to fulfill us. In fact, you cannot add to the soul. A man may make himself look well-formed by padding his coat and pulling in his waist, but he knows he is actually lacking in certain places and bulging in others; it is all artificial beautification. In the same way, it is illogical to think that we can add to the soul—even if there were an actual lack. But the fact of the matter is that the soul has no lack; it is of the very nature of perfection. Only because of its self-forgetfulness does it think it lacks what it wants and that what it wants is existing in the outside world and has to be gathered by means of experience.

Now, it is possible for the soul to regain its own knowledge. Just as one wakes from a dream, the soul can suddenly come out of this self-forgetfulness. Awakening from a dream can take place in at

least two ways: our sleep itself can become exhausted—our body has had enough sleep and we are pushed into the world of wakefulness; or for some reason we may suddenly awaken in the middle of the night. Similarly, it is said that when the soul has experienced enough, its period of self-forgetfulness subsides and it awakens from all its foolishness and illusions; the necessity for experience is over, and therefore these dreams of life and death come to an end. Or it may be that just as the pain of a nightmare wakes us up, so the shock of an exceedingly uncomfortable experience—a sudden bereavement, the loss of a fortune, the suffering of a great injustice, or the witnessing of a catastrophe visited upon a large number of people—the tremendous shock of such an experience can suddenly wake the soul out of its ignorance. Then it becomes aware of its own majesty, and the whole process of this *samsāra*, or transmigration, stops.

This is the general view of the Hindus regarding the soul's existence here and its destiny.

## 2

Now, what are the forces that have kept us in this transmigratory existence, and what should we do to get out of it? It is all very well to say, "Let's

have a nightmare to wake us up." But we are so timid ordinarily, we don't want to visit nightmares upon ourselves; rather, we want to escape all kinds of discomfort. Nor does nature always favor us with catastrophe. However, there are other ways. Those who have studied this existence can see that it depends upon certain conditions and that if a change can be brought about in those conditions, then this existence itself will become dispersed. Just as those whose job it is to wreck a house know where to strike so that the whole structure will collapse, in the same way, if we want to wreck this world of illusion that we have built up for ourselves, if we want to get out of it, we should discover what is holding it up—and there we should strike. Our philosophers and sages have studied those things, and they tell us what we should do and what we shouldn't do in order to get out of this situation.

Let us first consider the progress or movement of the soul. I shall say soul instead of human being, because we believe that wherever there is consciousness, whether in a human body, a sub-human body, or a superhuman body, there is what we call in Sanskrit a *jīva*, an individual being or soul. The difference in status between one soul and another—say, between a man and an animal or a man and an angel—is a difference in degree and not in kind. So the word *soul*, used in the sense of individualized consciousness, whatever the form, will be appropriate, as the observations I

shall make will apply not only to men and women, but also to other beings.

If you think of the whole journey that is undertaken by the soul, you can start from the present point of observation. As far as the past is concerned, it is not possible to say that the soul began in such and such a year—4,000, 10,000, or a billion years before Christ; you cannot say anything of the kind. So for the purpose of our study we can start from the present or from any point of time in which we have seen these individuals existing. Now, if we think of them as going towards the state where they will regain their true self-consciousness and attain to illumination, we can divide this journey into three different stages. The first stage I shall call the instinctive; the second the deliberative; and the third the intuitive. For convenience, the instinctive stage can be called the subconscious; the deliberative the conscious; and the intuitive the superconscious.

What do I mean by the instinctive stage of the soul? Consider animals as we know them—they haven't much power of deliberation in the control and regulation of their lives; they are subject to all kinds of forces, particularly external forces. In fact, why an animal is what he is can be explained more often by his external environment than by his internal conditions. All you can say of animals, if you think of them in these terms, is that they are guided by instinct; they do not have the ability

of coping with untoward circumstances; they just yield to them. If the circumstances are favorable, they thrive, if not, they suffer and eventually die out.

When we come to man, I would put him in the middle stage, which I have called the deliberative. It is true that when man is primitive or semicivilized, instinct often prevails; in general, however, we find in man the ability of adaptation, which means that circumstances do not govern what he thinks or how he behaves; rather, they bring out a force from within him. If the outward conditions are favorable, fine; if they are unfavorable, a human being pits himself against them and tries to conquer them for his own benefit. That is to say, human beings have a purpose of their own. I think this is what distinguishes them from subhuman beings: they seem to have developed a center of deliberation within themselves; they are not merely reflecting what nature is spelling out to them, they are not being merely imitative or repetitive. In every phase of his development you find man has said no to nature. Even if conditions are completely opposed to him, he will still want to have his own way. Nature wants man to behave in a certain way; man, for a purpose hidden within him, has asserted himself against nature. Not what nature is saying but what man is saying, that is the important thing.

Hindu philosophers say that this purposiveness is the first glimmering of one's truer self. I

would not say that in the deliberative period the light of the soul is manifesting itself unclouded and unobstructed, but I would say that it is showing. It is showing murkily, it is true, uncertainly, as in the very beginning of dawn, but nevertheless it is a light from within, and it is this light which makes a center of concentration, a center of resistance. Something has come, and you might say, if you are not cautious about your language, that that is the birth of the soul.

Man's purposiveness is a conscious attitude; that is to say, his motives are conscious motives. Of course, some of you will say that the motives of man are more often unconscious than conscious. I would not agree with you there. The very fact that man sets his conscious mind against his unconscious shows that it is his nature to want to be guided by the conscious. Even psychologists will tell you that if the contents of the unconscious are somehow controlling a man, then for that man's own benefit those things should be made conscious to him; only then will he be right. In other words, whatever there may be in the unconscious, man has to bring it within the scope of his consciousness, for only in terms of consciousness is he what he is. So I have called this second stage of the soul that of the conscious life.

As I said earlier (though it goes without saying), this conscious existence is not satisfactory; it is altogether too limited, too spare of meaning and

significance, too much dogged by a sense of futility. You build up so many things in the course of your lifetime, but old age undermines them all; and then comes death and takes everything away from you. Whatever you may accomplish here cannot be altogether satisfactory. Further, deliberation itself has not been found very helpful. Our knowledge is so limited that even when we have the facts and our reason deliberates upon them, it often fails to give us the correct conclusion. It is a heartbreaking struggle of man, this struggle to attain truth about anything. More often than not we find that what we thought to be true and correct is not true at all; our thinking has been all wrong; we feel that our whole life has been a waste. That is what happens when we depend upon our conscious deliberation, our own reason.

This is not the time for me to go into a study of why our consciousness is so limited and frustrating to us. What I want to point out here is that we do have a dream of perfection in respect to our own ability, our own thinking and conclusions. We feel we should be able to arrive at correct knowledge through a power other than this deliberative, conscious activity of the mind. We are all reaching towards what is usually called intuition. I am sure if someone says, "Come along, I shall teach you how to be intuitive. Twenty-five dollars for a course of lessons!" Thousands will flock to him. What great fun to be intuitive—

everything known and correctly known without any deliberation!

Of course, you might say that the idea of a state beyond limitation is like a poor man's dream of wealth—just a dream with no reality behind it. But I say there is such a thing as intuition; there is indeed a power in man by which he knows truth immediately and certainly. Our philosophers have been wonderfully encouraging in this respect; they have pointed out that even to make a mistake you must have perfect intuition to begin with. Just imagine this: when you are groping around, making all kinds of errors and mistakes, even then you are exercising the power of intuition. In their epistemology, when they discuss how we know and whether our knowledge is correct or mistaken, our philosophers conclude that just as light is the precondition of vision, in the same way the precondition of any knowledge, whether correct or mistaken, is the projection of the light of intuition, which is the very essence of our own being. It is the spiritual light, the light from which all other lights have come and without which this universe would be plunged into blinding darkness and so become nonexistent, incapable of being perceived by any of the senses. That we perceive anything, that even animals, or for that matter, worms and insects, have a sense of perception, is dependent upon some projection of this inner light. The difference, therefore, between these three states—instinctive,

deliberative, and intuitive—is a difference in the degree of the projection of this light. If we could break down all the barriers, the obstructions which have as it were blinded this tremendously brilliant light—this light that we have within ourselves—we would find there is nothing which could not be known to us.

The Hindus have taken a most optimistic attitude in this regard. They have always said that it should be natural for a man to know the truth. Since we are not separate from this universe of reality, since we are part of it and it is part of ourselves, the very thought of separation is itself a fiction. The waves on the surface of a lake might think they are completely separate from one another, forgetting they are rising from the same body of water and passing into one another. The fiction we have built for ourselves that we are separate existences is like that: it ignores the fact that in and through us and behind us there is just one continuous reality. Since that is so, why should we feel cut off in our knowledge and consciousness from the rest of reality, living or non-living, which we think is existing outside ourselves? This separation is all self-delusion; we should be able to know things as they really are without any effort.

When we ask a person a question, we take for granted that he will give us a true answer; it is expected of any decent person that he will not tell

a lie. The whole of nature should be treated with that same courtesy; we should expect nature to tell us the truth. But we don't trust nature at all; we think reality is a barefaced liar. Now, that is not right. If reality is a part of ourselves, knowing the truth about any part of it should be instinctive with us; true knowledge should be always there. Hindus, as I said, have maintained that attitude; they have said that lack of knowledge and the difficulty we apparently experience in knowing truth is an unnatural state and, like every other abnormality, is produced out of some obstruction or distortion. Further, since it is not natural, it can be got rid of very easily: natural things cannot be got rid of, but unnatural things can easily be thrown off. Thus they have maintained that one should have no difficulty in knowing truth.

There are, in fact, people who have attained to this intuitive state, this superconscious state of perfection. The difficulty is that even if we see such intuitive people, our own lack of intuition prevents us from perceiving them as such; but they exist in this world. As a matter of fact, it is quite possible that there are more intuitive beings in this universe than we think. The Hindus say that this physical world is only one of many planes of the phenomenal universe and that above it are planes of existence peopled by beings superior to ourselves. Not only are there gods—wonderful beings with wonderful bodies, but still deliberative and

rather pleasure-seeking, liking to dance and sing, and so on (I shall have occasion to speak of them later on with greater seriousness), but there are other beings living in still higher planes who are intuitive, contemplative. They have been purified of their material instincts, however fine these may have been, and have become aware of their own spiritual nature. It is said that when a person who has attained to a high degree of spiritual development here on earth dies, he goes to one of those worlds and lives in the company of similar beings. You may think this is one of those fairy stories common to all ancient peoples. I do not think so. I myself believe such beings exist, if for no other reason, than that it is difficult for me to think that the tremendous creative power we see manifest in this phenomenal universe has been exhausted by bringing into existence these miserable creatures called men, who are neither beautiful, nor celestial, nor illumined. I do not think the creative power of the universe is so poor. It must have brought out other beings at least more perfect in outer form. As regards inner form, I should certainly not think that God, or whoever created this universe, reached the acme of His creation with the human race, of whom only two or three individuals have attained the inner glory of Buddhahood or Christhood. Surely He must be able to create endless numbers of such glorified beings.

And there are such beings. Sri Ramakrishna

used to tell a story about Sri Krishna, who even in his lifetime was looked upon as an Incarnation of God. One day Sri Krishna said to his friend Arjuna, "Come, friend, I shall show you something." They went to a deep forest, and he pointed out a huge tree, covered with big clusters of blue-black berries. Sri Krishna asked Arjuna, "What do you see hanging from the branches of that tree?" And Arjuna replied, "Why, I see clusters of berries hanging there." "Come," Sri Krishna said, "let us go a little closer." When they went closer they found these were not berries at all; each was a Sri Krishna (Sri Krishna, you know, had a blue-black complexion). And he said, "You see, in this tree, which is the phenomenal universe, there are all these Incarnations of the Lord—an infinite number of them."

This story was in reference to the idea that creation is nothing but differentiation. As I pointed out in "What Makes a Man," when this Absolute Divinity, Brahman, begins to manifest as this universe and as individual souls, homogeneous Being becomes, as it were, heterogeneous—that is to say, marked with distinctions. In the first stage it is as though an artist had sketched faint pencil lines on paper here and there. These distinctions cannot even be called forms; they are just the beginning of forms; they are so close to the Godhead that they cannot be separated from It. Yet there is a world there—a phase of this phenomenal

universe where it touches the pure being of God. There is a demarcating line where the Absolute, pure Divinity, is as it were just entering into differentiation. If you ever reach that boundary line, you will find on this side of it godlike beings of the status of Divine Incarnations; they are not creatures in any sense. Of course, if you want to be strictly logical, you might say they are created beings, but in value they are so godlike you cannot really say they have been created by God; their very nature is God. Sri Krishna pointed out this fact to Arjuna.

Why, then, should I think that creation or manifestation has reached its culmination in man? I am naturally inclined to think when I reach the very height of this phenomenal universe I shall come upon a world perfect in every respect, godlike inside and outside, with beings who are themselves godlike you might call them intuitive beings. We have called that highest world *Brahmaloka* or *Satyaloka* —“the world of Divinity” or “the world of Truth.” Whereas in our world we are spots of consciousness here and there in a universe of dead matter, in *Brahmaloka* everything is divine: the outside is divine, the inside is divine, form is divine, substance is divine.

You may say there is not much fun in that. How do you know what is fun? You have chewed bitter roots all your life; your mouth has become so bitter that you cannot taste anything any more.

To taste the joy of that other world requires great training, a purification of the mouth, as it were. The real fun is not in seeing differences but in seeing unity, the same Divinity everywhere. That is the lesson one learns after a great deal of experience in this gross universe. At last we know that to see difference is death, to see sameness is life; to see difference is self-destruction, to see sameness is self-regeneration; to see difference is bondage, to see sameness is liberation. It takes a long, long time; it requires many bitter experiences before we turn away from our foolish vision of this universe. And when we turn back, we see extraordinary things, and then we become convinced.

In India it is our strong belief that every soul is destined to pass from the instinctive stage to the deliberative stage, then to the intuitive stage and on to liberation. Liberation is neither subconscious, conscious, nor superconscious, but absolute, and therefore it cannot really be called a stage or state; it cannot be spoken of in any terms. But then we need not speak about it: it is very easy for those who have reached the height of the superconscious or intuitive state to plunge into this Absolute and become entirely free; there is no problem about it. Our present concern is the soul's passage from one stage to another.

Some of you may ask, "Isn't it just an assumption that every soul will pass from one stage to another and eventually attain liberation? What is

the guarantee?" The guarantee is this: each of these stages is limited. You cannot say that the instinctive stage, the deliberative stage, or even the intuitive stage is endless. If you do, you are mixing up your terms. The phenomenal, by the very fact that it is a phenomenon, is limited. It is like a wave; it never stands still. In a photograph a particular phenomenon stands still in time, but in actual experience no phenomenon stands still, because the power that brings it into existence is dynamic. Dynamism is by nature change, and therefore it exhausts itself. The very power that brings any finite being into existence destroys that finite being.

Swami Vivekananda often said that in this phenomenal world greatness itself is the origin of smallness, life itself is the origin of death, strength itself is the origin of weakness. He said that powerful nations spell their own death, because in exercising their power they are spending it, and very soon it is gone. Yes, destruction is inevitable for every phenomenal existence. Therefore that power which has brought about the instinctive or sub-human existence for the soul will, by its very working, destroy that existence. The soul, having experienced a certain stage again and again, exhausts that stage; it no longer reacts to those experiences with any enthusiasm, and it is pushed out. Thus every soul bound up in the instinctive stage will be forced out of that condition into the

deliberative or conscious stage. It has to be so. Then, since even the deliberative state is limited, the soul will be forced out of it into a still higher state. There is no escaping this. That is the reason we believe that every soul will pass through these stages until it has reached its own highest state, which is self-realization, self-knowledge. Its self-forgetfulness will be destroyed; it will no longer be tied down to phenomena or form. It will know itself as it truly is, and therefore the force of karma and reincarnation will come to an end. Let us call this whole process evolution in the inner sense. So long as souls are instinctive and not deliberative, how far they will go ahead depends upon nature. But when the soul reaches the deliberative state, it becomes possible for a human being to study his own condition.

It is at this point that the age of philosophy begins, or, first, the age of prophecy. History has shown that when a large number of people have become educated and capable of thinking for themselves, individuals have arisen among them who are apparently endowed with superior wisdom. They have been called prophets and have been thought to be the mouthpiece of God, or at least to have a superior knowledge for the guidance of the community, a knowledge which has been tested and found beneficial. We find that in the beginning of their civilizations human beings have made much of their prophets. I may

say that we still need them among ourselves despite our vaunted intellectual knowledge and abilities. However, the need of prophets is greater in the early days of civilization, and this need has been met among almost every people. They always have prophets. Sometimes I think even among animals there are prophets born—well, that's my own fancy. But as regards human beings, there is always the age of prophets.

Then comes the age of education and culture. Prophets are supplemented, if not replaced, by philosophers, scientists, saints, and sages—all of whom contribute new ideas and new knowledge. They think pro and con; they speculate, analyse, judge, amend, and so on. This is the age in which people begin to ask: What am I? Why am I here? How have I become what I am? Is this the best state, or is there a state of supreme good? Is it possible for me to reach such a state? If it is possible, how am I going to reach it? Why am I not able to make the progress I want? Then a great deal of analytical study starts. I would say that civilized man is today in this age of questioning and study.

Now, let us see why we are held here. I told you in the beginning that we are here for experience: we feel that we have to have experience. If I did not have the senses, if I did not learn from all of you, if I did not come in contact with people, did not read books or see things, I would be practically an idiot; my body would grow, but my

mind would be that of a child. I will accept as a practical conclusion that that is true. You see, in this state we think there is no other knowledge possible for us than knowledge of the outside world derived through the senses. Or, to put it more truly, we want no other kind of knowledge; we want to know things outside ourselves. Why do you think it is so?

During the last few lectures I have again and again dwelt on this idea: when I forget my infinity and think of myself as finite, infinity does not become nonexistent because of my own stupidity; it is still there, and certainly it will assert itself. What it does is this: it appears, as it were, outside me as this boundless universe—infinite in space, endless in time, limitless in possibility. And just because I think I am this small being, I do not actually become this small being; I am still the infinite reality. I am still this universe, and therefore it is still of vital concern to me. That is why I cannot give it up. That is why I have built this skull and have put in it these precious things called eyes to goggle outward; I have all these hawklike fingers to grab things; I have these feet by which I can run around. All these senses are eager to repossess the universe because it is myself. I cannot escape it.

Of course, it must be admitted that I don't know I am this universe. If I knew it, then I would not think I had to experience it through the senses. In spite of all this philosophizing, I cannot say that

I am this person or that person or this clod of earth or this sky or these stars—it is just not so. You see, this is the peculiar situation: the universe is in fact me; and yet in my present perception it is not me. As long as this situation lasts, I cannot give up this outside world. That is why a soul in the deliberative state is held down here.

### 3

The Hindus have an extraordinary concept about this deliberative state in which we are held. They say that every human being is born burdened with certain debts and that his whole life is a process of repaying them. What are these debts? Three of them are the debt to the *pitṛs* or ancestors, the debt to the *ṛṣis*, and the debt to the *devās* or gods. The debt to the ancestors is partly paid off when one has brought forth a son so that the line can be continued. The debt to the *ṛṣis*, or the sages and saints, is paid when one has cultivated the *sāstras* or scriptures—that is to say, when one has become educated. And the debt to the gods is paid by making offerings to them.

There is a good deal more to the repayment of these debts than you might think. What kind of son are you expected to bring into the world? One who will turn out to be a gangster or an idiot? No!

You must bring forth the best son you can. For ages and ages in every civilized community, the family has accumulated and transmitted culture. Therefore, parents have the responsibility of giving birth to and bringing up good children who will not only continue the family traditions, but will enhance them, will add something to them. If you say you have no control over the kind of children you give birth to, that you cannot be held responsible—ah, I shall hold you responsible. The Hindus believe, you see, that if the minds of the parents are in a pure and high state when the mother conceives, then a good soul is drawn to her womb. And, of course, at that time a person cannot command the right state of mind unless he has purified himself through long years of training.

It has been the tradition in India from ancient times until the present for girls approaching the marriageable age to practice austerity and to worship the gods. Why do they worship? Not because they are eager for a man, as one of your American writers has imagined, but because they feel that to enter the state of wifedom is a tremendous responsibility. Everybody knows that girls haven't much brain in choosing a husband. Even parents are not always governed by the best motives, and sometimes they are hemmed in by circumstances and are not able to get the right bridegrooms for their daughters; there are so many difficulties about it. But when man can do nothing, there is

one whom he can approach, and that is God. There is a wisdom that is never asleep: *atandritam*, "the ever-wakeful One." And He is our very own; He is not a ruler sitting on a throne with a big stick in His hand; He is our inmost Friend; He is our Father and Mother. Why should our prayers not reach Him? So Hindu girls pray for a good husband. Then after marriage, when the husband and wife want children, they also become prayerful. They practice austerity, they fast, and they perform worship. There is nothing primitive about it; it is a process of purification. And when a child is conceived by parents whose minds have been purified, a good soul will be drawn to them, one who likes the spirit of austerity, of prayer and meditation. That is where parents' responsibility lies: if they don't train themselves, if they don't develop the power to attract good souls, they have failed in paying their debt to their ancestors. So you see, the payment of this debt is not a simple matter. Similarly, one's debt to the *ṛṣis* is not paid by merely reading the scriptures every day after dinner. That is just a matter of form. If you want to pay your debt to the *ṛṣis* truly, it has to be something else altogether.

And one's debt to the gods? In the time of the Vedas the sacrifice to the gods—*deva-yajña* it is called—was performed by making oblations into a sacred fire. Behind this sacrifice was the idea that all nature is governed by celestial forces, or gods—

those gods to whom I referred earlier. We may ignore these forces, but that doesn't mean they ignore us. If we ignore the weather, for instance, the weather does not ignore us: if we had no weather reports, still snow would come, storms would come. So there are these forces—celestial forces—that govern material nature, and it was found that if these forces are worshiped, then man is repaying the gods for what he has derived from them. You know how American Indians in Arizona would dance, and at once rain would come? Similarly, the ancient Vedic Aryans believed that when they performed certain sacrifices rain would fall as a result. You make offerings to Indra, the god of the rains, and at once you hear his thunderbolt rumbling in the sky; the sky becomes filled with black clouds, as though demons were covering it, and he pelts the earth with his bullets of rain. That is Indra: if you worship him he does that kind of thing.

These, then, were three of the debts the Hindus thought men were born with. Actually, they speak of five debts. If you reduce them to modern terms, you might say that every individual is born with certain responsibilities: he has responsibilities to his family; responsibilities to his fellow beings; responsibilities to the gods—if he believes in the gods; responsibilities to culture, that is, to education and to religion (which last he fulfills by supporting his church and by being a

religious person); and responsibilities to sub-human creatures.

By subhuman creatures the ancient Hindus meant not only animals but mysterious beings such as demons and the like. In this universe there are these evil, unclean creatures; they are not gods, they are just the opposite; yet they exist, and the Hindus thought that a human being owes something to them just as a community feels that it has some responsibility to its slum dwellers and tramps. Even today, before a Hindu will eat dinner he will take a bit of food and offer it to these *bhūtas*, or evil spirits, and it is said they are somewhat satisfied. You might think it is just childish to believe that a little piece of bread will satisfy these spirits. But why not? Suppose the father of a poor family has gone away to make money. Year after year he writes hopeful letters to his wife: "Now prosperity is just around the corner"; "Things are looking up"; "It will not be long before I shall come back and we shall live a better life." It is all just talk, but you must admit that these letters have sustained the family through the years. Take all idle thoughts away from people, and their lives will become as barren as a desert, dry as anything. True, there is no substance in all this sentiment and talk, and yet these things are the sustaining powers in human life at this stage. You cannot deny it. So even the thought that goes to the spirits along with the offering of food—"With

this food you will be sustained, O spirits"—that thought, it is said, sustains them.

Well, however that may be, you might say that the meaning behind this whole concept of being born with certain debts is that we have duties to all our fellow beings. If there are angels and spirits and such things in our universe, then we owe something to them too; we should be willing to help them if we can. In other words, as long as you feel that the world is outside you, that it means something to you and that you have to know it, then you must take it seriously. You cannot just say, "Oh, I don't care. I don't care for having children or for helping others; why should I bother?" You earn your money, you live your life, you have your fun. Death! Death for you! You would not be able to get away from the snare of this transmigratory existence. Why? Because you have taken it to be real but you don't know how to treat it in such a way that you can get out of its clutches. Only when you take it seriously and meet its demands with the highest sense of duty and value will this existence let you go. As I told you, when the soul in the instinctive stage no longer reacts with enthusiasm to the phenomena that nature is bringing to it, nature itself forces that soul into a higher form. In this deliberative stage, also, nature will do that. But you will hasten the process when you take this deliberative phase of reality with seriousness. When you respond with

sincerity and with the best intentions to what it asks of you, then nature will say, "Well, I have got what I wanted. I don't want anything more out of him in this stage; I shall appear to him now in another guise." Nature will let you go.

In our scriptures it is said that when a man becomes a monk he is allowed to give up everything—family, responsibility, everything—society expects nothing more of him; entirely free he is. But you see, it is only when he has finished all his duties in this phase of existence and wants nothing more from it, only when he has paid the five great debts that were his by the very fact of his birth, is he free to renounce the world and become a monastic—not until then. Renouncing is not escaping, as many people think. You cannot escape; you just cannot! A man may put on the garb of a wandering monk and beg his food, but that does not make him free. If he is bound internally, nature itself will make him work.

There is a joke about this among the people who live in the Himalayas. Although a great part of the Himalayas is uninhabited, here and there you will find small villages. The people are never prosperous, but they are very hospitable. For ages and ages, monks and spiritual aspirants have gone to the Himalayas to dwell there in poverty and meditation, and the villagers have always thought it their duty to supply them with their basic needs. Every day after cooking—and they

cook with a great sense of ceremonial purity and reverence—they will set aside some of the food, a piece of bread, a small portion of vegetables or lentils, expecting a wandering monk to come by. When a monk comes he will stand at the door and repeat the name of the Lord. Thus, at the very least, he makes the householder hear the name of God. Sometimes he will discourse on a spiritual subject or sing a devotional song for the alms he has received. Then he will go to the next house. Well, however devoted they are, the villagers have common sense; they know that some of these monks are not genuine, they are just lazy. But they think it is not their responsibility to administer justice; that is the responsibility of the monks among themselves. So of such a monk they say, "Let him have a piece of bread or a little vegetable. In his next life he will be born as our ox and till the fields that have produced this food!"

Yes, life will make you work if you have not become free of this phase of existence. And how do you become free? When you have treated a thing at its best with your best, then you become free of it. That's the secret. You in America say you are born with rights; Hindus say just the opposite. Our attitude is that our existence here is not to get something but to give. So we say everyone is born not with rights but with indebtedness to the community of beings, of which some are visible, others are invisible, some are human, some superhuman,

others subhuman. In this country you, too, speak of your obligations, but at the same time you talk of your rights, and then, of course, there is conflict. Boys and girls grow up and say, "I want to seek happiness; it is my legal right." Parents cannot say anything; it is unconstitutional to say anything. So the children go out seeking happiness. Of course, they don't know what happiness is, or which "happiness" will bring what result. They haven't had enough experience or enough self-discipline; therefore trouble comes.

I think the idea that we are born with obligations is better. I admit that by making too much of it you can crush the soul. Like every idea, it has to be viewed in conjunction with associated ideas. The associated idea in this case is that parents should teach their children, even when they are very small, the art of gaining happiness from within. To keep the spirit soaring even when things get very dark outside is an art that can be cultivated. It is the art of meditation, the art by which you brush aside mental conditions, and erase impressions received from the outside, so that your natural enthusiasm will emerge. The soul, they say, is not buried too deep. If you remove one or two layers from the surface you find it is there. In every person there is that source of peace and joy and strength. It is not dependent upon physical vigor; it is not dependent upon any stimulus coming into the mind from the outside; it is just there;

it is like an eternal spring, continually rising from within. The bounden duty of higher-caste Hindus is to teach their children this art of meditation. In olden times, if they failed to do so, the family was made outcaste. Other members of the community would not dine with them, would not invite them to any social gathering, would just ostracize them. So you see, these two ideas went together—indebtedness and meditation—and thereby the sense of obligation did not become a crushing burden; it became, rather, a stimulus to higher, nobler endeavor. Yes, that is the way. And when a person has fulfilled his obligations, has paid off the debts with which he was born, then this deliberative stage of nature will no longer have a hold on him.

If you study the whole thing psychologically, you will see how true this is. Whenever you enjoy your senses but do not assume the consequences as a noble obligation, your enjoyment degrades you. It is as if you had gone to a shop and helped yourself to something without paying for it. You are a thief. In the *Bhagavad Gītā* Sri Krishna actually says that you become a thief if you enjoy the fruits of nature and do not make offerings to the gods, who have made nature give you these fruits. Enjoyment must be coupled with responsibility; otherwise it will cause you to sink lower and lower until you lose your human status. On the other hand, if you repay your indebtedness to this existence, your desire for enjoyment gradually

becomes converted to another view of things; you see more in this phase of reality than you had seen before.

Suppose, for example, a man with a sense of obligation marries a beautiful girl. In the beginning, it is true, he may have been attracted by her beauty; the motive of enjoyment may have been predominant in his mind, but if he has a noble sense of responsibility, he will see a great deal more in their life together than enjoyment. Then it will not matter in the slightest to him if his wife becomes ugly or old or diseased; on the contrary, a better understanding of his wife will grow in him, and he will lose the external attraction with which he first married. He will find all that very superficial.

Or a person might say, "How wonderful it would be to be rich!" All right, suppose he becomes rich. Then at once he assumes the responsibilities of wealth: he has to support his relatives, he has to give to the poor, contribute to hospitals, schools, and churches. If he does all this in a noble spirit, very soon he will find that possession is not the important thing; giving is the important thing. Possessiveness is replaced by the sense of sacrifice and renunciation.

In short, to treat any phase of reality in the highest sense is the means of our liberation from that phase of reality. If I am caught in this phase of existence and have been forced to come to this

world, I must find where the compulsion lies, and then I must face this existence. I must say, "I shall do my best by it." When I do my best, at once I feel a release. But "release" expresses only a part of what comes: I become aware of a higher life. If I have discharged all my obligations in the deliberative stage of existence, I find that my mind and my power of perception have undergone a change: I have become superconscious; I have become intuitive.

In this lower phase of life, where knowledge depends on the body and the senses, and the mind traffics only with what the senses give it and cannot produce anything of its own, truth seems far off, and even our best efforts often end in error. But when we are no longer so dependent on the senses and our perception has become more internal, then the mind becomes free from its bondage to the body. The mind says, "Now, O man, I can do a better job of finding truth for you." "Oh, you can? Then why haven't you done it all this time?" "You didn't give me a chance. You forced me into slavery to the senses and the body; you compelled me to go outside to bring truth to you; you ordered me to rearrange the impressions the senses brought, to sort them out, and to put them away in the unconscious ready to be used again. But now I don't have to go outside to get the truth for you. I can produce it at once, like a lightning flash. But let me tell you one thing," the mind goes on, "I don't

think you have given me complete freedom yet. You still want to look outward through the eyes, and you still want me to make a record of all the things that you see so that you can hobnob a little with this and a little with that. No! That won't do. You have to give me complete freedom."

It is here that spiritual practice comes in. Religion, when it is taken seriously, is for those who have become aware that what they are seeking is not in the sense world. The truth of even what we see by means of the senses lies beneath what the senses reveal. If the senses reveal a man to me, I see his face; but the greater truth of the man lies behind his face. And this greater truth is within me; I don't have to look outside. Through me is the door to the heart of the universe. When I enter through this door, I enter into the very heart of the whole of reality, not merely the reality that is circumscribed by my physical form. But first I must give complete freedom to the mind.

That freedom comes when we deliberately, through religious practices, free ourselves from the remnants of bondage to the sense world. You see, when you clear a forest, you first cut down the big trees, then after they have dried a little, you burn them. Still you find burnt stumps are standing here and there, making things ugly; so you have to remove them. When you have removed stumps, roots, and everything, the ground becomes clear, and a beautiful harvest can be grown.

In the same way, the mind must be freed from all the remnants of sense desires, desires for external things. Then gradually the mind becomes calm; and that is the mind that becomes intuitive.

To put it briefly, a scattered mind, an objectified mind, is the deliberative mind, and it cannot give you the truth. When the same mind is no longer forced to be scattered, it at once becomes intuitive. Knowledge flashes. Just as in intense darkness a lightning flash illumines everything without the slightest shadow anywhere, making things clearer than in daylight, so the flash of intuition brings everything to you with the utmost clarity, without a shadow of doubt or speck of ignorance anywhere. That is intuition. Will it tell you your future or who is speaking where and what about you? No, that is not intuition, that is madness. If you have the power of intuition, do you think you will care to know what is going to happen to you in the future, or who is doing what now or did what in the past? That is a degradation of the very idea of intuition. Yes, there are certain psychic powers that can be attained, but the intuition I am speaking of is the light by which truth is made known to us.

Intuition brings you the knowledge that you are not this body, you are not this mind. And when this knowledge comes, it will not be just intellectual knowledge; it will be actual perception. You will feel separate from the body; even if someone

were to cut your body to pieces, it would not matter to you. When this intuition comes you will already have reached the point where you are no longer tied up with that form of existence called *samsāra*, in which you are made to whirl from life to death and death to life. You have come out of it; you are approaching the life that has been called Absolute, the life of freedom, the life of your own true Self, of your own true nature.

#### 4

In this process of becoming free from trans-migratory existence and reaching the Absolute, there are many stages. I shall mention only one here. As I said, before the mind really reveals its power of intuition, it will demand that we make it free, completely free from taking account of our sensations and perceptions in this world of appearances. That is a long process, but a time comes when the mind is free and stands still. Patañjali has called that stillness of the mind in which the truth is revealed the state of yoga. How do you make the mind stand still? He says, *abhyāsa-vairāgyā-bhyām tan-nirodhaḥ*<sup>1</sup>—“through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*.” As I told you in an earlier lecture of this series, *abhyāsa* means

1. Patañjali, *Yoga Sūtra*, 1.12.

making the mind continually come back to the contemplation of truth, not allowing it to dwell on anything else. What is truth? Truth is the Spirit. Make your mind feel that changeless, unmoving, subtle Being, which is the support of the whole universe and without which in one moment it would go into nothingness. Think on that Being which is the essence of everything that is. By imagination remove all these variations and make your mind dwell on this homogeneous Being, the one essence of all these variegated forms.

This is spiritual practice, my friends. All the time, as it were, you have been looking towards the west. Look towards the east and you will see the rising sun. That is, take your mind away from differentiation, from the many, and make it dwell in imagination upon the infinite, homogeneous Unity, the one Being. At first it will be just some vague abstraction. That also is good; your mind has never thought like this before. It has always thought of little things, changing things. In fact, it has not really thought; it has just danced the dance of a monkey, that is all. We can't call that thinking. Let the mind turn the other way, if only for one minute. Sit still, close your senses, and in imagination and consciousness feel this one unchanging, infinitely peaceful Being—just one Being unto the ends of the universe, the endless ends of the universe. Feel yourself one with that Being. That is thinking. Learn to do that more and

more, more and more. That is *abhyāsa*. A time will come when that Being no longer appears so abstract, and as you progress in thinking of It you become aware of It in such a way that the most glorious being in the phenomenal world pales into nothingness compared with It. That experience is the proof of the reality of this one Being, such irrefutable proof that if all the philosophers were to din into your ears that you are only indulging in imagination, hypnotizing yourself, you would just smile at them. *Na sāmparāyaḥ pratibhāti bālam pramādyantam vittamohena mūḍham.*<sup>2</sup> “This transcendental Being does not appear before a child or to a person deluded by the idea of acquisition” — that’s the common man, and this truth does not appear before him. So you just smile and go back to that experience, which fills you with peace and joy and which opens a source of infinite strength and vitality within you. Not the vitality of this plane, such that everyone will say, “You’re eighty years old! Why, you don’t look more than thirty!” and you preen and look at yourself in the mirror and feel smug and satisfied. Not that kind of thing. Do you think a person who has found the truth wants to parade himself before fools? No! Another kind of vitality comes to you, the vitality of eternal life. The body dies out in course of time; it has nothing to do with this life

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2. *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 1.2.6.

eternal, nothing. When you have this other vitality, you feel fresh whatever your age; if youth is the synonym for freshness, for endless vitality and enthusiasm, then you have youth.

But *abhyāsa* does not become complete unless you are established in *vairāgya* or dispassion. *Vairāgya* literally means "uncoloring." All these things in the world look colorful; that is why they attract you. But if they lose their color, you no longer want to look at them. Suppose there is a canvas full of beautiful colors; you would say, "What a wonderful painting!" But if some water or acid falls on it and the colors are washed away, would you look at it? No. This world of appearance is like a canvas painted by the greatest of all artists—God. Or by you yourself, my friends; by the real you—*kavi*, the poet. This is the beautiful poem you have composed—this universe. You don't know it now, but a time will come when you know it is your own composition. But then, you will no longer like it. Its color will have gone and you will no longer be attracted by it. That is called *vairāgya*, nonattraction. A time comes when you are no longer caught by this world; you are free from it. You have seen through it, and it has become pale; there is nothing there. Even an illusion, however, has a tendency of coming back; so if a remnant still remains, you just remind yourself that it is really nothing. By this effort you kill the remnants of illusion, and the whole mind

becomes free. True intuition comes; the mind becomes unified and exceedingly subtle. You become aware of the one divine Being.

Friends, I wish very much that you would have a glimpse of this most wonderful, beautiful Being that is hidden by the forms of this universe. It is He who is contributing the substance, the color, the attraction of everything that is. His the value, His the power, His the love, His the sweetness and the beauty. He is the living one. And He is not a stranger to us; we have not to be afraid of Him. He is not far off; He is the nearest of the near. He is in our very breath, He is the life of our life, He is the eye of our eye. He is the very Soul of our soul, our very own. It is not a relationship that we have built up; there can be no fear it will dissolve. It has been always there; it is, in fact, not a relationship at all: He is one with us.

If we would just think of Him, we could catch a glimpse of Him. From time to time the mind would stand still: as in the midst of a storm suddenly there is a lull in the air, an utter silence, so from time to time the mind quiets down, and in that quietude reality flashes, and you see His beautiful face. I wish you could catch a glimpse of Him, because that is the answer to all your seeking. Once you have fallen in love with Him, you will never forget Him; even if you forget Him for a time, you will again remember Him, and you will come away from what has bound you down for the time

being. Then comes a new stage: The soul will never rest until it has been united with Him forever. It just cries and cries and cries for Him and will not find comfort in anything else. It is said that when that state comes to the soul, it will never go back; no longer will delusion come upon it; no longer will it waste time on the way; it will just rush towards God. And it is said that God also feels that longing. When the soul cries for Him, He rushes towards the soul. That is the culmination of the soul's journey. That is its destiny, not merely its destination: no soul will find peace until it has reached that state.

My friends, every one of you is bound to reach that state. You are now God; you are not going to become God; you are going to remember yourself as God. That memory will come back, and you will smile at the childish games you have been playing, thinking you are a small being, fearing this, loving that, hating one thing, desiring another. You will laugh at all those things, just as we laugh at the fears of our childhood. Yes, we shall all have to become great; we shall all have to know ourselves as divine. Until we have done that, there will be no rest for us; continually we shall have to move from moment to moment, from life to life, from stage to stage, until the highest has been reached. That highest is at-onement with God. If God is excellent, in that at-onement we also are excellent. Nothing more need be said.

## THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF THE EGO

### 1

Let me say at the outset that by the birth of the ego I do not mean the ego's birth as a definite event in time; rather, I mean its coming into existence, as it were, every moment. Just as you could say that this building is being held in its present position every moment through the coordination of certain forces, in the same way, our ego is being held up by certain forces every moment. This continual coming into existence is actually the only way we can speak of the "birth" of the ego. All we can really say is that if certain conditions prevail, then there will be an ego. These conditions

are the cause of the ego; they are its origin, if we may use that word. And when these conditions do not prevail, or when they undergo a change, then the ego will disappear; that is what I mean by the death of the ego.

The Buddhists also speak of the birth and death of the ego in these terms. When Buddha first attained to Nirvāṇa under the bodhi tree, a great peace came upon his soul and all the mysteries of existence opened to him. There unfolded before him what he called the causal chain—sometimes called 'dependent origination'—that is to say, if certain conditions are present, then certain other conditions will follow. He did not say that these conditions were actually there. He was a very rational person and very careful about his terms when speaking of his own fundamental doctrines. He said, if such were the causes, then such would be the effects. If certain conditions prevail, there will be this ego; if these conditions don't prevail, there will not be any ego. That is all there is to it.

Well, it so happens that those conditions seem to be always prevailing. As far as our own personal experience goes and as far back as we can remember in our past we find these conditions, and this gives us a sense that they are everlasting. Let me assure you they are not. Am I assuring you, or doing just the opposite? Many of us think that without our ego we would be nothing. To be told that the ego will die one day, that it has no

permanent existence is to be shaken to the very root of all our usual convictions. In our present state of ignorance, everything we do, think of, aspire after—everything exists in relation to our ego and is justified by it. It is because of our 'I' that we struggle, that we live, and that we resist the oncoming of decadence and death. If this 'I' itself is only transient, then it would seem that everything loses meaning; the very foundation of our existence, of our thought structure falls to the ground. And yet, that is exactly what Vedanta says. And not only Vedanta—there is not a single worthwhile system of religion which has not maintained that this ego has no place in the eternal scheme of things.

For the matter of that, it has always been found that our deepest experiences are those in which our ego has subsided and another kind of consciousness has emerged. Take for example your enjoyment of music: you go to the symphony and sit quietly; the maestro is wielding his baton, and you are listening to beautiful music flowing from the orchestra. Your ego has taken a back seat. You are forgetful of your surroundings and your own condition; your whole consciousness is absorbed in the music, and at that time you have the greatest enjoyment of it. I should say you then have the greatest knowledge of it, and because of that knowledge there is this enjoyment. If you were busy in analysing or criticizing the music, there

would not be that deep enjoyment.

Those experiences give us a better sense of our own true Self, which is quite different from the ego. We find that when this ego intrudes itself, it spoils those deeper experiences. That self-forgetfulness, which seems to be the womb out of which everything great in human civilization and culture has come, is somehow assaulted and insulted by the intrusion of the ego. Whenever the ego enters, we come, as it were, to the surface, and the depth is lost. Let us not be afraid, therefore, of trying to understand this ego and eventually killing it, for then we shall be released from bondage to something which is not ourself, although we have been made to think it is.

## 2

In earlier lectures of this series I pointed out to you what Vedantic philosophers say about the origin of man—that is, how man has come to be what he is now. I told you that originally there is absolute Divinity, infinite Divinity. Then there comes, as it were, a sense of self-forgetting and a sense of otherness. Not really so, but as it were. Our philosophers, particularly those who belong to the school of monism, are very emphatic about this “as it were.” They will never allow you to forget it. There is a Sanskrit word *iva*, which means “as

it were," and this word is scattered all over their pages. For instance, they will say *jāta iva*, "born as it were," "existing as it were." They will not say actually existing. If you say, "Why, I know that I exist, that I was born. What is *iva* about it?"—that, of course, comes from an uncritical acceptance of what your mind is giving you. Actually, we have to recognize that back of us there is something contradicting our present state. If we are hurried, there is a calm behind us; if we feel we are limited and helpless, there seems to be back of us something that is unlimited and of infinite strength; if we feel we are ignorant, there is something back of us giving us the assurance that we can know. Back of us there is always a contradiction of our present state, although we do not pay much attention to it. So remember that this sense of self-forgetting came *as it were*. It has been called *avidyā* or *māyā*—ignorance, nescience. Just as a little cloud appears in the sky and seems to cover the sun, in the same way this *māyā* comes and, as it were, hides the face of Brahman, or the Absolute.

Now you know, when we forget something, yet still have some knowledge, that knowledge is just the opposite of what we have forgotten; so when this *māyā* covers, as it were, the face of absolute Divinity, there comes a sense of Divinity with a touch of relativity: the One becomes, as it were, divided into many, and that which had nothing outside it now seems to have

something outside it. We say that is the beginning (if we want to use that word) of creation. Creation, as you well know, consists of two things: the objective reality, which in our present state of existence is mostly dead; and the subjective reality, or the knowers—the individual conscious beings scattered throughout this universe.

Now, in the course of evolution or degradation there came into existence what we call the mind. Mind has been called *antaḥkaraṇa*, that is to say, the inner instrument or organ, because with its help the subject is able to perceive the object. The senses are also of course instruments of perception; in one respect they are subjective, in another they are objective. But although they partake of the nature of both subject and object, they are used by us as instruments; so they have been given a separate status. However, it is the mind we are concerned with here. It is with the mind that we are able to grasp things, understand things. The senses deliver the data they have acquired to the mind in order that it, in turn, can bring these data to us, the knower. It is the mind, then, as well as the senses, that brings us the knowledge of the external world. In our present state it is very important, this mind.

Vedantins have said that the mind has four aspects: first is intelligence; second is mind, specifically so called; third is egoity; and fourth is what they have called *citta*. In the second lecture of

this series, "The Mysterious Ways of the Mind," I explained these four aspects and their functions to you, but let me just briefly remind you about them.

The intelligence, or *buddhi*, is that part of the mind in which knowledge, whether conceptual or perceptual, appears as a finished thing. This finished form of knowledge is not necessarily complete and correct, although the knower is satisfied that it is.

Before the *buddhi* can present this "finished" knowledge to the knower, the process of knowledge has passed through the phase of the mind called *manas* in which there is uncertainty, doubt, and hesitation.

Then there is the part of the mind called *citta*. Sometimes it is said that its function is to seek happiness and avoid unhappiness and sometimes that its function is specifically to remember. In that lecture on the mind and also in the third lecture of this series—"Why We Are What We Are"—I gave a detailed explanation of this particular phase of the mind. I told you that it is there that all the impressions of the past are stored; it is what you call the unconscious. Every single impression of every kind of experience remains there (unless by some means it has been nullified). Therefore it is quite right to say that this part of the mind is functioning as memory.

The *citta* is the storekeeper, and the moment some sensation comes from the outside and

knocks at the door of the mind, this *citta* at once brings out impressions which have been produced by similar if not identical sensations. It sorts these out, doing a great deal of detailed work, and presents the middle phase of the mind, the *manas*, with two or three alternatives. The *manas* works over these alternatives and out of them chooses one, which goes to the highest part of the mind, the intelligence, or *buddhi*. And there the self-conscious being, the knower, casts his light upon it and says, "I am seeing a tree."

In the telling of it I have taken so long a time; the doing of it takes the smallest fraction of a fraction of that time. Because most of us are really dwelling in the accustomed world, very few of us are facing new knowledge, truly speaking, or new decisions. Therefore for most of us this process has become instinctive and works with lightning speed; we are not aware of it. You say, "Why, the moment I open my eyes I see the tree." Nothing of the kind. If we had a powerful psychological camera by which we could see all the processes through which this knowledge has gone, we would see many, many steps and lots of hesitations—and then comes "tree." Do you know what you are actually doing when you think you are having very correct knowledge? There is really so much uncertainty about it that just for the sake of practicality you lump all your cognitions together and give them a name. Rarely, rarely do you have true knowledge.

I understand that when you go to a restaurant in America, the waiter calls out your order to the cook in peculiar terms that have very little to do with the thing you have ordered. Why they use these terms I have not been able to think out; there must be some reason, and somehow it is practical; you do get what you ordered. I sometimes think the mind does the same thing: it calls everything by a wrong name, but it works out. I do not mean that the truth is hit upon—no, but it works out for our practical purposes. The whole thing is slightly mad, isn't it? It is really so; the whole thing is a bit crazy.

### 3

Let us come now to that phase of the mind called the ego. It is found that the ego really does not fulfill any necessary function in the process of knowing. But I sometimes think that if the ego were eliminated, leaving only these three phases of the mind—*citta*, *manas*, and *buddhi*—there would come a revolutionary change in the world of our knowledge—of our perception as well as of our thought. That is the peculiarity of this ego. It does not seem to add anything, and yet it scrambles everything so that we don't see what is there to be seen.

If there is a reality—external or internal—

which somehow impinges upon our being and sets in motion a process by which knowledge is presented in its finished form to the intelligence, it is reasonable to think that this knowledge should be correct and right. There is no reason to think that the reality should somehow become distorted. Things should go on functioning according to their nature: if there is a reality it should function as real and not as unreal, as true and not as false. And yet it is found that because of this interposition of the ego, somewhere the whole thing becomes, as I said, scrambled and distorted, so that we do not have true knowledge of things. That is the fact.

If you say, "How do you know we are not having true knowledge of things? You take for granted that what we perceive or what we think we know is not true knowledge, and then you begin to worry about the interference of the ego and its terrible effect upon the processes of our perception. That is arguing in a circle." I don't think so. The very fact that you have to struggle so hard to find knowledge and truth shows that most of the time you are dwelling in a world of falsehoods. It is a notorious fact, however tragic, that few of us know much. Even in a university you can count on your fingers those who truly know any subject, and even they will say that there are certain areas of their subject that are still obscure and need further research. It was not just humility on the part of Newton when he said he was only gathering

pebbles on the shore of the sea of knowledge. The more you know, the more you find you don't know. Vast areas are dark, unknown. If this be true of even great scholars before whom we bow our heads in reverence, how much more true it is of us, who are virtually ignorant! How, then, can you say that what you know and perceive is correct knowledge? If it were, then why do you have that sense of ignorance? Some of you will say, "We perceive everything correctly. All that is wrong is that we cannot systematize it." That is not the case. Systematization has taken place in your mind, otherwise you would not perceive at all, but there has been wrong systematization somewhere; that is the trouble. And our philosophers have said that that is because of the presence of the ego.

Of course, from the Vedantic standpoint the explanation seems simple: If we admit that our original state was, and even now is, oneness with Divinity, then we must say that our present state is, as it were, a degradation. And if the ego itself is existing because of this degradation, then that ego will do mischief; it will degrade us further. If this ego is presenting a principle which is the opposite of the principle which is our own true Self, then it will work against our own essential nature. That is understandable, and we at once see the justification for getting rid of this ego, for killing it if possible.

Now, I said that the ego does not contribute

anything to the processes of the mind and yet seems to have a terrible effect on those processes. Where does it insinuate itself? Some say that it does not seem able to do so in the lowest part of the mind, the *citta*. Others say yes, the 'I' is there also, but not in the depths of this phase of the mind; rather, where the *citta* meets the middle phase this 'I' begins to come in a little. However, there is general acceptance of the view that in the lowest phase of the mind the ego hasn't much scope.

But in the middle phase of the mind, where there is uncertainty, there the 'I' comes into full play. As I told you, all possibilities have been sorted out in the *citta*, and as the result of those researches, a few alternatives have been presented to the *manas*, which has to choose for itself the one it wants. Now, of course, when the mind has to form a desire and a purpose, when it has to make a choice, the 'I' asserts itself. It asks, for instance, "Am I seeing Mr. Smith or Mr. David?" Some of our philosophers have said the 'I' is most prominent when knowledge is uncertain. They say that in the *buddhi*, or intelligence, where knowledge seems sure, the 'I' is not so prominent; it somehow remains in the background, and the knowledge itself takes the prominent part. Here you do not say, "I see Mr. Smith"; rather, you have the knowledge, "There is Mr. Smith." Well, I believe that is quibbling somewhat. Suppose intelligence presents you with a definite desire to do some-

thing: "I shall have swiss cheese on rye"—that is sure knowledge, and there the 'I' is prominent. It is true, when you have a piece of pure knowledge the 'I' does not have to take a prominent part; but when it is a matter of a decision about doing something, rejecting or accepting something, the 'I' has to be prominent. So if you lump all these kinds of sure knowledge into one category, then you have to say that the 'I' is also present in the *buddhi*. Sometimes it does not have to come to the forefront; at other times it has to have an equal place with the proposition.

So in these two phases of the mind, *manas* and *buddhi*, the 'I' is associated. It does not seem to have one special phase of its own. It seems to say, "I haven't any home." "Then where do you live?" "Why, I am always invited by my friends." He has so arranged things that he doesn't have to have a place of his own. Now, as you know, there are people who invite themselves into your home and create all kinds of trouble. By the time they have departed, although they were just guests, they have upset your home completely. Similarly, when the 'I' becomes associated with *manas* or *buddhi*, it at once brings about a terrible dislocation and disorganization.

When you study this 'I' you never find it standing alone. That is its peculiarity. If the 'I' is the subject, it is always accompanied by a predicate—except, perhaps, during deep sleep.

But as I mentioned in an earlier lecture, some of our psychologists say that even in sleep there is a predicate. For example, when you say, "I slept soundly; I didn't know anything," they will ask how you know that you didn't know anything. If you say it is an inference, these psychologists will tell you it is a memory, not an inference. You have the memory of an experience—the experience that there was no object of perception. They have said: "In deep sleep the object of perception is non-existence." Some of you might say that is hairsplitting. Well, we shall let it go at that. My point here is that if we forget the possible exception of deep sleep, then during the whole day and night whenever there is 'I' there is also a predicate attached to it. Subject and predicate are bound up together. Do I see Mr. Smith or do I see Mr. David? Here the predicate is seeing Smith or David, and when the 'I' decides that it is seeing Mr. Smith, it says, "I am seeing Mr. Smith." The pure 'I am' we never perceive. I am happy, I am unhappy; I am speaking, I am listening; I am lying down, I am sitting up; I wish this, I do not wish that; I feel good, I feel bad. Always after 'I' there is something else.

Now, if we could accomplish the miraculous feat of stopping this proposition half way—if we could say "I am" or just "I," with no predicate attached—then that 'I' would no longer be the ego, it would be the pure Self, the pure self-conscious Being. But the moment your 'I' trails into some

proposition, some action, some adjective, then you are no longer this pure Self, you have become the ego.

Some of you might ask, "Is there an unconscious 'I'?" No, there cannot be an unconscious 'I'. If you have 'I', then you are conscious. That is why I said that in the lowest phase of the mind, where all these unconscious psychological processes take place, the ego has no scope. Only when ideas in at least half-complete form are emerging and reaching towards the middle phase does the 'I' begin to get mixed up with them. An example of this is the experience of coming out of sleep—you are not yet able to grasp the environment around you; you hear sounds, but your mind is interpreting them wrongly; you don't know where you are. In that twilight world — that state where the 'I' is in the sleeping world and yet is also entering the waking world—the ego is just coming into prominence. You find the same thing happening when you are falling asleep and have become, as it were, detached from your waking environment. Things assume a sort of dreamlike quality as you are about to be merged in unconsciousness. There again the 'I' functions in a peculiar, undefined way. Again, we sometimes find that a kind of stirring goes on beneath our conscious mind, and we feel its impact upon us. It is important to notice this here, because when we were speaking about karma, some of you might have wondered if the

karmas that remain stored up in a corner of the unconscious have an effect on our conscious life. As you know, the modern tendency is to say that the unconscious is making us dance to its tune. Vedantins don't believe that; the conscious mind is the mind with which you do things. But we do admit that the unconscious somehow, in a vague way, pushes some of these accumulated, or *sañcita* karmas across the borderline, where they reach the middle state of the mind. There we say that these karmas have some effect, but not a defined effect. Somewhere they are putting their own forces into that twilight state of your mind, but you cannot say they are the governing factors of your conscious life. Well, however that may be, it is in that twilight state between *citta* and *manas* that the 'I' enters.

## 4

But where does this 'I' consciousness come from? Our philosophers say that because consciousness seems to be always related to the 'I', the 'I' is not one thing at all. To say that it is a phase of the mind is to tell only half the truth. Rather, it is made up of two principles: *cit* and *jaḍa*—the conscious principle and the unconscious principle.

The conscious principle comes from the Self; it is the light of the true Self, which we are, which is

perfect, and which is always there, undimmed in spite of all these apparent degradations. It is the light of the Self that shines upon whatever is presented by intelligence. What is presented by the intelligence is the unconscious (that is to say, the nonconscious, the insentient) aspect of our ego, and the two together give us this egoistic sense.

In other words and as I have said again and again, the ego that we perceive ordinarily, does not stand alone; it is always associated with a predicate. If you say, "All right, it is associated with a predicate; nevertheless, as far as the subjective portion is concerned, it is the pure Self. Why, then, is there this degradation?" You see, when this 'I am', or the pure ego, which is a reflection of the pure Self, becomes associated with the predicate, it loses its pristine nature, and the two together become the ego. The mind presents a proposition which belongs to relative, phenomenal existence. That existence is, as I said, *jada* unconscious, insentient; the light of the pure Self—the *cit*—falls upon it, and the ego is, as it were, produced. The ego, therefore, has been called *cit-jada-granthi*, a knot made up of two strands—one, pure consciousness; the other, material phenomena. The two get bound up together, and we then have this egoistic sense, this 'I'.

For example, I say I am sixty years old. Sixty years-old qualifies 'I'; it presents me in reference to my age in this form. I can say I am sixty years

old only because there is that knot. The 'I am' has no age at all. If you say I am being too metaphysical, that there is no such thing as 'I am' separate from age or condition and that I create all kinds of philosophical troubles for myself by being unrealistic, then let me ask you this: If 'I am' is permanently mixed up with a condition, how is it that sometimes those conditions are contradictory? For example, I say I am ill; the next morning I say I am well. If 'I am' is essentially connected with illness, then how can it be also connected with health? If 'I am' and some condition are essentially bound up together, then there could be no change in my condition: there will be just one condition forever. It is because the connection of 'I am' with a condition is only accidental and not real that 'I am' can be connected with all kinds of diverse conditions. So we see that logic supports the proposition that the 'I' is essentially separate from any conditions.

This is of course also supported by our own experience. Although the ego is bound up with all these changing conditions of body and mind and thinks these conditions are its own, there is nonetheless a persistent sense of self-consciousness and identity. I who came so many years ago into this country am now before you talking on this subject. There is a continuity of my being through this ego; therefore, there must be some element in this ego which is really not so transient as it

appears. There must be the pure 'I am'.

But through my foolishness, I who am the pure conscious principle have forgotten what I am, and because of this forgetfulness I am grabbing at any condition that is presented to me and identifying myself with it. Yet, as I have often explained to you, I, the infinite One, cannot altogether lose the sense of my own infinitude; it is still there, submerged somewhere; it will not let me forget that I am the all, I am the One. I cannot let this part of me go; it is my own, my Self. Because of contrary conditions in me I undergo change, apparently. But still I want permanence; thus from moment to moment, moment to moment, I want to hold on to whatever is presented. That is the secret of the ego.

Some of you may ask here, "If the ego is really a compound thing and not a unity, how can it have a persistent sense of unity about it?" The answer is that behind both the subject and the object is the Self. It is that which gives the sense of unity. Through mistake we have, as it were, divided ourselves into two, and now we are trying to make ourselves whole again in our own fantastic way—by enjoying, grabbing, holding on to things, and so on—which is scarcely the right way to go about it. But in spite of this mistake, the sense of unity is not gone; it is still there because this division is only an appearance and not real. Since this background of unity interpenetrates all these apparent divisions and differences, it is only natural that there should

be an appearance of unity between the subject and the object which make up the ego. But this sense of unity is only apparent; it is not real, and because of this unreality, the ego cannot be lasting.

I said earlier that there are certain forces and conditions that make this ego seem to exist and that perpetuate it. What are those forces? The sustaining and perpetuating force is this: As long as you have the sense that you are very limited, that you are not what you want to be and therefore have to get what you want from outside yourself—as long as you have that sense, so long will your 'I', or this ego, become bound up with conditions that are not really of the 'I' but of the body, the mind, and the external world; as long as you have the sense of limitation, that connection will never, never be severed; you will just have to go on like this.

Why do you think that all spiritual disciplines are telling you, in one form or another, to cut off all connection with what is given to the ego through the mind, through the body, through external nature? "I want to live like a king, I want to have beautiful clothes, I want to drive a powerful car, I want to live so many years, I want to have heaps of money and oodles of children." Having analysed the infinite desires of men, our philosophers have found that they can be brought under four simple headings. They have called them *eṣaṇā*—a Sanskrit word which means searching, the object of search. They have said that all our desires are

just variations and combinations of these four seekings: *putraīṣaṇā* (desire for children, posterity), *dāraiṣaṇā* (desire for a mate), *vit-taiṣaṇā* (desire for wealth or possessions), and *lokaiṣaṇā* (desire for name and fame and for going to heaven). They say that these desires follow from our present status, and that everything we search for here is to satisfy those desires in their compound or simple forms. But rarely are we satisfied, even when we have what we want. Parents could have children with whom they are very much pleased, wonderful children; but there is always one thing—a separation comes through death. Either the children die or the parents die.

So this perfect thing is ruined. Sometimes a man has great wealth; but when he leaves this world, he goes out as bare as he came in—everything is taken from him. So you see, these things we desire never satisfy the soul; yet we desire them. And as long as we have those desires, this ego will be there; they are the prime conditions of its existence.

## 5

As I said, all religions try to destroy our sense of dependence on anything external. One way is by teaching that all you are seeking is already within yourself—"Thou art the fulfillment of every-

thing." The soul is eternally fulfilled, immovable, eternally established; that is its nature. Spiritual teachers remind you of this, and you become convinced of it. That is one teaching.

In ancient India there was a king named Janaka. He was of course an autocratic monarch, as kings were in those days. Yet he was a highly illumined person; even great monks used to come to his court to listen to his spiritual discourses. Once there came a very great saint whose name was Śuka. Well, while Janaka was discoursing with Śuka, word was brought to him that his city had caught fire. It is said that after bathing, Śuka had put out his loincloth to dry in the sun, and when he heard about the fire he at once rushed to save it—just two strips of cloth. But the king remained unmoved, and when Śuka returned Janaka said to him: "O sage, if the whole city of Mithila were to burn down, nothing of me would burn."

The soul has to feel this detachment. In this teaching you say, "I have the all. If the whole world were to burn, what difference would it make to me?" Swami Vivekananda once said, "Why should I care if the whole world were to disappear? According to my philosophy, that, you know, would be a very good thing."<sup>1</sup> After all, the world

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1. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* 15th ed. (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, January 1991) p. 185.

is unreal. A world of illusion should disappear and become nothing. You might say that attitude seems awfully cruel. Cruel to whom? Cruel to what? Do you for one moment think there can be anything good or great in your life or in the life of mankind which is not based on truth? However you might be sentimentally affected by its appearance, do you think there is any virtue in anything whose foundation isn't in truth? Most of us, you see, talk about things from a purely sentimental point of view without being assured that there is some truth in them. "Doing good" may be a nice game to while away the time, but if you are really seeking to do good, to have the right kind of feeling, then your words and your actions have to be based on truth. You do not know whether this world is real or unreal, and yet you are shedding jugfuls of tears. You are crying yourself hoarse, "Oh, poor mankind! Poor mankind!" What is poor mankind that you are shedding tears over it? Find that out! I am not saying that mankind does not require sympathy; I am saying that most of us who get excited about it and make the sky loud with our oratory and our howling do not know what we are talking about. I for myself do not have the slightest respect or regard for that kind of sentimentalism. About everything it is the truth you have to find.

What is the truth? The truth is that this world, as you see it, has no reality anywhere. Don't get

excited about it: it just has nothing in it. You have everything already within you. Why are you looking outside? Why do you think your unconscious mind has to store up impressions and sort them out? Why does your conscious mind have to go over the alternatives presented to it? Why does your *buddhi*, or intelligence, have to accept a decision, and why do you have to grab at it and say, "I see, I hear, I want," and get mixed up with the mind? Why do you have to do all this? When you realize that everything you seek is already within you, then you don't do it; the sharp sword of knowledge just cuts through that connection. And when that severance takes place, does it mean you will become hardhearted and cruel? No, you become the tenderest of persons in the true sense of the word.

Why do you think we human beings are cruel? Because we are weak; we are small; we lack the capacity to be kind. We sometimes pretend we are strong, but we have a profound weakness within this crust of strength. But when you become free, you become so fearless, so powerful, so full of worth and truth that you would be tender even to a little ant. You have nothing to fear any more, you have nothing to seek for yourself; you have no fear of death, you have no fear of loss, you have nothing to gain. Therefore your whole being goes to the service of others. You may say here, "Other beings are also in truth free; they don't need any service."

Yes, there is a paradox about it. It is an odd thing: the greater your knowledge in this respect, the more tenderly you feel for others. In that tenderness there is no appearance of sentimentality; there is no outward show in that kindness, no fanfare, but when it is needed it is there. It has been rightly said that the heart of a great soul is as soft as a flower and as hard as a thunderbolt.

Yes, it is a paradox, but it is true. Buddha says there is no soul; yet he will lay down his life even for the sake of a little animal. A man says this world is unreal, yet he cries day and night and gives his whole life in order to bring relief to the people of this world. There is a beautiful explanation of this paradox, but this is not the time for me to go into it. The point here is that the knowledge of truth will not make you hardhearted. The truly strong are never hardhearted; it is the weak who are hard. It is the weak who cannot really feel friendly towards others. The strong can always feel friendly, they have nothing to lose, nothing to fear. They can accept anything. They can smile, they can be tender, they can be understanding. No, there is no possibility, no danger of your being hardhearted with this teaching.

There is also another way of becoming free. This is the teaching that all things are in God and not in His creation. The Lord has said, "Don't try to enjoy My creation—enjoy Me." However beautiful the creation may be, the devotee will always

remind himself that it is the Lord's; we should remember Him and not get lost in His glory. There is a common belief that the Lord has created all things for men to enjoy. What a conceit! It is neither reasonable nor has it any kind of spiritual or religious flavor. No! Saints and sages have all said, "This creation is not for me." Just as you become blinded by looking at the sun, so, in your present condition, you will lose spiritual vision by looking at the glory of God in His creation. So what do you do? The devotee says, "The Lord is the fulfillment of all my desires."

*Tvameva mātā ca pitā tvameva,  
tvameva bandhuśca sakhā tvameva  
Tvameva vidyā draviṇarṇ tvameva,  
tvameva sarvaṁ mama deva deva*<sup>2</sup>

"Thou art my Father; Thou art my Mother, my Friend, and my Relative; Thou art my wealth; Thou art my knowledge; Thou art my all, O God of gods! Thou art the all." If the mind accepts the view that what the ego is seeking is not to be provided by any of these phenomena but is to be found only in God, then also comes the severance of the ego from the predicate. That way also it happens. Or it can happen through a mixture of both methods: a person may follow either as his mood suits him.

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2. *Prapanna Gītā*, 28.

## 6

Now, what happens psychologically to a person who follows one or both of these teachings? You see, true knowledge or perception does not come all at once; there is a long process; only little by little do we come to the realization of this goal. What takes place psychologically is this: First comes acceptance of whatever comes in our life. That is called patience and endurance. Every civilized person cultivates this attitude, whether he is religious or not. Good things come, bad things come, things apparently deserved, things that seem undeserved—all these he accepts with good grace. That is the greatness of man—even when he falls or suffers, his dignity is not assailed. That endurance creates in us a certain equanimity, and therefore the predicates of which I have been speaking are not able to overwhelm the ego, the self. If I am flattered or glorified, I do not lose my head; if I am reviled, then also I do not lose my head. You see, whatever might happen to me, I try to remain the same. If we cultivate that equanimity, we will find that whatever might come in knowledge or in experience will not upset our 'I' too much. Illness, suffering? You will say, "Just as it is the portion of man to enjoy, so also is it his portion to suffer. Why should I get excited?" Old age or dying? "What of it? That is part of this earthly existence. There will come a time when the

body will get feeble and eventually die. Why should I get disturbed about it?"

Out of this philosophical equanimity, this patience and endurance, will come the sense of detachment, which is, of course, a higher state. When you are even partly established in detachment, you will be surprised to find that you actually have a sense of separation from the body. Not merely are you able to accept adverse conditions philosophically, you find they do not touch you any more. It is as though a gulf had opened between the phenomenal part of your being and your inmost being where your sense of 'I' dwells. Physical sufferings no longer reach you with the same intensity; nerves no longer carry that tremendous sensitivity. Thirst, hunger, sense of fatigue, all the things that belong to the body do not reach you with the same poignancy as before. Even the conditions of the mind produced by your contact with the external world, or by your desires for gain or fears of loss—even those conditions are no longer so strong; therefore if something undesirable arises in the mind, it does not overwhelm you. This is how you conquer the mind. Suppose strong feelings and desires arise; you conquer them first by learning patience and endurance, then, by learning detachment. Until the state of detachment is reached, you cannot say that you have conquered the mind. The mind will produce all kinds of stormy feelings. As a matter of fact, it

has been said that the further one proceeds along the path of spirituality, the more powerful become the storms the mind raises. There is a wise Providence in this universe: to the small, everything that is given is small; to the great, everything is great. But the great also acquire greater detachment. As the bars of a cage separate you from a ferocious animal just three feet away, in the same way you actually feel separated from the storms that rise in your mind. Within you is another mind, serene. It is as though you could see heavy rain falling half a mile away, while all about you it is sunny.

Here I must again remind you that with this sense of detachment the sense of the ego changes. As I told you, the ego is a compound thing—part of it is a reflection of the true Self, and part of it is accidental, being nothing but a phenomenon of our body and mind; when the two come together the reflection loses its natural character, and we do not recognize it as such. Now, when the state of detachment comes and these predicates, these oncoming conditions, physical and mental, do not overwhelm us as they did before, then the conscious part of the ego, which is the reflection of our own spiritual Self, becomes more evident, and we begin to feel more and more like the Spirit. Therefore some who have reached a little of that condition, say that they have known themselves as the Spirit. That statement has some validity;

such exalted states are in the right direction, but the full perception of oneself as pure Spirit is a tremendous experience. Further and further detachment must come.

In detachment, as you all know, two things are involved: First, desires still exist, therefore all kinds of conditions come to the mind; second, when they come we remain partly detached from them. We have done the mischief, punishment has come, and we are receiving it with good grace; that is the situation. But in a higher state no punishment comes—that is to say, the mind no longer wants anything. Detachment has now become desirelessness, and a desireless mind does not create any kind of condition; its natural tendency is to remain in a state of serenity. Does a person with such a mind remain, then, always in meditation? No. But it has been found that the amount of attention that is required by one's duties in this world is very little compared with the vastness of the mind. One would do one's duties, but one would use only a very small amount of one's mind to perceive what has to be perceived in the external world and to do what has to be done. The rest of the mind becomes serene, no desires arise in it; it is not affected by anything coming from the outside, nor is there a propulsion outward. So there is a great serenity, and that is the higher state of detachment. The first exalted perception of the conscious part of your ego in the early stages of

detachment becomes a hundred times more intense and real in this higher state.

There will be periods in which you are completely oblivious of the objective world. Even in the path of monism you will become aware of the existence of a wonderful Being within yourself—the Soul of your soul, God. You will become aware of Him, and He will powerfully draw your own consciousness into Himself; you will feel like closing your eyes and diving deep there in meditativeness. It is then that all the conditions of the ego, being merged in the consciousness of God, gradually disappear. A time comes when the ego no longer feels it is a separate entity, no longer does it think it is dwelling in the body, no longer is it connected with any part of the mind—not even with the best part of the mind. Your 'I' has become at one with this other conscious being, God, and you then realize your own true Self—the Self you seemed to have lost.

Actually, your true Self was never lost. As you realize higher and higher states of your ego, there is a simultaneous sense that these states are nothing new, that you have always known them. It is as though you had regained a lost memory, as though you had come to a place where you had lived many, many years before and had somehow forgotten. Now you remember it; it is your very own. So when the highest state is reached, you do not feel that you are gaining something you did

not have before; rather, you feel you have found what was always there, always yours. One might say that this realization is the death of the ego. Body-sense no longer exists; mind has disappeared; and the conscious part of the ego has become the pure Self. There is no ego; there is just this illimitable Being, God, who cannot be defined because He is beyond all qualifications and attributes. He is just there.

Some people return from that state, and then again this ego appears. But oddly enough, the ego of such people is no longer identical with their own spiritual consciousness; it appears to them as something different from their spiritual Self. Just as our thoughts are not ourselves, although they seem very close to us, in this state even the ego appears as something objective. That is the difference between the state before the highest illumination and the state after. It was because of this that Sri Ramakrishna sometimes used to say, "You know, I search for the ego in me and I cannot find it."

A friend of mine once told me an experience of his. He had been undergoing intense spiritual practices and was in a very nice condition. One day while walking along a street he suddenly felt the ego had, as it were, separated itself, but was still in his own person. He began to chase this ego in order to throw it out of himself. It moved all over his being, from here to there with lightning speed, and

just as he was about to cast it out, it suddenly became blended with his being again. He couldn't throw it out. Nevertheless, that was a very illuminating experience and one which accords with our whole system of Vedantic thought. It not only gave him the sense that the ego was something different from himself; it also gave him a sense of what he really was—not the ego, but the Self.

My friends, when you have succeeded in gaining the right perspective—when you understand how we have come to be what we apparently are, when you know how we can get out of this condition and regain our true status; when you are convinced that even in this degradation we are still our own pure Self and that all that is required is just to turn our face in the right direction and proceed on—when you have grasped this truth, you will be on the way to the conquest of the ego. Very soon you will become aware of something within yourself which you can never find outside—the sense of objectivity itself will vitiate it. That which you perceive as so wonderful in the outside is wonderful only because it is your very own Self. When you become convinced of that, you give up this mad rush after the things of this life, of the world. It seems like childishness; it is beneath the dignity and self-respect of man. Once you have grasped this truth, once you have brought about a little of the severance between the 'I am' and the predicate, the rest will come easily. It is as though

you had made a breach in a tremendous dam; it is just a question of time before the waters themselves will sweep the whole dam away. And so it happens. At first, spiritual achievement seems difficult. When you have made a little progress, it seems to be the easiest of all things.

## THE UNCONSCIOUS AND THE SUPERCONSCIOUS

### 1

In speaking of the ego in the previous lecture I said that it is called *cit-jāḍa-gran̥thi*, that is to say, a knot made up of consciousness and matter—a composite thing. Consciousness, which is the same as self-consciousness, is derived from the Spirit itself, which is all-consciousness and which man truly is. The consciousness, or self-consciousness, that we find in the ego is the reflection of the Spirit on the mind, which is usually considered nonconscious or material. In other words, when the light of the Spirit is reflected on a certain part of the mind, say the part we call intelligence

or *buddhi*, the two together produce the sense of egoism.

I have gone into this process in detail in other talks and so I shall not do so here, but no doubt certain questions have arisen. First of all, you could easily ask, "Why is it that when the light of consciousness is reflected on the mind, it chooses to be reflected only on certain aspects of the mind? Why is it that consciousness cannot illuminate the whole mind?" When I say "whole mind," I should remind you that, according to Vedanta, the mind has four aspects: there is the *buddhi*, or intelligence, in which a percept or a concept takes full form; then there is the *ahamkāra*, or sense of egoism; third, there is the *manas*, or that part of the mind in which full judgment or full knowledge has not been arrived at; and, fourth, there is the aspect of the mind called *citta*, which is the unconscious. Now, why is it that all these four aspects of the mind do not become illuminated by consciousness? It seems that only three of them do so. The ego is of course illuminated; by our very definition of the ego, and by our own experience we find that one part of egoism is self-consciousness; so the light of consciousness is there. As for intelligence, or *buddhi*, when anything appears in intelligence it is lighted up by consciousness; so that, too, becomes illuminated. The other part of the mind where judgment has not taken full shape and different alternatives are presented—as when

you wonder, "Is that a mango tree or a cherry tree?"—there, also, consciousness is present; otherwise you would not even raise the question. But the fourth part of the mind, the *citta*, or, if you want to say so, the basic or lowest part of the mind, seems to remain completely dark. No ray of consciousness seems to penetrate it; so it can easily be considered unconscious.

What prevents consciousness from illuminating that part of the mind? You might say it is only one-fourth of the whole mind; yet I must remind you that a great many things take place there. I have told you that in the *buddhi* there is a full judgment as regards perception or ideas, but I should also tell you that even in this unconscious part of the mind there are sometimes full judgments. It is a well-known fact that our unconscious mind seems to have an existence of its own and to be governed by laws of its own. In fact, the whole unconscious part of the mind seems to enjoy a sort of autonomy. Not only are scraps of thought and perceptions scattered there; full-fledged ideas are also there. Out of these ideas, habits and tendencies are formed; preferences, likes and dislikes—all these arise as fully formed judgments in our conscious mind; there is no uncertainty about them. All those ideas have been lying buried in the unconscious, in the lower part of the mind, and certainly it is a matter for inquiry that consciousness does not penetrate there. We

all know that in order to discover what is buried in the unconscious we have to go to doctors. And the doctors themselves are not able to peep into our unconsciousness by mechanical means; they have to bring back certain things to our memory by a laborious process, and a great deal of what they find is through guesswork and interpretation. There is no direct perception of the unconscious. Why do you think that is so?

Then another question arises in connection with the mind: why is the mind so limited in its perceptions? It would not do to reply that since sense perceptions are all the mind has to work with and since the senses are limited, they naturally limit the mind. Yes, it is true the senses are limited. For instance, if I say I see a mango tree, it is supposed that I am seeing it within the scope of my own vision. If I say I am seeing a mango tree full of blossoms two thousand miles off, you will just laugh at me. Similarly, memory is limited: if I should say, "I remember that five lives ago I had a conversation with such and such a person in such and such a place," you would laugh at me again. We naturally take for granted that the mind is limited in its functions and scope; therefore we think questions of why the mind is so limited should not even be raised. But in my opinion, such questions have relevance.

First of all, perception through any sense is such a complicated process that to say "We can

perceive only so far and no farther" is rather to beg the question. It is as though a person suffering from bad eyesight takes for granted that what he can see is the normal limit of vision and that he cannot expect to see any farther. Only if he becomes aware that many other people see farther than he does will he realize that he is abnormally near-sighted. Then he can go to a doctor and have his vision corrected. Now, of course, those who think that mind and senses are naturally limited in their functions happen to be in the majority. Nevertheless, that's an assumption of the ignorant; we should not take it for granted. Today, for example, I think it is an almost accepted fact that the mind has supersensory powers. The mind can, for instance, become aware of things happening at great distances without depending on the senses. True, the research that has been made in this respect and the evidences that have been so far collected are rather rudimentary. Yet there have been people who have shown extraordinary gifts, seeing or hearing things that would seem beyond the power of a normal person. Of course, those are exceptional cases, I admit.

Another thing in this connection may be mentioned. In abnormal cases, cases of mental derangement, it has sometimes been found that the mind has evinced the existence of knowledge buried within itself which the individual could never have acquired during the course of this

lifetime. Again, things are found buried in the mind that no individual could ever experience. Such things can be explained only by assuming that the mind of the whole human race is involved within this individual mind; it is buried there, and under these unusual circumstances it has been provoked, churned up. Some psychologists have almost come to the conclusion that mental derangement—neurosis or psychosis—is a sign of spiritual sickness; they think that something deeper is trying to come out and because it is not able to, this aberration develops. In fact, some people think that psychosis is a superior state of the mind. Well, I believe that is going a little too far. I am afraid that when such a conclusion is arrived at, one very pertinent fact of human nature and human life is forgotten: it doesn't matter what you involuntarily manifest; your status should be judged by what you manifest consciously, deliberately, and with full control. What you manifest when you are semiconscious or dreaming or have a nervous disorder or some such affliction is not what you should be judged by.

Yet it is a fact that there are many things in the unconscious, and these two questions that I have raised—why is only a part of the mind illuminated by consciousness, and why is the mind so limited in its function and scope?—certainly require to be answered. I shall try here to discuss certain answers our philosophers have given.

First let me point out that Indian philosophers are also psychologists, and our psychologists are also philosophers. You see, we rarely deal with psychology in itself; we think it can never stand alone. Western psychologists resist associating psychology in any way with metaphysics, because they think metaphysics is speculative; whereas they like to think their psychological study is scientific, that it is based on data actually observed and experimented upon. Indian psychologists, on the other hand, have always considered mind to be *antahkaraṇa*—that is to say, an instrument without any purpose in itself. With the help of this instrument, or *karaṇa*—some of which is internal, some external—the soul, or self, is trying to accomplish something. So if you want to study the mind, you will have to do so in relation to the self—the doer, or the agent—who wields it.

Further, we have found that our sense of the agent, which in our ordinary state is the ego, itself varies. If my body is ill, then my ego is ill; if the body is tired, the ego is tired. Of course I don't use that clumsy language: I say, "Oh, I feel so tired." And if I have to give a lecture when I am tired, you will notice that I fumble with my words and that my ideas are not fluid. Probably you will charitably say, "He must be tired today!" But when you recognize me as tired, actually speaking, you are judging the ego. Or at another time you might say, "He was full of vim and vigor this morning!" Well,

I was nothing of the kind. You see, the body and mind may have had more vigor, and the ego changed accordingly. In other words, according to the changes in the body and mind our egoistic consciousness seems to contract or to expand; it is not a fixed thing. You might say, if you think of yourself in terms of the ego, that you are not one ego at all, that there are layers and layers of selves within you. I can quite well imagine a condition in which this ego would appear to be so expanded that you could say, "I have cosmic consciousness, I am as large as the whole universe. I feel one with everything." As a matter of fact, you do say that in a very high state of spiritual development.

Now, it is natural for us to ask what makes these variations—these contractions and expansions. The explanation of this involves a good deal of philosophy and brings us at once to a discussion of one of our questions. Why is it that our whole mind is not always illuminated—both in its depth and in its heights? It is reasonable to think that our consciousness should be able to illuminate the mind in its greatest depth, where it perhaps contains everything of our past—the past not only of the whole race but of the whole creation. Similarly, it should be able to illuminate the mind in its highest expansion, where it is identical with the cosmic mind; there is no reason why our consciousness should not do that. Our psychologists or philosophers say that within the

individual there is indeed that cosmic mind, which is in no way distinguishable from the mind of God, or from Cosmic Intelligence. Then, what makes the distinction? Not only do we feel that our mind is distinct from the mind of God, we also find that it is distinct from other individual minds; sometimes we even find that our own mind is inferior to what it used to be or to what it could be. What makes the difference?

The simple explanation is this: there is a prevalence of *tamas*. Of course, I am referring here to one of the three *guṇas* or qualities—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Tamas* means darkness. When your mind is covered by *tamas*, then the light of consciousness cannot play upon it. It is as though you had taken a big brush and some dark grey paint and covered over a very large and wonderful painting, obscuring most of it. That obscurity is *tamas*.

Our philosophers say that everything is made up of these three *guṇas*, and in any given case one of them may be predominant. *Sattva* has the quality of illuminating everything like a light. When a light is thrown on an object steeped in darkness, that object is at once made manifest; *rajas* is the *guṇa* which represents a twilight condition in which you do not see anything very clearly and in which there is continual storm and turbulence; and *tamas*, as I said, means darkness. Why is it that the average man is so ignorant, why

is it that the light of consciousness seems so limited in him? If not much of his mind is illuminated, our philosophers will tell you that *tamas* is very predominant; it has covered a good part of the depth of that mind, as well as its surface. That is why light does not reach much of it. There is light, but a darkness, as it were, covers it. It is as though you had lighted a lamp and then over its transparent globe put a dark hood so that the light cannot shine out. This is the position our philosophers have taken.

They have said, in fact, that there is no such thing as an individual mind; there is only one mind, and that mind is the infinite mind, the divine mind. We may say that our minds are fragments of this infinite mind, but this idea of fragmentation is arbitrary; our minds need not be fragments. Yes, for practical purposes you might say, "My mind is very limited; I do not understand much, I do not know much; if my mind were unlimited my knowledge also would have been unlimited." That argument seems to be valid. But on the other hand, to say that your mind is limited is going against the evidence. You can never come to the end of your mind. It is as though a man had just inherited a huge ranch—say four million acres in Texas. He has no idea of the extent and nature of his land; he has not yet investigated it, but he takes for granted that it is limited and does not contain this or that. We are in the same position;

we have not investigated the extent of our own mind, and therefore we say it is very small. Both ideas are true: from one standpoint we have to admit that our knowledge is limited; from another standpoint there is no reason to think that our mind and, therefore, the powers of our mind are limited. So our philosophers say that since the individual mind is really the same as the cosmic mind, since there is only one mind, each person may as well lay claim to the whole of it. Then how is it that our knowledge is limited? They say that although we have an illumined mind, the same mind as the mind of God, we have for some reason put a layer of darkness over some of it; we have kept only a certain portion illuminated.

## 2

In the lecture "The Birth and Death of the Ego" I brought forward the fact that in the body and mind all kinds of highly intricate things are taking place which do not require our ego. For instance, sensations are reaching us and are being interpreted as perceptions without waiting for our permission or initiative. I think it is right to think that the ego doesn't contribute anything at all to what is taking place within us. Just as the phenomena of weather take place without any help from some small geographical area, such as the county of San

Francisco, in the same way, cosmic forces are working within us without our help. We of course say, "This is mine; I am doing this; this is taking place in me." But actually, what is happening is that cosmic phenomena are coming up, going down, coming up, going down. This ego is just a superimposition; it contributes nothing. Yet its presence somehow seems to distort everything that is taking place through the cosmic intelligence and will. You see the implication of it? If something is being done by the divine will, it should be perfect, should it not? God cannot make a mistake; His knowledge is unlimited, His power unlimited. And yet many things that happen to us seem to be full of imperfection and evil—wrong, as a matter of fact. Those who have considered themselves to be Sons of God, having come directly as messengers of God, even they have continually impressed upon us that many of our thoughts, many of our desires, many things we do are wrong, that we should reform our ways, we should turn our face towards God. So even from the divine standpoint it would seem that much that takes place within us is wrong. And yet, we can explain all the things that are taking place in all individuals, living or nonliving, from the cosmic standpoint; we don't have to include this ego in it at all.

There is a sort of paradox, even a contradiction, here: everything is being done by God; this isolation from which we individuals

suffer has no real place in the cosmic functioning, materially or mentally; yet we have the sense that the things taking place in our body and mind are specifically our own. Although we realize that these things are not unconnected with what is taking place in other individuals, still we feel that each person is enjoying a sort of autonomy. This contradiction is explained by the ego: the ego does not contribute anything, and yet it has the power of distorting everything. Some of you might say that is its contribution.

Yes, in a sense it is, and yet it is not a real contribution, because the forces at work do not proceed from the ego. For instance, if I should say, "I'm going to speak on such and such a subject this evening"—what a foolish statement that would be! How do I know I shall speak on that subject? My thoughts rise from invisible sources; from some dark deeps they rise into my consciousness. What pushes them out of the unconscious? What gives them form? What makes them proceed consecutively into my conscious mind? What transfers them into articulate speech, and how is the speech produced? If I tell you that I shall speak on such and such a subject and say such and such a thing, it would seem that this 'I', this ego, was going to be responsible for all the actions that will take place in my mind and body, and yet, truth to tell, this ego has very little to do with it. How these thoughts rise from within and become converted

into speech, this ego doesn't even know. I do not know how speech is produced, and if something should happen to my head, I shall just open my mouth and stand mute. I would not know how to go about producing speech. If the thoughts don't come, I shall not be able to dig them out. Yet I say that I am thinking, that I am telling you all these things. You see the preposterous situation? Actually, all this thinking and speaking is proceeding from another source, someone else is doing it.

You have read the teachings of nonattachment in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in which it is maintained that everything really is being done by Him who is seated in the center of our being. That is called the practice of *karma yoga*; it is putting the ego in its right place; it is the recognition that all experience and action proceed from a far deeper source than the 'I'. In every experience the 'I' is in the middle state; it cannot attach itself to the gross objects of experience, and when the experience becomes subtle, goes deeper, then, also, this 'I' cannot get hold of it. Say you hear a beautiful song; as long as you are hearing it, the 'I' is there. It is saying, "Oh, I am enjoying this music!" When the music has stopped the 'I' can no longer connect itself to it, but the music is not lost. It has sunk deeper and deeper below the level of consciousness.

In one of the Upaniṣads the inner self has been called the "Eater of Honey." Why eater of honey?

Because the essence of all experiences goes deep, deep down into the very center of our<sup>d</sup> being. If you are a theist, you would say that that center is God, the Soul of our soul.

*Īśvaraḥ sarvabhūtānām hr̥ddeśe'rjuna tiṣṭhati  
bhrāmayan sarvabhūtāni yantrārūḍhāni māyayā<sup>1</sup>*

"The Lord is seated in the heart of all beings, O Arjuna," and being seated there, "He is making them move as if mounted on a machine." Body and mind are moving because He is whirling this machine. He has been called the *antaryāmin*, the inner ruler. All theistic religions have admitted that God is inside of us as well as outside. He ensouls the soul. If you are a monist you would say, "I am That"; you would not make a distinction between the soul and the Soul of the soul. Well, whatever that might be, it is from there that powers come; it is from there that all motives arise. And when experiences seem to enter into the subtle stage and disappear, it is there that they go. He who sits there enjoys the essence of all those experiences; He enjoys the fruit of His doing. You see, when you recognize that fact, then you withdraw your 'I'. You say, "I am not doing anything. Thy will, not my will, O Lord! Thou art the doer of everything. I am only a tool in Your hand; You are the wielder of that tool." You may

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1. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, 18:61.

say that that is not a very healthy attitude. Well, healthy or unhealthy, the fact is that when you have learned to withdraw your ego, you at once perceive that everything proceeds from a deep source; you actually see it rising from great depths. He is speaking; this is His body; He is thinking; this is His mind. He is the doer; everything is He.

Then what is the position of this 'I', this ego? The ego just stands as a witness, a spectator. That's all. It hasn't any place of its own; it doesn't contribute anything, and oddly enough—or beautifully enough—when such a state comes to a person, whatever he does is perfect. If he perceives, his perception will be pure; if he acts, his action will be perfect and pure; his feeling will be pure. You will probably say, "Well, he has become one with God; so God works through him." Yes, you can speak about that state in various ways, but actually, when this ego becomes separated, you at once find that your mind has assumed its right dimension: you feel it is not separate from other minds, and you see profound depths in it. That is a matter of experience.

What has happened? As long as the ego arrogated to itself all the credit, it cast, as it were, a pall of darkness upon the mind; therefore only a very limited part of the mind became illuminated, and that not very clearly. It is a notorious fact that we often make mistakes even when we think we are

sure about what we are thinking or seeing. It is all due to the imposition of this ego. When the ego is removed, that mistake, that darkness is also removed, and the light of consciousness becomes, as it were, expanded. From this you can understand how the idea of the unconscious and the superconscious arises. Actually, if this ego is not there, everything is superconscious—there is no longer any such thing as the unconscious in the ordinary sense.

Earlier I said that we ordinarily do not see the real depth of the mind; nor do we see its true expansion. Further, I said that what should function perfectly (because it is really the functioning of the cosmic mind, the divine mind) appears to be mostly wrong. We perceive things wrongly; we understand things wrongly; we act and react wrongly. These conditions—lack of illumination on the mind's surface, lack of illumination in its depth, and distortion—all these conditions are there because of the interference of the ego.

### 3

Now, let us consider. I have already said that there are, as it were, many different kinds of ego; you might almost say you have millions of egos. Every moment there is a different one. For instance, in the morning you may be very buoyant

and self-confident; in the afternoon you are morose, you have wilted away. Probably all that has happened is that you have tired yourself out; you make a habit of pulling yourself down. Perhaps by evening your spirits have come up and you feel self-confident again. In other words, your ego is changing from moment to moment. You can classify all these changes under three headings. You could classify them in various other ways also, but I think this is the best way and one which Indian philosophers have taken advantage of. I have already referred to this principle of classification: everything falls under the three *guṇas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. To repeat, *sattva* stands for illumination, purity, unselfishness, nonegoity, aspiration towards the highest reality; *tamas*, which is the opposite of *sattva*, is a state of torpidity, of darkness, laziness, indolence, unwillingness to move or to change. Between *sattva* and *tamas* is *rajas*, which is a state of tremendous activity. Like everything tremendously active, it stirs up a lot of noise and dust, and this creates a great deal of ambition and desire and fight. It is a turbulent state, full of likes and dislikes and all sorts of opposing forces. It is not considered a happy state for true knowledge, but it is superior to the worst state—the state of torpidity, which is virtual death. Of course, these three *guṇas* are always in combination; you never find one standing in isolation from the others. As you can well

imagine, there are infinite combinations possible, but for our purpose, let us say there are just three combinations, in each of which one or another quality is predominant.

Now, consider an ego that is overcome by *tamas*, darkness. Is there such an ego? Yes, when you sleep that kind of thing happens to you. It is as though you had drawn a blanket of darkness over your whole being; there is no detailed perception, nothing is achieved. So even if you are not overcome by *tamas* when you are awake, when you sleep you lapse into this state. Similarly, a fainting fit or a disease is a sign of *tamas*. But we need not go into such things; we are concerned here with the waking state. When a person has a predominance of *tamas*, you find he has no enthusiasm and ordinarily his knowledge is very limited. It is true that one sometimes comes across an indolent person with a very fine brain. As I said, all combinations are possible. We sometimes explain such a person by saying that his achievements were made in his past incarnations. In this life he has a predominance of *tamas*, and so he doesn't want to do anything; yet he cannot get rid of the knowledge and aptitudes he acquired in his past life, and he appears very sharp; without any effort he seems to know many things, but he makes no further progress; one finds he is standing still.

Let us take an ordinary person, one who has no special gifts and is also indolent. He cannot

learn much; his brain is not well developed. He can never do anything rightly; he is full of mistakes, and he always finds life difficult. His ego is just overcome by *tamas*, and therefore a great deal of darkness is there. What about the unconscious and superconscious of such a person? You have to say that he has too much of the unconscious in him; even in his conscious mind instincts and impulses play a great part; he is very often governed by them. That is the trouble: he cannot deliberately do things; he cannot exercise his own will power.

However, most of the people in civilized countries are not of that type. They belong rather to the middle group where you find *tamas* and *rajas* combined, with *rajas* predominant. There is much desire and activity in this group. But it has been found that this activity is concerned only with the superficial part of the mind and is awfully limited. Why is it limited? If I am an ambitious man with many desires, in regard to what shall I be ambitious? In regard to what shall I have these many desires? Certainly not in regard to God, because then you would not call it ambition, you would call it aspiration; moreover, there would not be many objects of desire, there would be just one object. But when a person has many desires, likes, and dislikes, you will find the objects of his desire and aversion relate to this gross world, the world of the senses. Now, as you can well imagine,

grossness is a limitation: the more gross a thing is, the more concrete and rigid it is; therefore, the more limited it is. So when our mind is involved in *rajas* and, consequently, with things of a concrete and gross nature, it is held within rigid limitations, and consciousness cannot flow beyond them.

Rather, I should speak of it this way, because it will be more correct: I have kept one circle of my mind lighted up and within that circle I have spotlighted certain specific things in which I am interested—I either like them or dislike them. I throw my light on those things and they are illuminated. Over the rest of the mind I have as it were drawn a blanket of *tamas*, and therefore it is as good as nonexistent—or, if you want to say so, it is unconscious. If you admit that in the unconscious there are not only impressions of our own past experiences but also of the past experiences of our ancestors, of our race, of our species, or, you might say, of the whole history of the universe in which we have been existing—if you admit that, then you could say that I have drawn a blanket of darkness over everything except what I am interested in and have thereby created a vast area of darkness or unconsciousness. That is how the unconscious mind comes. Whether you think of the mind in its expansion or in its depths, all these experiences are buried deep there.

Now, let us suppose you are rising to the status of *sattva*; that is to say, your worldly

instincts are becoming very much subjugated. What takes place within you?

Let me say here first that a person cannot rise to the status of *sattva* if he has a predominance, or a very large degree, of *tamas* within him. You see, *tamas* is the principle of inertia. It is as though your car had a powerful engine; the wheels can roll with tremendous speed—that would be *rajas*. But for proper functioning of that car, you have gadgets by which you can slow it down. That is also important, isn't it? So this *tamas* functions as a brake. Thus the Lord who has created us put sleep in our daily life. Or, if we have created ourselves, we have in our higher wisdom (which is somehow buried now) given sleep to ourselves. Otherwise, we would just burn ourselves out. If we were active all twenty-four hours of the day, *rajas* would become so predominant that we would be just shaken to pieces. So *tamas* acts as a brake and gives us a sort of balance.

Now, *sattva* also has the quality of braking *rajas*; but it does so in another way. When *tamas* acts as a brake to our tremendous activity, it does not change the nature of our activity, it just stops it; it just suddenly withdraws the power. But when *sattva* acts as a brake on *rajas* it does so by changing the contents of all our turbulent desires and activities. Some of these it eliminates; to others it gives another character. So you see, if you have a predominance of *tamas*, then *sattva* cannot

work. *Tamas* wants to stop *rajas* without changing it; *sattva* tries to stop *rajas* by changing it. Since these are two different functions, the two cannot work together.

Therefore it has been said that if you have too much laziness within you, you cannot have a predominance of *sattva*, you cannot become spiritual. Some people say, "Yes, I want to repeat the name of the Lord all the time, but I just forget. What can I do? Yes, I want to meditate, but you see, I get so tired out; I have to sleep long. There is no time to meditate." Well, here is a conflict between *sattva* and *tamas*, and if *tamas* prevails, then *sattva* cannot do very much for you. *Sattva* it is that will make you remember God and repeat His name. *Sattva* it is that will bring you out of sleep to sit in meditation. But if *tamas* has taken hold of you, then it is *tamas* that will function. So you have to overcome *tamas* to a great extent; then *sattva* works on your *rajas* and changes it gradually.

However, in practice, it has been found that *rajas* has to learn its lesson first. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Haven't you noticed the policemen in Calcutta? If there is a riot or some quarrel in the streets, a policeman may be within close range, but he doesn't come at once; he waits. When the two parties have fought a little and exhausted themselves, then he comes—'Just separate, just separate! What are you doing! Don't quarrel!' " He used to say that our higher nature doesn't function when our

lower nature is predominant. *Rajas* has to work itself out; it has to exhaust itself a little, then this higher *guna* can intervene.

How does it exhaust itself? Well, you run after worldly things, then you get tired out. You don't want any more of those things. There comes a little exhaustion of *rajas*, and then *sattva* comes and helps, and you find that this blanket of darkness, has been removed to a great extent. There are not too many desires; mind has become serene and expansive. You feel a sense of unity with others. In fact, the first expression of *sattva* is feeling for others, sympathy for others, an unselfishness, a desire to serve others, a desire to serve whatever furthers the higher ideals of man. That is why in every religion it has been said that no one can gain in spirituality without charity, for in being charitable to others you become free from the limitations of your own ego. And then the higher self begins to express itself.

Another thing happens. Not only do you find that light has spread further and further, you also become aware of deeper and wider movements of the mind. You feel that the barriers between yourself and others have broken down. Actually you feel it. Sometimes you do not know whether you belong to this body or that body, to all bodies, or to none. You see, your consciousness becomes so free that you actually feel this deep movement. And that is the beginning of superconsciousness.

Yes, when this *sattva* has become predominant, then the light of the Spirit is spread farther and wider on the expanse of the mind, and you begin to discover that your mind is not so small, after all. It seems larger and yet larger, and from time to time the divine impulse seems to communicate itself to your mind. You begin to feel that your mind is becoming at one with the divine mind. You actually feel all those things. That is the superconscious state.

What happens to the unconscious part of the mind? We began with the idea that there is one part of the mind where the light of consciousness never goes. But in this state you can see deep, deep down. It is like looking into a deep pool of clear, transparent water: deep down you can see fish moving; you can see even the sand at the bottom. Similarly, you can see everything going on in the mind; deep in the mind you can see the movements that are taking place. What kind of movements are they? You can see the subtle movements, the desires that have remained stored up there. You see, this kind of experience presupposes that your mind has become comparatively purified. It is no longer running after worldly things; yet utter purification has not been reached. So in that state you can see desires rising from time to time from deep down in your mind. I like to illustrate it in this way: it is as if you were standing on the top of a range of hills from which a highway extends for

miles and miles, and far off you can see a car or a person coming. In the same way, you find a desire or a thought rising from a great depth. If you find that it is unspiritual, you can kill it then and there. Just as with a slight pressure of your finger you can kill the sprout of a potentially gigantic tree, so with a slight inclination of will you can kill those subtle desires. Then the whole mind begins to work as one. That which was unilluminated, that which you ordinarily call the conscious mind, and that which I have described as the superconscious mind—these three are, as it were, becoming one, they are blending together.

What happens to those who have attained that state? When they experience things, do they not remember them? Do not impressions remain in what is ordinarily called the unconscious? Yes, impressions remain. But it is the substance, the inner essence of things, that impresses such people more than the form. There is a saying, "Wherever he looks, there he finds Sri Krishna shining"; whichever way you look, there you find the divine light shining through every form. And when you see that light, the form just pales to insignificance; it is the divine content, the divine essence that is the important thing. You see, there is an experience which is of the sameness of being rather than of all these varieties which we ordinarily perceive here. So even the impressions which usually remain stored up in the

unconscious become the consciousness of God. Therefore that unification of mind takes place—the unconscious becomes converted into the superconscious.

You may ask, "What happens to the impressions that were stored up in the state of ignorance?" We have been told many times that all these impressions become burnt out. But the explanation that should be given here is this: They become "burnt out" because they become meaningless when they are seen in the light of a greater wisdom. They no longer have the same effect upon us. Suppose as a child I had peopled a grove of trees with all kinds of supernatural beings and had been afraid to go there in the dark; then suppose that twenty years later, when I have become a full-fledged young man, I look at these same trees. I remember my childhood fear, but do you think I will still be afraid of the ghosts and spirits? No. You see, my higher wisdom has changed my memories and their effect. In the same way, even if I have gathered many false impressions in the days of my ignorance, they all become changed in the light of wisdom. Even ancestral memories, or memories of the human race, lose meaning. He who has seen God existing in everything sees everything as the very being of the eternal Self. All these memories belong to history and to evolution, they belong to the many changes through which we have passed; but when the very idea of time is repudiated, then

the idea of change, the idea of history, is also repudiated. Everything is now known in terms of the eternal Being. So, you see, these old impressions no longer have any hold upon you.

Nowadays psychologists tell Western people that if they want to go deep into religion, it is better to follow Christian mysticism. Why? Because that is in their tradition. This is a nonsensical idea. That which is concerned with the eternal does not belong to this race or to that race. When you come to culture, which is mental, then such ideas are quite valid. How you eat, how you dress, what language you speak, your manners, your customs—all that has a tremendous effect on your temporal life. But say you want to acquire scientific knowledge; you don't care whether you put on trousers or a *dhoti*; what matters is how you proceed with your experiments and observations; similarly, when you want to find the eternal truth, your customs have nothing to do with it. You have to override all the impressions that are lying buried deep within yourself; those things are not memories of your spiritual life, they are memories of your temporal life. Whatever civilization or culture or race you may belong to, these memories are of the life of *avidyā*, of ignorance. Therefore, no matter what form they have, you will have to rise above them. The terms in which you will realize eternal truths do not belong to time or to any particular culture, they belong to the eternal.

If you say, "Why, a mystic from the Orient speaks an Oriental language," yes, that's the external expression. But if a true Christian mystic, a true Mohammedan mystic, a true Hindu mystic, and a true Chinese mystic come together, they will find they are the same within. When they have to speak to others, they of course use their accustomed language, but you will be making a great mistake to confuse language and customs with the real thing. The real thing has nothing to do with the expression of it.

This, then, is the way the unconscious, the conscious, and the superconscious become unified. And when you have reached that unified state, you find your mind can scarcely be separated from the divine mind. No wonder, therefore, that when we come across a man of such illumination we accord him the honor and worship due to God Himself. At least in India we do so. *Brahma veda brahmaiva bhavati* <sup>2</sup> —"He who knows God becomes God." Don't forget that. If you want to contain the infinite Lord in your heart, if you want to perceive Him which means that you have to enclose Him in your consciousness, then your consciousness has to be infinite. If you want to realize the eternal Being, you have to be eternal. There is no escaping it. That is the task we have set before ourselves when we say we want to know

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2. *Mundaka Upanisad*, 3.2.9.

God, we want to find Him, we want to possess Him. "Lord, You are the Life of my life, the Soul of my soul; You are in my very breath. I want to embrace You and hold You in my heart for ever and ever." When you say that, you are saying, "Lord, make me infinite, make me eternal." That is the only significance of the prayer.

It is no wonder that the words of illumined souls have a prophetic quality about them. If you can meet such a person and if he is pleased to bless you and says, "Yes, such and such will happen to you," rest assured these words will become fulfilled, because verily they are coming out of the mind of God Himself.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE CONSCIOUS MIND

### 1

During the course of this series of lectures I have gone into a rather detailed study of the mind in its various aspects, but one question, which has no doubt occurred to you, remains to be answered. You see, it is all very well to try to understand the mind in its different aspects as well as in its different states, such as waking, dream, and deep sleep or the conscious, unconscious, and super-conscious; yet you of course know that whatever might be in the superconscious or unconscious

parts of the mind or whatever we might realize in the dream or deep sleep states, we can call our own only that which forms a part of our conscious life or conscious mind. In dreams, for instance, we might find ourselves most perfect and accomplished people, endowed with all riches, but if we do not find any of these things in our conscious life, then they are not ours. So while other states of the mind are important in our studies, the most important in our lives is the conscious. Everybody knows that. The question that arises is this: why does the conscious mind occupy this important place? Its contents are often of less value than the things we sometimes realize in our dreams and certainly of less value than what we possess, or shall possess, in our superconscious state. As you know, one of the teachings of the Vedanta philosophy is that man in his essential nature is as pure, as perfect, and as holy as God Himself. Now, when we compare this philosophical affirmation of our being with what we at present experience, we find so tremendous a difference that we wonder how a conscious affirmation of our innate perfection can be of any practical or even real value. It is this question that I want to discuss.

Of course, in all its phases the mind is ours; therefore today many people think that if we knew some of the things hidden in our unconscious mind, our conscious life would become easier. Others think that such knowledge would even

enrich our conscious life: if we could discover what lies in the depths of our unconscious—not our superconscious, but subconscious—we would undergo a transformation of being. Some have thought that in the unconscious we are as large—as eternal and as infinite—as the cosmic Being Itself; they say that if we delve into our unconscious mind we can possess ourselves of this infinite existence and succeed in making ourselves over.

Is this true? One of the reasons the subject I am discussing this evening has seemed important to me is that this extreme emphasis on the unconscious mind has somehow taken our attention away from our conscious mind. Let me repeat that only what we gain in the conscious mind is really ours; and until we have brought a thought, or an emotion, or whatever it might be, within the range of our conscious perception, we cannot benefit from it; nor can we say it is of much importance to us. So this deflection of attention from our conscious life to the unconscious has seemed to me rather unfortunate.

Let us make a distinction here between the study of the unconscious and an undue attention to the unconscious in the regulation of our life. A doctor may study pathological conditions of the body, and for the cure of physical ailments such a study is no doubt important. But if a normally healthy man continually thinks of illness and his pathological symptoms, you must admit that his

state of mind is not wholesome. Similarly, a study of the unconscious for the purpose of knowledge is one thing, but when individuals give one-sided attention to the unconscious part of their daily life and thought, I must say it is unhealthy. You cannot do that without doing a great deal of harm to yourself.

In the course of many of his lectures and even in his writings Swami Vivekananda continually warned us against this tendency. He further warned us against yielding our own will and judgment to the manipulation of others. He was very much against what is called faith cure or spiritual healing and other such things. I believe he would also have said that unless a person is so sick that he has no power of self-determination, the subjection of his mind to the efforts of a psychiatrist or any other kind of psychologist would be harmful.

I should make my position very clear in this respect: I am not against psychiatric treatment in cases of actual mental illness. If a person cannot lay down rules for himself, if his mind is sick, then he is not capable of self-cure; therefore if he or his relatives take recourse to the services of a psychiatrist, that is justifiable. But I do not think I shall be exaggerating if I say that nowadays anyone and everyone subjects himself to psychoanalysis or some such thing. You go to a psychiatrist and lay yourself bare to him. He examines all the contents of your mind, without

making much distinction between the conscious and the unconscious, and he gives you certain suggestions which you are expected to submit to. That cannot lead to any good. In fact, in trying to guide others, a psychiatrist accepts a role which does not truly belong to him—the role of spiritual guide, and even the spiritual guide exercises extreme care not to weaken the mind, the willpower, or the judgment of those he is seeking to help.

Swami Vivekananda sometimes said that a spiritual teacher can ruin his disciples by allowing them to remain with him for too long. In India, when a person comes to a spiritual teacher he is not allowed to stay with him. He is sent out so that he can think for himself—with, of course, the understanding that he should faithfully follow the teachings and guidance that have been given to him. Guidance is not needed from day to day or year to year. In the most excellent cases the teacher may have given instruction to the disciple once during the course of a whole lifetime; the disciple may not have even met the teacher again. Yet that instruction has been absolutely effective in spiritually transforming him.

In Indian tradition, a great deal of importance is given to the conscious mind: it is with the conscious mind that we have to follow instructions and form judgments. True, my mind may not be capable of forming judgments: it may lack experience and expert knowledge; nevertheless, what I

shall be doing tomorrow will be in accordance with my own state of mind, my own knowledge, my own competence. Even if I am given the advice and guidance of the most wise person, the only thing that will be of use to me will be the competence I have gained within myself—in my conscious mind.

You will find that all great religious teachers have paid extraordinary attention to teaching those whom they are seeking to lead to improve their conscious minds. This is why they lay down moral laws and insist upon certain moral observances: you must not do that, you must do this, and so on. Today such dicta are not accepted with grace. It is said that this laying down of moral laws has been the source of great misery. Just as in regard to your secular education there is continual agitation about whether you should go back to the old system of teaching or follow "progressive" systems, there is a parallel agitation in regard to religion: should people be taught through the discipline of the conscious mind or through some kind of manipulation of the unconscious mind?

I think many people expect a religious teacher to have regard for their unconscious minds—their habits, their instincts, and so on. Actually, very little good comes of that. If you are to strengthen your will, with what means will you strengthen it? By observing and paying attention to all these little shades of your own mental behavior? No. You have to lay down the basic laws of life before your

conscious mind, and from the very beginning you have to train it to accept those things. Just as you teach your growing children to stand the changes of weather, in the same way, if this mind is to grow, it must be made to accept and endure the necessary laws and conditions. It may seem hard to begin with, but it is actually the most simple way.

For a long time I have felt that life should not be too complicated for people. You know, when you want to see a beautiful view, you just look at it, and there it is. But if you try to analyze the process of seeing, then the whole matter becomes impossibly difficult. There before your eyes is the blue sky; but if you had to make a blue color out of empty space, it would be a very complicated process. Or if you had to go through the whole biochemical process of making things appear green, it would be impossible for you. But do you have to go through that process? No, you just open your eyes and see these colors; you see all kinds of things with which your being seems in harmony. I have wondered why our education and training cannot also be made simple. Why should we have to go into all the intricacies and complexities that modern psychology is revealing to us?

You might tell me that things have been made simple for the layman. But I am afraid the study of the mind has not been made sufficiently simple for us ignorant people. We have to learn new terms with their peculiar meanings; we have to turn

ourselves topsy-turvy in order to understand the way modern psychologists are studying our minds and our lives. The old-fashioned man, however wise he may be, will be completely lost in this new knowledge and these new terms. Why can we not have a simple understanding of our minds, which would yet be true of the greatest discoveries about it? That is what I want to know.

I have been in this country for many years, and I have noticed that life has been made exceedingly complex because of this new knowledge; as a consequence of it, men have become really helpless. They can no longer stand on their own feet; they don't know from day to day what they are to think. They are like helpless straws floating in a powerful current. Why has it to be so? For many years I have dwelt upon this question and have come to the conclusion that it does not have to be so. I am a believer in the old-fashioned approach to truth and to life and reality. I do not say that no improvement can be made; I am just referring here to the basic character of that approach—the disciplining of the conscious mind.

What does it matter whether or not I know about my subconscious or unconscious? It doesn't make the slightest difference. For practical purposes we need not even know that there is such a thing as an unconscious mind—providing we know how to train the conscious mind. If you say, "Yes, a few can ignore modern psychology, but

many people can be helped by it and would suffer if we don't take it into consideration, just as a great many people suffered before medical science was developed." I do not agree with that.

Furthermore, I do not agree with the idea that the physical health of a person is dependent upon the extensive development of medical science. I believe that if a person observes the basic laws of health and lives a good life, he will need very little medicine; even when he needs medicine, he will not need all this complicated help of doctors. I believe that if we live close to nature, if we observe the basic rules of our existence, we can on the whole live a very healthy life. I do not believe that good health and an extraordinary number of doctors are causally related.

Similarly, I do not believe that in order to enjoy a good mental state and to accomplish things with your mind you need psychologists to study your mind and write books about it that will sell by the millions—*Psychology Made Easy*. You read all those books, and by the time you have finished, you do not know whether you are a jellyfish or a man. You have lost all confidence in yourself, all power of self-determination—everything gone. You have again fallen into the hands of the experts. Experts are wonderful people, but if you depend upon them at every step of your existence, then your existence is hopeless.

Excuse me for these strong remarks. You don't

have to accept them; as a matter of fact, I myself won't accept them fully. I keep an open mind about these propositions; I shall examine them again and again, again and again. At this moment I believe them; but I don't say that you are to accept them as absolutely true. You should think about what I have said and see if there is some truth in it; and if you find some truth, then I hope you will accept it.

## 2

Let us proceed. I have many times said that wherever there has been a development of mysticism, that is to say, wherever you find men and women who have attained to eternal stability in union with God, you can be sure that they have had to pass through many stages of the mind before they realized that supreme state. In fact, the mind is probably the most essential factor of that journey. Now, I do not deny that one may pass through many stages and yet not be observant of them. A traveller, for instance, may have passed through many countries, but that does not mean he has observed the conditions of those countries. Similarly, there are mystics who have realized a high state but who have spoken of the intervening conditions with error or with uncertainty and vagueness; some have not even mentioned those states. For example, many of you have no doubt

read or heard about the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*, and I shall speak about it in some detail in the next and last lecture of this series. Briefly, the Hindus say that there is a peculiar power located at the base of the spinal column and that when this power wakes up and ascends stage by stage through the spinal column to the brain, all kinds of spiritual unfoldment take place. In India there have been so many people in different times who have spoken about this *kuṇḍalinī* that you cannot deny that the experience of its ascent is valid and true. And yet you could ask, "If it is true, why have not Christian mystics spoken about it?" Well, one answer is that all people, you see, are not equally observant. Further, if we have not been trained to observe certain states, the chances are they will not catch our attention. Our experiences are often understood and instinctively interpreted according to our own mental or cultural background and, in the case of spiritual experiences, according to our religious beliefs and doctrines. But if you have been trained in a religion where you are not governed by dogmas, then your mind will be free to observe the various conditions through which you pass.

In India many books have been written on the subject of the *kuṇḍalinī*. For the most part, they are written in terms of *rāja yoga*, the path of mental discipline, in which the emphasis is on the mind itself, and since works on this subject are also

psychological explanations of all spiritual experiences, we find the authors have gone intensively into the study of the mind. Yet, oddly enough, the works of these ancient Indian psychologists are extremely simple, easily understandable; they don't contain all kinds of rigmarole and mysterious terms.

During this series of lectures I have deliberately tried to impress upon you by repetition a general understanding of the mind according to these philosophers and sages. I have told you they consider that the mind has four phases, you might almost say four functions. In the lowest, which is unconscious, all kinds of impressions are stored. It is there that sensations from the outside first enter the realm of the mind, and a great deal of action takes place. When a sensation comes, your reaction to it may not be exactly the same as that of another person. Now, this is a very important point. I may look at a man and say, "Oh, what a terrible man he is; I don't like him." You may see the same man and say, "I see Divinity Itself embodied in this man." What makes the difference? It is made by that which is already contained in the unconscious. You see, when I saw this man, his appearance, his behavior, his voice, the expression in his eyes, on his lips and forehead all had characteristics that I have associated with evil functions and thoughts. These peculiarities went first to my unconscious mind and evoked past impressions of

evil, and I at once identified him with these impressions. Then by the time my idea regarding this man reached the next stage of the mind (*manas*) and finally the third stage, the stage of intelligence (*buddhi*), where a finished idea is formed, I said, "Here is a bad man." Simultaneously the 'I' or ego, which is the fourth part of the mind, said, "I don't like him." And there is the finished judgment. The beginning, you see, took place in the lowest part of the mind.

So this is how they have put it: in the unconscious part the groundwork is done. Then the idea or percept comes to a higher state of the mind where consciousness is in a rather wobbly stage, not functioning in full force—the idea or percept has not become absolutely complete; then it comes to the intelligence, where judgment is completed. With these last two phases the ego is associated. Now, it doesn't matter what you do, all these four phases of the mind are active in you. The mind will always behave according to this pattern of behavior. You cannot do anything about it. It doesn't matter what you think—whether an idea originates in sense perception or in imagination, memory, or thought, the pattern is always the same.

Now, you see how simple our psychologists and philosophers have made the whole thing? In fact, their treatment of the mind is so simple that on the surface it may seem to be an over simplification that doesn't give us much knowledge. Well, I

shall tell you how this simple analysis is really so basic that if you can capture it you will have a real understanding of the mind.

The question is: Why does the mind have to behave in this way? For that matter, why does there have to be a mind at all? I have sometimes spoken of the death of the mind. In reading Oriental systems of thought such as Hinduism and Buddhism, one often comes across the teaching that the mind dies before the realization of absolute truth. One transcends the mind, and it becomes annihilated. Buddhism, as you know, speaks of *nirvāṇa* as the ultimate ideal, and many Buddhists have explained it as extinction, complete annihilation. Just as the flame is completely gone when you blow out the lamp, in the same way, this whole existence is snuffed out, nothing remains.

Now, it is certainly startling to be told such things. People get frightened. "What? Mind dies? But it is the mind that is important! Without the mind what should I be?" What you should really ask yourself is this: is the mind, perhaps, at the root of all trouble? Maybe I have everything and my mind is stealing it away. Maybe it is like a servant who makes me feel he is quite indispensable and the greatest friend I have, while all the time he is robbing me! Yes, that is what the mind does. The mind is the principle of limitation.

I have explained in other lectures that this pure and full Being, pure Self, which we are, has

to be realized. Why should I, this pure Being, the all-conscious, self-conscious Being, have the mind and the body and the external world, all of which constitute the other—the object of the knower?

Probably we will never be able to answer that 'why'. But we can answer the 'how', and sometimes a 'why' is included in the 'how'. Even now we can say why we see the other. If we analyze the whole process of our miserable and defective perception and the compulsion behind it, we can say that there is a continual urge to achieve a unity, to comprehend the total reality, which we find infinitely differentiated. At the very least, we find there is a fundamental division between the knower and the known or the knowable: I am the knower and my mind, my body, the universe are the knowable; there is that fundamental division. Yet I do not accept that division. In my present experience I think I am a small being; I feel so barren of everything. There is not enough music in me: I make every effort to produce a nice sound—the moment I open my mouth I croak; so I search for a musician; I shall buy a ticket and listen to him, and there will be a solace in my heart. I want love: there is not enough love within me, but in somebody's eyes I see great affection and love for me, and there is a satisfaction in my heart. I want to possess: my body is small, the things around me are awfully small. If it were possible, I would like to possess the whole earth and maybe the solar

system. Of course, it would be awfully inconvenient to possess so much; just some nice little part of the solar system would be enough—maybe another planet where things are not so difficult and where I could go for weekends. All these things I want to add to myself; continually there is that effort. That is to say, there is a division, and there is also denial of that division. There is a recognition of these differences, and there is also rejection of these differences.

There are these two contrary forces, as it were, working in our individual consciousness: one recognizes differences; the other wants to embrace all the differences in unity. How do I explain my desire for unity? I explain it by saying that there must be a fundamental unity between me and what I call the objective world. My being is not just here at this point in space; my being is all this being; that is why I want to be united with the whole universe in one way or another.

So, why is it that instead of going directly to the One we just mess around with all these diversities? The mind goes through an infinite variety of forms trying to find a basic unity. That is what we call knowledge: we study all kinds of diverse phenomena and try to discover if there is any unity. We sometimes find a unifying principle, and we call it a law. Why do we have to do this? Why do we not go directly to the One? When we ask this question and start tracing our inability to perceive the One

directly, we come to a very strange conclusion. We find that for some reason we ourselves want to hold on to that inability. I told you about the dual tendencies of the mind, which are opposite in character—one seeks a comprehensive unity, but the other likes diversity. We find this opposition even in our daily behavior. Sometimes a person will say, "I want to give my whole heart and soul to God. Why can I not do it?" Of course, back of that question is the idea (probably not a very clear idea, but definitely there) that the fault is not his own. He is willing to give himself wholly to God; his inability to do so must be somebody else's fault. If you tell such people that the reason they cannot give themselves wholly to God is that they don't want to, they protest, "Oh, I do want to. Don't say that to me!" They feel insulted. But when it comes down to brass tacks, they find they don't want to.

There is a fable about a very old man who used to make his living by cutting firewood. He would make big bundles and carry them to the market. Life was exceedingly miserable for him, and one day he was asking why death did not come and take him. His complaining was so loud that the angel of death appeared before him. The angel said, "Well, here I am. Do you want to go with me?" The old man cried out, "Oh, no, no, no!" "Then why did you call me?" "Oh, please just give me a hand with this bundle. That is why I called you." Often it is so. The mind itself contains an unwillingness to surrender

utterly to God, an unwillingness to go beyond diversities, beyond these differences and divisions. And here we find a clue to why we do not go directly to the One.

It is because there is the mind, and there is the mind because there is the sense of otherness. That is not a real answer, but the trouble starts with this sense of the other one, the sense of otherness. In the beginning it is a very small thing; there is just an undifferentiated, vague sense of duality, *dvaitam*, which we call *māyā*. And the moment you feel there is another, then at once you become limited. If you are alone, you can be yourself; the moment you know someone else has come into the room, you have to be polite, you have to put restrictions upon yourself. Similarly, the moment the Infinite thinks there is the other, it has to restrict itself, it becomes finite. And once it becomes finite, it resists this restriction, because its basic nature is of course infinite. You may say the restriction is self-imposed, but nevertheless it resists it; it wants to comprehend the other, reach towards the other and make it a part of itself. But at the same time it wants to retain the sense of otherness. This whole contradictory effort becomes the source of creation. One thing leads to another, and everything becomes more and more complex and more and more elaborate. That is the condition of the *samsāri ātmā*, the transmigratory being, which we are. We want to make the whole

world one, and yet we want to retain this diversity. It is for this dual purpose—on the one hand, elaboration and diversification, on the other, unification—that the mind, together with life, the senses, and the body, comes into being.

Intelligence, which is the highest part of the mind, serves the purpose of unification. Intelligence tends to unify your world of knowledge. When you have education, when you are cultured and intellectual, your intelligence becomes further developed, and the process of unification becomes further advanced. But at the same time, you are unwilling to give up that which makes for diversification. The same intelligence also conceives desires. The scholar says, "I want to become a famous man." There it is. He is seeking knowledge—what has fame got to do with it? But he says he wants to be a famous man. He wants to have a chair in such and such a university and be looked up to by everybody. Then he thinks he could also make a little money. Then he wants to have a nice family, nice children, nice friends, all kinds of things, elaboration goes on and on. So this dual process takes place. You will find that the four phases of the mind—the whole mechanism, physical and mental—serve this dual purpose. And in that there is no hope.

Now, remember, the very beginning of this process is a basic ignorance. The sense of otherness cannot be real. The Infinite cannot think

of another outside Itself. How can there be anything outside the Infinite? You may say that He perhaps thought of the other within Himself, just as in imagination I might think that I am two people and might talk with myself—maybe that is what He does. Yes, in many of our legends and mythologies the idea that God has made Himself into two is symbolized; but we know it is all a game; it cannot be considered real for Him. Yet in our own present experience we find it to be real. That is the difference. Looked at from the standpoint of God, it is only a play, an appearance. But from our present standpoint it is not playful or fanciful; it is actually a matter of strenuous experience. But notice this: whether this otherness is actual or whether it is merely apparent, it is a false thing. We must not forget that, particularly when we experience it as actual. It is false, and therefore everything that has come out of it is characterized by falsehood. Everything is tainted by this original falsehood, this original mistaken thought.

Therefore it has been found that when a person is living this dual life (that is to say, the normal life, which has two directions, both of which are characterized by a fundamental taint of error), his life often gets into tangles, which produce an unwholesomeness, out of which comes error, out of which, in turn, comes mental disease. Since the One really cannot be divided into two, diversity cannot be real, but by the very fact that the world of

diversity is outside us, we cannot on this plane of existence become one with it. Even though we say, "I want to embrace the whole thing, possess it, and become one with it," we cannot do so. You may pour out your heart and soul to someone, but just as the circumferences of two circles can touch at only one point, you cannot become one with that person. A fundamental frustration and disappointment is dramatized throughout our life. A person is fond of eating; after some time he finds his digestion is no good and his teeth are all gone—frustration. He wants to behave like a young man, but he has become middle-aged and old; he has youth in his heart, but when he behaves like a young man, people laugh at him; he is frustrated. He wants to travel all over the world; there is not enough money—frustration. He wants to enjoy this life—illness comes. His intellect itches to study; he finds he hasn't time—frustration. And the final frustration is death.

Poor man! He made this world his all; then suddenly (at least he feels it is sudden) he is snatched out of it and thrown into some other environment entirely foreign to him. We all fondly hope that after we die we shall find ourselves in the midst of our relatives, who will be waiting for us with flower garlands and bouquets. I do not know whether such a thing ever happens; it might happen in some cases; but most of us are just thrown amongst strangers,

and we have to take a long time to adjust.

Well, that is the present condition of our existence. On the one hand, we can never completely diversify the world. If we could do that, we could become separated from it entirely. That would be right: if we could know that our mind and body and the world are completely different from us, then we would become free. But you see, we cannot accomplish even that. On the other hand, we say, "I want to make everything one; my heart and mind are hungry. I want to know more and more," that also we cannot accomplish fully. So there is this frustration. This is the fundamental story of the mind. And as long as the mind behaves in this way, we haven't much hope of ever attaining any stability or satisfaction.

### 3

Now here comes a certain operation which we should undertake in order to remedy this state of things. It is undertaken with the help of the conscious mind.

First, let me explain what we mean by "conscious mind." Consciousness alone is consciousness. The very fact that we distinguish consciousness from the operations of the mind, some of which are unconscious, shows that mind and consciousness are not copervasive and is one

sure proof that consciousness is something different and separate from the mind. All our Indian philosophers have maintained that the Self, the Atman, is of the nature of Spirit, not of mind or of body, and that it is different and separate from them.

In previous lectures I gave you a general idea of the philosophy in which it is maintained that there are two principles completely opposed to each other—conscious and unconscious. The conscious principle is the soul, the *puruṣa*; everything else—intelligence, mind, body, and so on—is a diversification of the unconscious principle, which is called *prakṛti*, or nature. It is all unconscious. Now, since we are conscious, we are the principle of consciousness. When we know ourselves as we truly are, we shall find that we are homogeneous, we are not made up of several things; we are made up of just one substance—the spiritual substance, which is all light, all consciousness. And as I have many times told you, consciousness is the same thing as self-consciousness—providing you do not understand self in a bodily sense, or in the sense of individuality. Individuality stands for limitations and distinctions; pure self-consciousness, which is the essence of an individual, has nothing to do with these limitations. The self-consciousness of a Buddha or a Christ is entirely different from the self-consciousness of a man like me, or like you in your present state. When you have become like a

Christ or a Buddha, you will find that your self-consciousness has no connection with your mind, your mental or physical traits, or anything at all. It is completely separated from them.

Now, all knowledge, all finding of truth, all attainment is of me, that is to say, of the self-conscious entity; therefore it has to be accomplished in and through this self-consciousness. There is no other way about it. Nevertheless, as long as the mind behaves in the way I have described, where is hope for this self-conscious being? Will it not always be clouded? As long as there is an unconscious mind which contains all kinds of wrong impressions and in which our finished judgments are at least crudely formed, where is there any chance? Unless I can put my finger on the wrong things in the unconscious, where is the hope that the conscious mind will find truth? So what is the sense, you might ask me, of emphasizing consciousness?

This is the sense: One of the things you have to do is to become self-conscious on a higher and yet higher level. All moral and spiritual dictates are prescriptions that enable us to reach towards a higher self-consciousness. If, for instance, I am accustomed to lie, then, by following moral principles, by becoming filled with truth, I reach towards a higher conception of myself, a nobler self-consciousness. That is one very important thing we have to do. Rather, I should say it is the

most important. Unless it is given seventy-five percent emphasis, the whole process will become unbalanced. Seventy-five percent of our attention and effort should be given to meditating upon and trying to approximate this nobler, higher self (and twenty-five percent to another practice, which I shall tell you about presently.) To put it simply, if you are a religious person, I would say that you should dwell upon the nature of God.

Now, here many people suffer from misconceptions. The moment you talk to them of God, they protest, "Oh, he wants me to be religious, to become stodgy and dull. Religious people go to church and cry and pray and see darkness and nothing else. No good can come of it." I admit if you think of God in that way, then no good can come of it. But what prevents you from thinking another way? If I were asked for a definition of God I might say that all greatness is God—wherever there is greatness there is God. Now, if I ask you to meditate on God as greatness, can you say you are pursuing something empty and dark? No!

If you do not believe in God, believe in great qualities, believe in great men like Buddha and Christ and Krishna. What prevents you from thinking about them? They are the embodiment of greatness, of wisdom, of illumination. These great ones truly represent the principle of unity. Not that peculiar kind of unity which drags itself down into an infinite number of pieces. We have all been

seeking that kind of unity by trying to grab everything. Nothing comes of it. If we want to grab diversity, diversity swallows us; we don't consume it, it consumes us, and then we have only a pale unity that we reach towards with feeble fingers. No, not that kind of unity. Meditate on these great ones who represent pure unity, transcendent of these foolish diversities after which our heart pants and pines.

The moment your mind, your conscious intelligence, tastes true unity, it will send out a message to the unconscious part of the mind, and a revolution will take place there: all contrary impressions will be on the defensive. Just as when confronted by honesty all dishonesty stands on the defensive and shows fight, similarly, the thoughts and desires in the unconscious which pertain to a false unity and crude diversity will fight when confronted by impressions of the higher and truer unity. Sometimes the old thoughts will come up to the conscious mind to contradict you. But if our honest man does not weaken, then the dishonest man slinks away. If you remain calm when these contrary thoughts rise to the conscious mind, all the strength will go out of them. I don't say that they immediately die out; they put up many fights, but each time they lose strength. Further, you find that in the unconscious there are also good thoughts, good memories, and impressions of the higher self, of the higher unity.

Maybe you have seen a person with a noble face; you have seen noble things done; you have heard about God from lips that have been purified by speaking truth. You had never paid attention to those things, but now they will come up and strengthen your aspirations towards real unity.

A time comes when the contents of your unconscious are gradually replaced by impressions of this higher unity; your mistakes become fewer and fewer, because you are gradually getting rid of the sense of otherness to which you clung. The less our sense of otherness, the fewer our mistakes; the less our sense of finitude, the fewer our mistakes; the less our sense of difference and division, the fewer our mistakes. If, for instance, you feel at one with a person—truly at one, not the sentimental at-oneness that people and books are always talking about, but a real oneness—you will never make a mistake about that person. Your reaction to him will be right, your thought about him will be true and wholesome. Not only will it be true, but it will also be productive of good to that person. Whatever is true is good. At that time you realize that. And you also realize that there cannot be any good without truth.

As your thought becomes free of mistakes, the middle part of the mind, the part which is said to be indecisive, can no longer be distinguished from the highest part of the mind, the *buddhi*, in which correct judgment is formed. We see a change

taking place in the entire mind. The unconscious mind, being now the repository of the consciousness of the Divine Spirit, is no longer so unconscious; it is becoming as conscious as the conscious mind, which has been dwelling on God and feeling the being of God more and more.

So we find that the fourfold division of the mind is gradually disappearing. The mind begins to become unified; it begins to function as one entity. And when the whole mind, conscious and unconscious, is brought together, it is no longer a finite, small mind. In an earlier lecture I explained to you that the fact that some part of the mind is unconscious is the same fact as that the mind is limited. That itself is a fascinating subject, but I won't go into it here. Just remember this: the mind would not be finite if no part of it were unconscious; if the whole mind were conscious, it would become infinite. And that is what happens now; the mind no longer goes after the spurious infinite—the phenomenal infinite, divided, formed, full of finitude and bounds. Rather, it seeks undivided, homogeneous, undifferentiated unity. In other words, the mind now tends more and more to deny the sense of otherness.

No doubt some of you are thinking, "The mind itself is the product, or even the principle, of this otherness; how, then, can it deny this otherness?" Yes, you are quite right. The mind is now going to commit suicide. That is what I mentioned earlier:

the death of the mind. You see, it is a reverse, or return, process, and here again it is consciousness that accomplishes it. The self-conscious being continually affirms itself, "I am not the mind, I am not the senses, I am one homogeneous, infinite Being." That affirmation reacts on the mind, which of course can then no longer move down with the sense of otherness; it has to go up, even if that means its own death.

Some say the mind should not be maligned and castigated; mind is a good boy. They say that if we did not force the mind to go downwards, it would not become so gross; it would not go after differentiated, gross things. The natural tendency of the mind is to become finer and yet finer and eventually so fine that it will dwell only on God. That is what many teachers say, and I think it is true. When the mind becomes pure, a little free from the dead weight of sense experience and the consequences of sense life, it soars up, lightened. There is a spiritual practice in which one doesn't do anything with the mind; one neither forces it to go after sense objects, nor forces it to dwell on God; one just lets it run. When it finds that it is not being tied down to this lower life, it wakes up, as it were, and at once rises up. So they say that of its own accord the mind will seek the homogeneous, pure, unitary Being, which is the infinite Spirit, God.

But, you see, this, too, is accomplished through the conscious mind. And that is the

importance and significance of the conscious mind. Our existence here is determined in terms of it, not by what is contained in the unconscious. Let me emphasize this: even if you had the most absurd and most harmful things in your unconscious mind, it wouldn't make any difference. If you can control and direct your conscious mind, it will eventually purify the unconscious. You don't have to worry about it. The art is to learn how to guide, manipulate, and develop your conscious mind rightly.

I said earlier that seventy-five percent of your attention should be given to lifting the conscious mind to the awareness of higher reality, God. With the remaining twenty-five percent of the mind you should watch for the contents of the unconscious as they rise. You should take care that your conscious mind does not become identified with what is appearing from the unconscious. If you watch out for that, then that thought or memory sinks down and disappears.

Further, you could do this: With a sense of comparative judgment, you could look at what has floated up from the unconscious to the conscious. Since the mind is now tasting something superior, you have these two things side by side, and at once you see their comparative value. You would not have the slightest doubt that what has come up to divert you is completely unworthy. You do not have to think about it; just glancing at these two

things simultaneously is enough.

It is primarily during the hours of meditation that twenty-five percent of the mind does this job of discrimination. But you should also discriminate when you are not meditating. As the day wears on, you find that your mind is coming down; then a little struggle is necessary, alertness is necessary. Constant vigilance is the price of liberty. Twenty-five percent of the mind watches for unworthy thoughts and banishes them. This is the negative side. The positive side is the lifting of the mind to an awareness of God. As you do both these things—and both are done by the conscious mind—you find the unconscious gradually comes under control. And as I have already told you, when the divisions of the mind disappear, when the whole mind becomes luminous and conscious, then it loses its bounds in every respect. It becomes at one with the cosmic mind. Whatever depths are in the cosmic mind also belong to this individual mind. If memories are necessary, memories will come; one's tendency, however, is not to reach towards time but towards eternity. You might say, "In eternity there is no fun; in time alone there is play and fun." Who told you that? Those who have caught even a glimpse of the eternal find time with all its promises absolutely insipid. Whatever is God's becomes man's—*this* man's; all is possessed, but it is possessed in a way that you cannot describe.

Now, I have given you a general outline of the mind and its behavior, its whys and its hows. And I have, I think, said enough to impress upon you the importance of the conscious mind. Let it never be forgotten that whatever you do, you do with the conscious mind, and whatever is accomplished in the conscious mind has its repercussion upon the unconscious. You cannot delve directly into the unconscious. If you do, you will become entangled in it. As a matter of fact, you can never directly manipulate its contents. You have first of all to become consciously aware of the higher reality; then in the light of that you will be able to understand the significance of most of the contents of your unconscious, which are, of course, mostly impressions of this lower reality.

In short, the superconscious state has to be reached through the conscious. The conscious mind becomes superconscious, then the light of that superconsciousness transforms the unconscious and whatever remains of the conscious into the superconscious, so that in course of time the whole mind becomes superconscious. The whole mind dwells on and reflects the infinite Spirit, in which there is no differentiation, no division; there is just complete, utter, absolute, and transcendental unity.

## THE KUNḌALINĪ AND THE AWAKENING OF HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS

### 1

*Kuṇḍalinī*, as you all know, is a Sanskrit word, and although it is used in a substantive sense, literally it is an adjective, meaning "coiled up." Technically speaking, it refers to the divine energy that, according to Hindu belief, is lying coiled up and asleep at the base of the spinal column of every conscious being. At first acquaintance, this doctrine is, to say the least, startling. Sometimes this energy has been called *serpent power*, and some believe in sincere faith that in

every person there is actually a cobra hidden at the base of the spine, which would be awful indeed. But when you become acquainted with the philosophy behind it, this doctrine of the *Kuṇḍalinī* does not seem so shocking; on the contrary, it seems enlightening. And I may say here that it has become very widely accepted in India, not merely by the Tāntrikas, who have made it a special part of their teaching, but by almost all Hindus. It will be my effort to explain it to you—as far, at least, as is practicable; for even though I give rather long lectures, the time will be too short for the full enunciation of this doctrine, which is highly complex and has many things connected with it that even experts have found difficult to explain.

And what is this awakening of higher consciousness which also forms a part of my subject? What is this higher consciousness? In Sanskrit it is sometimes called *parā vidyā*. In one of the old Upaniṣadic texts it is said,:

*Dve vidye veditavye . . . parā caivāparā ca . . . parā . . . tad akṣaram adhigamyate*<sup>1</sup>

“Two different kinds of knowledge have to be acquired: one is lower, another is higher. . . . The higher is that by which the *akṣaram*, the immutable, is to be experienced.” Our consciousness has many strata or levels in it, and each level

1. *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 1.1.4-5.

seems to have different phases. With our present consciousness—which, let us say, is the normal level—we become aware of reality as multiple phenomena. We are not aware of the immutable, the imperishable, and the unchanging substance behind phenomena. If we want to perceive that, then we have to have a different stratum of consciousness. For convenience, this stratum has been called "higher consciousness," but that is a rather loose term, because in that higher consciousness there are also different levels. As you all know, there are different experiences of God. Generally speaking, one experiences God with form or without form, with attributes or without attributes; such experiences are graded and correspond to different levels of higher consciousness.

Now, this higher consciousness in the so-called normal man is practically asleep. Some even might say it is nonexistent; that is the general attitude. Or some people, admitting that it is possible to have higher consciousness, think we have to produce it or create it through spiritual efforts. In other words, it is not here now and we have to develop it somehow, or build it up. The fact is, it is here, but because we are not using it or paying any attention to it, we are not cognizant of it. It is, as it were, lying neglected and hidden; it has to be brought forward so that we become aware of it. And since our state of consciousness

is also our state of being, we not only have to become aware of it, we have to become identified with it; we have to learn to function with it. That is the purpose of all spiritual effort. Whether you believe you are to experience God here and now, or think all that is necessary is to have faith in God, you must admit that in either case you are expected to reach a condition, on earth or in heaven, where you are able to perceive God directly. If you admit that, you also have to admit that there is bound to take place a transformation in your own being. Unless you become transformed from your present limited state to a state where you can directly perceive God, how will you perceive Him? You will have to undergo this change; your consciousness will have to become equal to the divine reality you want to perceive.

The Hindus maintain that if this change does not take place here in this life, you will not attain it by merit of dying. We all know how difficult it is to change our mind or state of consciousness. If death is the gate to the highest state of consciousness, then the honest advice to everyone would be to die the next moment. If by dying you can reach that state, why should you not die? But the fact is you don't attain anything by merely dying. So according to Hindu belief, the higher state of consciousness has to be realized here; and everyone is destined to realize it. The object of that consciousness is the infinite, eternal Being, the

divine Being. Higher consciousness is perfect consciousness, and therefore that of which this consciousness is aware is also perfect.

Now, how are these two things connected—this coiled-up divine energy and this higher consciousness which has to be awakened within us? This question naturally pushes me into some sort of metaphysical disquisition. I hope you won't mind it too much; it is good to know a little of these things, though I frankly admit that if you want to experience God, what is essentially wanted is earnest longing and withdrawal of the mind from anything other than God. Without knowing philosophy you can do that. But in modern times, when we cannot shut out all the things that are being said about physical and metaphysical realities, our mind is apt to raise all kinds of doubts and questions, which we shall have to answer to the satisfaction of our intellect. So some philosophy is desirable. You might find it rather dry to begin with and sometimes complex and even unconvincing, but I do not think you lose much thereby; at least it makes you think. And what seems unconvincing now, may appear the opposite after some time; what seems complex now, may appear simple and clear later on; and what seems meaningless now, may later give you the most profound meaning. Nobody knows. These things have to be stored up, for the need of them may arise.

The philosophy that I have to go into is the philosophy of creation. At the beginning of this series, I gave a talk entitled "What Makes a Man," and I tried through that discourse to give you an idea of the process by which man, as he thinks himself to be, has come into existence. Always, of course, I reminded you that according to *Advaita*, or monistic, Vedanta, the whole process is just apparent; it has not actually taken place. Just as dream experience does not bring about any change in our real situation, in the same way the whole process of creation or change is only apparent; actually nothing has happened to our real being. Of course, if you want to be a bit critical, you might say that by this doctrine the monists have very cleverly solved one of the knotty problems of philosophy. You see, we cannot deny that we are experiencing the manifold here. We cannot deny that we are experiencing ourselves as limited, mortal, finite beings. There is no use denying that. On the other hand, if you trace all these things to God in order to explain how you have come to be, then also you are in a fix, because if you ascribe this miserable situation to the creative power of God, then that power is malevolent, and He is no God at all. If you say the creative power ascribed to God is not to be considered evil, I would ask: what is it if not evil? You who are divine in nature and full of happiness and perfection have been reduced to this miserable state. If

some of you tell me that it is not such a very bad state, I would say you do not know what you are talking about. You do not know the divine felicity; you do not know the state of freedom that is natively ours, that is our birthright. We have been deprived of it and have been thrown into the darkest hole of this existence and imprisoned in it. If we cannot call that evil, I do not know what we can call evil. And if it actually happened, if God has actually created the world, then of course all these evil things will have to be ascribed to Him.

Further, there is this philosophical problem: why should God create? What business has He got to create? Is He not perfect? Behind every action there is a motive that arises out of a sense of lack. What was lacking in God, who is considered to be perfect and infinite in Himself? Then again, He is the One. How out of the One could the many come? He is eternal—how could the temporal come out of Him? These things are opposed to His nature. You could not say that eternity is also time, because the two are contradictory. You cannot explain those things.

But if we just say, "Oh, actually nothing has taken place; it was just a dream. You dreamt you were eaten by a tiger? There was no tiger. No being eaten up. Nothing. You are the same person as you were before you fell asleep"—there we do not have to explain where the tiger came from and why it should eat you up. Of course, you might ask, "Why

should there be such an evil dream?" Well, that's another story. If you can explain it, good; if you cannot explain it, the fact remains that there was no tiger and no being eaten up. That is how Advaitists solve the problem of creation.

All Indian philosophers have not accepted that view. Some say it is too hard to believe that all these phenomena are merely appearance. Well, I won't go into the comparative merits of these views. I myself am inclined to the monistic view; it seems more logical and more factual to me, because if I felt I really had been created so miserable and limited, then I would have no hope at all. That which I really am cannot be changed; I can become only what I am. Can you make gold out of lead? If there were gold hidden in it, it is possible that by some chemical process you could bring gold out of it, but if the gold were not there, you couldn't. So in order to attain to a state of perfection I must be perfect even now. Therefore I consider that this miserable state is only apparent; in reality I am still divine.

Well, that brings me to the discussion of the philosophical truths that lie behind this doctrine of the *kuṇḍalinī*. The Hindus say that from the cosmic point of view this universe is an expression of Divinity. It is the dynamic play of the Divine. The Divine, which is absolute and therefore static, without change, has, as it were, assumed a dynamic aspect, and the whole universe is a play

of this divine *śakti*, divine power, or energy—living. On the surface it is divine energy, in the middle it is divine energy, and at its very root, at the foundation, it is divine energy. We say that at the foundation is a cosmic *kundalinī*, a universal coiled-up divine energy, which, being there, prods this universe into all kinds of momentary changes, takes it through the cosmic process—that is to say, the process of manifestation—and again, on the return journey, takes it back into the process of dissolution.

When you find that a large section of mankind, a large nation or even a race, becomes suddenly stimulated by a spiritual ideal, becomes devoted for some centuries to the realization of this ideal, and, by and large, dedicates all its energies to it, you must know there has been a tremendous stimulus. Of course, if you want to explain it, you will at once relate it to some saint or prophet who harangued the people of his time. But how do you think he influences people, say, two centuries later? You may say his words remain; then tell me how words can help a man. Word is a dead thing. What actually happens is this: this man, this prophet, is only an outward symbol; like a small island rising above the ocean, he comes from the very depths of a large section of humanity. That is where his root is, that is where he truly exists. Only a little of him comes to the surface, and you say, "He is an Incarnation in our time." But

actually his being lives deep, deep down, and there he works. It is no wonder, therefore, that for generations millions and millions of men and women are influenced and stimulated by him. If you want to explain that spiritual stimulus and if you want to use the term with which we are presently concerned, you would say that a part of the cosmic *kuṇḍalinī* has become active.

Yes, there is lying at the root of everything a divine energy, and it stimulates us. We would say it becomes active even in inanimate nature. For example, if you find a place where your mind quiets down naturally, we would say that there this divine energy is a little more active, has come out a little to the surface, and has thereby made this place particularly suitable for spiritual thinking and perception. There are such places, there is no denying it. Similarly, if you speak of a time when it is easier to meditate—say, in the evening or at dawn—we would say yes, at that time this cosmic divine energy becomes a little more stimulating than at other times.

Now, let us come to the individual. You must always remember that the Hindus think that what is true of the cosmic whole is also true of its constituent units; that is to say, what is true of the universal is also true of the individual. So when we find a man who is spiritually stimulated, when we discover that he is highly spiritual and a great inspiration is in him, we would say that his

*kunḍalinī* has awakened; that which in everyone is lying asleep, coiled up, has become awakened in him and has reached its destination. In the individual the pathway of this divine energy lies through the spinal column to the brain, and it is said that when it reaches the brain, then the person becomes thoroughly illumined. In terms of this doctrine, that is how the Hindus would explain spiritual illumination.

You see, there has always been this problem: somehow man has lost his divinity. In Christian legends man was perfect, he lived in fellowship with God; something happened, and as a result of it he lost God, he came down to this earth, and henceforth he has been separated from God. It is said that those who take refuge in Christ are able to make contact with God and eventually to regain the fellowship that was lost by their original ancestors. If you ask a Vedantic philosopher, he would also say, "Yes, in my true nature I am that infinite Divinity. I am not only in fellowship with God, I am one with Him, I am identical with Him; there is no difference between me and God, no gap, no separation—just one. As pure water poured into pure water becomes completely one with it, in the same way, when this self of mine becomes free from the impurities which are technically called name and form, then my being, utterly pure, becomes one with the pure being of God; there is no distinguishing one from the other; there is complete

identification. That is my true nature." But the question is: how did one lose that sense of identity with God? What happened? Mythological explanations are there, but everybody knows it is hard to accept them. Sometimes they are explained allegorically and sometimes taken literally, but they do not always make philosophical sense. Now, in this doctrine of the *kuṇḍalinī* I think we really have a philosophical presentation of the problem.

## 2

Let me tell it in very brief form. I shall try to make it simple, but I have to admit that the effort to simplify it is a tremendous one, because the whole doctrine is filled with all kinds of complexities, and simplification of it risks misrepresentation. However, I hope I won't misrepresent it. Now, let us assume that a desire has arisen on the part of the Absolute God to create. How can we assume that? We assume it because to our experience there is a creation, and we think that creation is of a Creator, that is to say, of an infinite Being, of God; so we have to ascribe the desire to create to Him. We cannot ascribe this desire to anybody else. So from our standpoint, we have to assume it. Of course, if you inquire of God, I don't know what He would say. But as I have

sometimes mentioned, in philosophical inquiries we always have to proceed from our own point of view and imagine how things would appear from the viewpoint of God. Such imagination is not always possible or practical and not always absolutely dependable, but there is no other way for us. Philosophy, in other words, is not always capable of presenting the truthfully; we admit that, but we have to do our best.

Well, when this desire to create arose, it was in a certain sense a repudiation of the true nature of God, which is absolute and infinite and without any determinant and condition. Along with this desire, therefore, something arose which denied the nature of God. We have called it *māyā*, which sometimes is translated as ignorance. As a result of God's association with this *māyā*, a process takes place, and through different stages in this process—stages of involution and degeneration—the whole thing comes to our own level. The one undivided God becomes divided, as it were, into an infinite number of souls, infinite fragments of God. As our old philosophers have sometimes said, just as out of fire many sparks fly, similarly the souls come out of God; or as in a fire there are many flames, so, as it were, in this unconditioned, indivisible Divinity, there are an infinite number of souls. Yet the undivided God has remained. (You should always remember this peculiar theory of causation: the cause becomes something else,

and yet it remains what it was; it never loses itself.)

Now, when God in conjunction with *māyā* made Himself into many souls, it is assumed that these souls were so Godlike that although they had a certain form, that form was very transparent. It was celestial form, form of the very highest order, and did not hide the divine nature of the Being that dwelt in it. These souls in that first, highest state, which has been called the causal state, were Godlike. But there came a degradation. As a result of it, the forms became, as it were, more pronounced, more obscuring, and the souls enclosed in them began to feel cut off from God and cut off from one another; they began to think of themselves as narrowed down, finitized. This can be called the subtle state. Then there came a further degradation that could be called the gross state. Let us say our present state is the gross state, in which the form has become very gross indeed, and we ourselves have become so beclouded by this form that we have no consciousness of what we are as souls, let alone of our being Godlike in nature. We feel separate from God, separate from one another, and more and more identified with this physical form. This is the way our philosophers speak of the process of creation. If you ask, "Why did it have to take place?" The answer is that if it actually took place you could ask that question. But always remember that they say it is only a seeming—actually it has not taken place at all.

Well, we have come down to this gross state. What happened when this degradation took place? (Probably it is not right to use the word degradation so much. Let us say descent—that sounds more polite.) In that descent from the causal to the gross, what actually took place and what has been the result? Here the doctrine of *kuṇḍalinī* goes into details. That's the beauty of this teaching, it goes into the details. The study of this form has been given the name *dehatattva*, that is to say, inquiry into the truth of the body—not the physical body alone, but also the subtle body. Mind and body together, you see, make up the form of the Self or the Spirit; therefore both body and mind have been called the body. One is gross, the other is subtle and causal. The idea is that through an inquiry into the body we can discover many fruitful facts—fruitful not only because they will contribute to our understanding of what has brought about and is perpetuating our present state, but also because, having known those things, we can set in motion the opposite process and return to the source from which we came.

Those who made this study found that in the brain is the fullness of God-consciousness. They will tell you that when the soul becomes, as it were, more and more narrowed down, clouded, and shut up in this body and mind until it seems to have forgotten its original nature, nothing of the kind has actually taken place: this perfect soul, which

is all God, completely identified with God, is still there. He is seated in the brain; there He still exists. If you had the eyes to see, you would find that there is a lotus (they use this symbolic term) having an infinite number of petals — *śahasrāra*, the thousand-petaled (the word “thousand” is used in the sense of infinite number)—and in that lotus this infinite Divinity, this Brahman, is seated.

But the opposite also seems to exist in us. Remember this, the whole process of creation, whether individual or universal, is a positing of the opposite. Creation is nothing but God thinking of His own opposite. You see, that is His game: He is trying to think of His opposite. He is infinite; He is trying to think of all kinds of finites. He is eternal; He's trying to think of all forms of time, and so on and so forth. And so they say that if this perfect Brahman is seated in the brain, then the opposite is at the other end of this human form—that is to say, at the bottom of the spinal column. If in the brain this divine consciousness is ever awake, then at the bottom of the spinal column it is lying asleep. There is, as it were, a polarization: one pole reacts on the other; and thereby the status of a human being, or any conscious being, is maintained.

How did this polarization come about? It is said that Divinity did not just suddenly go to the base of the spine; there were many stages in the journey by which, as it were, it went there and yet remained here in the brain. Mark that, it is one of the

essential points of our teaching: a thing becomes something different and yet retains its original nature. That's the idea. Is it so very difficult to understand? If you say that it is not understandable—well, try to understand it. Say a friend of yours, who is a very fine man, has taken the part of a villain in a play and perfectly plays his role. While you are enjoying the play have you forgotten that this man who is acting the villain is also a fine person? Do the two things seem contradictory to you? No, not if you remember that his role of villain is only playacting, not actual. In the same way, this process of descent is only playacting. Divinity goes down stage by stage only as it were.

What God is in Himself, how He exists in Himself, no one is able to describe. However, He comes down, as it were, from that state, and the first (or some say second) downward stage is located in the junction of the eyebrows. They call it *ājñā-cakra* or *ājñā-padma*. *Padma* means "lotus," and *cakra* means "center" or "circle." They define *ājñā* in different ways: some have said it means "command"; others have said it means "complete knowledge." Both interpretations would be acceptable. They say this lotus has only two petals, and in that state there is already a sense of duality. There the soul has come into existence, as it were, distinct from God, even separate from God. But in this stage it doesn't matter that the soul feels itself distinct or separate from God; what

is important is that it is ever aware of the presence of God—ever aware. It has not forgotten God; although there is a distinction, there is no bondage. If the soul could have remained in that state, it would have been all right. It is what people call union with God, or fellowship with God, as distinct from identity with God. It is the state many religions place before us as our ideal. However, we are not concerned here with the ascent of the soul but rather with its descent.

When it goes farther down it comes to what is called the level of the throat. They say there is a center of consciousness there. They call it *viśuddha-cakra*—"extremely pure lotus." It is supposed to have sixteen petals. (What you think of the lotuses and their sixteen petals or thousand petals or two petals doesn't matter at all. Some say it is all symbolic, others say no, it is actual. It doesn't matter.) But here at the level of the throat the soul is no longer in fellowship with God. It is full of fervor for God, but God has become a little obscured. God is accompanying the soul downward, and here the soul feels His presence, but not very clearly. Yet the soul is not aware at that time of anything else; it is full of the thought of God.

Then it comes to a still lower state, which is said to be the level of the heart. *Anāhata* it is called—"unstruck," "unvibrated." There also the soul is aware of God but not perceiving Him. Longing is there, but longing has become a little lessened; the

soul is getting more and more enmeshed in bondage. God is becoming more and more invisible, although God is still with him. And then by and by the soul descends through further states. It is said that the stages I have spoken of, the level of the brow, of the throat, of the heart, all these are spiritual. Here the soul is still aware of God, still yearning for God, still directed towards God, but when it goes below the heart, then it forgets the existence of God, and its direction is towards the opposite, towards matter.

Next in the downward journey is a center on the level of the navel. Then through two other centers we finally reach the base of the spinal column. It is said that in that last stage God has completely disappeared to the soul. The soul has become aware of form more and more, until it is fully enclosed in the consciousness of its own form, particularly of its gross form—the body and the mind as subservient to the body—and therefore it perceives everything in terms of the body or in terms of matter. God has come down there. Divine Energy, which has brought the individual soul to this lowest point, is, as it were, lying asleep there, unwanted.

It is as though two friends started out on a journey; one was exceedingly dependent upon the other, and not only dependent, completely satisfied in the other. He said, "I don't want to travel. I am satisfied with you, living with you. I don't want

anything else. But let us take the journey anyhow." So the two took the journey. For part of the journey, the first friend was still full of the other one; he looked only at the face of his friend. Then in the next stage of the journey he forgot his friend; he began to look this way and that way, began to get interested in other things. Then he ran this way and that and left his friend behind. The friend still went along, but because he was not wanted anymore he sat down. That is *kuṇḍalinī* for you.

Where is the soul now? The soul is in the lower three stages, or centers. Our philosophers call the lowest center *mūlādhāra*, that is to say, "basic receptacle," because it is there that this *kuṇḍalinī*, this Divine Energy, is waiting for the soul to call it; it is lying there waiting—inactive. They say it is lying in three and a half coils, with its face bent. (It is out of that description that the idea of a serpent and the term *Serpent Power* have come.) They say it is not altogether inactive. How can God become altogether inactive? It makes murmuring sounds; it is not completely asleep. If it were completely asleep, then the soul would be without support and would be totally lost, but even in this gross, ignorant state, the soul seems to have some incipient wisdom, and that wisdom seems to guide it, gradually and unknown to itself, to a higher state. So they say that this accompanying Divinity is not altogether asleep or unconscious in the

lowest center; it is a little conscious, and that is what is making the soul behave. Well, this is the present situation. Of course, the whole journey as our philosophers describe it pertains not only to the gross state of the soul, but also to the subtle state, and I ought to have described the causal and subtle states that the soul passes through in order to reach this gross state. But then the description would have become so complex that I have omitted these things. Anyhow, here we are.

In this state the soul is concerned with the lowest three centers. Its base is the lowest center, and lying in that lowest center, it functions in the two next higher centers, and these three are mixed up together. What does the soul do here? It is said that it is essentially conscious of *āhāra*, *nidrā*, *maithuna*—eating, sleeping, and procreation. You may put a fine gloss on it; a building may have all kinds of fancy decorations and colors, but you know it is built essentially of stone or brick or wood. Similarly, as long as a person ranges in these three planes only, he is behaving essentially like an animal—of course better than the so-called subhuman animals, but an animal still. His energies are spent in procuring food, eating food, enjoying food, and digesting food; in resting the body, or in enjoying sex pleasure. That is how our philosophers describe the present so-called normal state, and although such a description of

a human being does not sound very dignified, there is a great deal of truth in it.

### 3

Now let us think here of the ascent of the soul. How does this ascent take place? You see, the soul somehow becomes aware of its higher destiny, of its higher nature. How? Three ways are possible. Probably this accompanying Divinity, which is as it were lying asleep, becomes a little more awake; it is no longer just murmuring, it is talking loudly enough now. They say that sometimes happens. If you say, "How does it happen? There must be some rhyme or reason about it," I would call it the grace of God: there is no rhyme or reason in the grace of God. Something happens; you find that that which was lying asleep has wakened, has begun to stimulate you. When the mind craves higher things, it means that the *kuṇḍalinī* is speaking a little louder.

You ask yourself, "What am I doing here? I don't have to spend all my time sleeping and eating and doing all kinds of things. What good is it? Where does it lead me? Maybe there are better things to do." You may remember someone who lived the kind of life that is suggesting itself to you; then you read of spiritual ideas, and your mind takes hold of them;

they have meaning for you. That is one way.

Another way—time and experience do it. When you have experienced the same thing over and over, you get tired of it; however good it is, you don't want it—like furniture, even good furniture, that you have had for ten years. Every morning, every noon, every evening same stuff, same color; you get tired of it. All finite things experienced long enough will disgust you, rest assured. Disgust you! So some advise: go to it; after you have eaten and drunk your fill, you will say, "Brother, no more. No more." So out of long experience in the lower states the soul looks upwards for something else. There are these two ways; it may happen through divine grace or it may happen through experience.

There is a third way, and that is self-effort. For example, some of you might be impressed by the truth of what I am telling you. You may say, "What this man says seems to be reasonable. Well, if it is reasonable, we should do something about it." So you read about God, deliberately try to think of higher things. You are not feeling impelled to do it through dissatisfaction; nor is the grace of God making you do it. No, you deliberately take it up. It is hard work, interest flags; you find it becomes just meaningless; but if you persist in it, it begins to have substance and strength and reality.

Many people think, however, that unless some dissatisfaction with our ordinary experience has

come and unless there is a little genuine desire, which you might call the grace of God and a prompting of *kuṇḍalinī*, you would not go on with this self-effort. You may persevere for a few days, then no more. But even that is good. You see, maybe fifteen, twenty years later, maybe two lives later, you will again hear or read something. You will try it again—this time for two years. Then you will give it up. Twice you have tried, the third time the impression has become too deep to be thrown off easily. It has got you. So we say that if for one moment the mind turns towards God, that is valuable, even if you forget it the next moment. Everything spiritual is good. But however that may be, there are ways in which through your own effort you can make *kuṇḍalinī* wake up. Sometimes those practices are drastic. I know that in this country people have taught them, but since they are of such potency, they should not be undertaken by anyone and everyone without proper preparation. Powerful things are powerful, and unless you have the power to control them and direct them, they can wreck you. You should be very careful when you undertake them. But there is a safe way. We say in India if a person has become established in *viveka* and *vairāgya*—in discrimination between the real and the unreal and in dispassion for that which is unreal and perishable—then he can undertake any drastic practice he wants; body and mind will sustain the

effect of it. But up until then, your body and mind will play tricks on you. They have wanted to go back to the unreal, and when you force them to go to the real, they don't like it. They say, "All right, we shall wait our chance!" When you give them that chance, mind looks at the body, body looks at the mind—and there you are!

You see, spiritual practice is an art as well as a science. That is to say, it is an art based on the science—on the facts—of spiritual existence, and while that science and its art are as sure and as exact as any other science and its corresponding art, the science is itself extremely subtle, and the spiritual aspirant doesn't know enough about it; nor does he know much about how the art follows from the science or which art follows from which fact of spiritual life. Therefore he has to be guided.

But if the body and mind have reached the state of *viveka* and *vairāgya*, then these practices can be undertaken, and good results quickly come. You can stimulate the *kuṇḍalinī* and awaken it. You can make it start its upward journey. Here God says, as it were, "Finished. Creation is finished for you. Come on, let us go back." That is it! God is forever with the soul. Forever, forever. In its downward journey as well as in its upward journey, forever with the soul.

In the upward, return journey the soul becomes more and more aware of God. Just as in the downward journey we become more and more

identified with matter, we now become more and more disidentified with this mental-physical form, which is the gross state. As a result we rise to the subtle state; then we find that we are really souls, separate from body and mind, and not as separate from one another as we had thought; nor are we so distant from God. We begin to feel a nearness. And then comes a further transcendence, and we go beyond even the subtle state and come to the causal state, where we feel we are Godlike in nature. The form really is so transparent that it is not any obstruction at all, and we feel one with one another and one with God. Here all the souls and God become as it were bound up in one grand unity. But that is not the highest. The highest is still beyond this causal state.

That is the general process of the ascent of the soul, but let us here consider the details. The fact is that until the soul has reached a certain stage in the return journey, it is not tangibly aware of God's presence, although it recognizes through things that happen that there is something to depend upon. It is in that stage, therefore, that religions teach us to have faith in God. But faith is not the last word. What happens is this, when this upward journey begins, quickly the soul goes beyond the first three stages. As I said, the soul's preoccupation was with the lowest center as well as with the two centers above it. All three together constitute the animal existence of the soul. When

*kuṇḍalinī* wakes up, it means that the soul is going to give up these animal functions. I do not mean that at that time a person does not eat or sleep, but he does give up sex life. As regards eating and sleeping, they also become minimized. He no longer eats to enjoy food, but only for sustenance. Sleep becomes less, and even when the body sleeps, it is not overcome. More than that, mind is not overcome by the unconsciousness of sleep. As a matter of fact, as you grow spiritually you notice that sleep becomes an even higher state than your waking state—because there you are protected from any invasions from the outside. In sleep you do not see or hear; your sense life is blocked, your mind becomes free from these disturbances and reaches the calm state of meditation. So sleep becomes more and more like meditation, and when you come out of it, you often have the feeling not only of the refreshment of sound sleep, but also of the joy and quieting that is characteristic of deep meditation.

Well, when you become free of those animal functions, you come to *anāhata*, the level of the heart. Here it seems as if a new world has opened before you. It is as if something has been taken off the face of the earth; the gross appearance has been, as it were, peeled off, and the whole thing appears new, everything seems to have another dimension and depth in it—not a material dimension, but a spiritual dimension—and you begin to

feel the faint presence of God in everything; the light of God flashes before you—you actually perceive this, actually see it. It has nothing to do with ordinary light; it is another kind. Compared with it, all these lights—bright sunlight, the lightning flash—are just nothing, are like darkness. It is living, soothing light. To have that vision your mind has to be quiet to begin with, and as a result of it, mind becomes more quiet, exceedingly quiet, and your whole being feels a sense of expansion. These experiences are characteristic of this first upper center,—the center of the heart. And here it is that faith is justified. Let no one remain satisfied with faith alone; as soon as possible it should be replaced by experience. Of course, experience gives you greater faith, but then you no longer have to emphasize faith. If you are experiencing God, you know that He is there; direct experience makes Him real to you; you can never again doubt His presence.

Sometimes when I speak on the subject "Things We Must Accomplish before We Die," I say that if you are interested in spiritual life, you should at least become established in this center of the heart. Here, as it were, you have come out of the world of darkness and have entered into the world of light. I admit you are only in the periphery of that world; you have not gone far into it, but you have come out of the other world, and that is something. If you accomplish at least this much,

henceforth your condition will be preeminently spiritual. You will be reborn under spiritually favorable conditions, your heart will crave for God, you will not think of worldly things; you will find life sweet and peaceful, and in the course of that new life you will accomplish an exceeding amount—spiritually, of course, because that is the only worthwhile accomplishment. So before you depart this life you should not have any of these nonsensical things clinging to you, you should be sure you have gotten rid of them. I say that is the least one should do. One should do more.

What more should one do? The next center is called the center of the throat; when the soul reaches it, it can talk about nothing but God, can hear about nothing else. They put it this way: This is the seat of the goddess of wisdom, and when the soul reaches that state, it becomes filled with wisdom; all spiritual and metaphysical problems become solved for it. The soul says to itself, "There is no darkness for me any more. I know all." And when that person speaks it seems as if a torrent of wisdom is pouring through him from an inexhaustible reservoir. This state is reached when no more attraction to the world remains in the soul, the last remnant has gone.

When we are at the level of the heart, something of our attachment to the world is still left, and so they say that the soul might go back to a lower stage. There is that danger; it is said,

therefore, that when one has reached that stage of the upward journey one should be exceedingly cautious. Unfortunately, we become just the opposite. You see, when the soul reaches the level of the heart there comes a wonderful sense of relief and freedom, a dead weight has fallen off, all past karmas have relaxed their hold, life has become easy—and the soul becomes incautious. If the teacher tells you not to do a certain thing, you are apt to rebel: "Why does he nag me? I am not a child, I can take care of myself. I have a free mind. Why not do it? It is a good thing." Exceeding egotism may come: one should be particularly cautious about the ego. That is why in spiritual life obedience to the teacher is inculcated from the very beginning. You make a habit of it; then if your mind says, "Oh, no, he's wrong," out of that habit you at once say, "No, he has asked me; it is my duty to obey the teacher. Whatever he says is right." Of course I am not speaking here of a mechanical habit, but of a respectful habit, and that habit alone will save you. If you begin freethinking, you are gone: it is there that the mind looks at the body and body looks at the mind.

They say that the journey from the level of the heart to the level of the throat is the most strenuous part. During the lower part of the journey you have lived the common life. Only when you are spiritually awakened do you really struggle toward a spiritual goal, and that awakening

comes when you have reached the heart level.

By spiritual practice, by continually concentrating your mind on God, by withdrawing the mind from material things, you make the soul rise higher and higher. God also tends you. Many people say, "Where is God? Why does He not save me? Why does He not protect me?" He does, you see, He does. He calls you; He tells you, "Don't do that; follow this." But you become arrogant at that time, or careless, and so you don't listen to Him. But the beauty of it is, He will not let you rest in that world of darkness. If you go back to the lower life you will find it is blasted for good. It is as though a man wants to eat all kinds of rich dishes, but he has a bad liver—everything tastes like straw. Glamor is off the face of that world. You see, if there has been an error and you have discovered it, you will always know it for a mistaken thing. Even though it appears before you, you will not take it seriously. That is the peculiarity of all knowledge: once you discover something to be an error, you can never again take it to be the truth. Compared with higher experience this present experience is all wrong; however hard you try, it will never have the glamor and the attraction it had before you discovered what it truly is.

You may ask, "Then why is it that the soul goes back to the lower life?" To finish the lesson. It somehow has an idea that there must be something wonderful about it. You know, we

always think like that. We look back upon what is behind us, and we think maybe it was not so bad; maybe if we had behaved rightly it would have been good. Maybe we made a mistake. So the soul goes back, and he finds he did not make the mistake; it was the lower life that was mistaken. In order to learn that lesson the soul goes back. The Lord says, "You want to go back home? All right, go back." He goes, and he finds things are not what he thought them to be. Then he comes out, and the Lord says, "Did you find what you wanted? Well, then, come along now." He goes on with God eagerly now, and this time he will remain on a higher plane. And that is of course the real achievement.

Once the soul has reached the level of the throat there is no fear for it. It may come down a little, but it will never go below the level of the heart into the world of darkness. Never. So you are secure. If you want to be very concrete about spiritual achievement, you could say that higher consciousness has here asserted itself. You are now living in a higher plane all the time. What has happened to the other mind, which is usually called the lower mind? It has become transformed. In that state, there is no longer any kind of lower mind. Even if you eat, even if you sleep, even if you see this world, it is not like eating and sleeping and perceiving as before. Another element has entered into everything now: you don't seek material things for themselves; you see the presence of a

higher truth in them. Probably that perception cannot be called sense knowledge or sense experience, truly speaking; whatever you find here in your present state is only a little afterglow of what you find in a concentrated and intense measure in that high state; and in that state you live. You are no longer limited, no longer finite, no longer bound by time and space and the ordinary laws of nature. Your body may be bound, but sometimes even the limitations of your body and mind drop away. Extraordinary things happen. A person can see and hear what is not given to ordinary eyes to see or hear. He can know the future and remember the past in ways the ordinary senses or the mind cannot do. That is called psychic achievement. It has been found, however, that such achievement doesn't make the slightest difference to spiritual growth and that it is unnecessary. Sometimes those powers come unsought. You don't pay any attention lest you become sidetracked, but those things do come. You become transformed in every way; body, mind, intelligence, will, emotions—all become transformed. You have become a great soul, *mahāpuruṣa*—that is to say, "superman" in the true sense of the word.

The next stage in the return journey is the point between the eyebrows. Here you have the first union with God, *savikalpa samādhi* we call it. *Samādhi* means "at-onement with God"; external

consciousness has gone. Then last of all comes the highest experience, which is identification with the Absolute.

#### 4

Those of our philosophers who have studied these matters say there is a nerve in the spinal column along which this return journey takes place. The Sanskrit name for that nerve is *suṣumṇā*. There are two other nerves outside the spinal column. The one on the left is called *iḍā*; it has a kind of smoky gray color, so they say. The one on the right is called *piṅgalā* and has a somewhat reddish color. They say that in the average man, who has become reduced to the status of an animal, consciousness functions along these two nerves, *iḍā* and *piṅgalā*, or as you would say, consciousness functions along the physiological nervous system.

You must admit that it is through this nervous system that the soul, or mind, communicates itself to the body and through the body to the outside world; therefore these nerves are very important in this doctrine. As long as we allow consciousness or mind to function along the present nervous system, there is no hope for us to realize anything higher than we realize now. There will be no qualitative difference. We might know a few more

facts. We might argue about things a little more, talk a little louder—no other difference. They say that you have to withdraw consciousness from your present nervous system and make it move along the central nerve, the *suṣumṇā*, before there can be a qualitative difference in perception or knowledge. In an ordinary person, one cannot even see the *suṣumṇā*; if you dissect his body, you would not find it. But it is there, and it grows when this higher consciousness has developed. But while it is said that the nerve in the spinal column actually develops physiologically, the “lotuses” are psychic; it is through psychic development that one becomes aware of these centers of consciousness. They say that within the *suṣumṇā* there is another, finer nerve, called *vajriṇī*, and within that there is another, called *citriṇī*, and within that there is a threadlike, infinitely bright nerve called *brahmanāḍī*—“nerve of Brahman.” It is along this last that all these “lotuses,” or psychic centers, are strung, and it is along this that the soul gradually makes its upward journey. That is how they explain the doctrine of the *kuṇḍalinī*.

I cannot, of course, go into the niceties of this doctrine, nor can I tell you of the practices to be undertaken in its pursuance. I should mention here, however, that if you grow spiritually you actually feel a sort of creeping sensation along the spinal column. This is not indicative of the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī*, but rather of the

withdrawal of consciousness from the nerve ends. It is a good sign. In course of time, when in meditation you try to withdraw consciousness, you will also begin to feel shooting pains in your eyes. You know, the eyes are always trying to grab the outside world of forms—the world of shapes and colors; the optical nerves are highly sensitive, and consciousness is strongly tied up there. Similarly, the hands are eager to grab things, and you will find that when consciousness is trying to rise to a higher level and to withdraw from the lower level, you will feel a sort of receding movement in your fingers. You will begin to feel these creeping sensations all over the body. You feel it in the lips, in the tongue, in the nose; you feel it in the eyes, in the fingers, in the feet. Wherever consciousness has gone to contact the outside world, there the nerves have as it were a surplus of consciousness tied up, and from there consciousness withdraws. Afterwards, it withdraws from the skin all over our body because the tactile sense is pervasive; most of our skin is the organ of the sense of touch.

When such withdrawal has become very definite and sufficiently tangible, when there has actually begun a return movement for the soul, when most of our consciousness is looking towards God and not towards the world, then the *kuṇḍalinī* wakes up and takes over. When that happens, there is an entirely different sensation,

and you will find a new world opens before you.

Some of you might ask here, "Have all who have known God felt this? Why is it that Christian or Mohammedan mystics don't speak about it? Not even all Hindu mystics have spoken about it; the Hindu *ṛṣis* didn't speak about it in the Upaniṣads." Well, quite possibly they didn't feel it. One reason is that they were not observant enough. You see, as I mentioned in the previous lecture and also in the second lecture of this series, to know God and to be observant of concomitant conditions are two different things. Another reason is that all spiritual experiences do not take place in everyone in the same way. There is always a rise of consciousness, and while there are always some physical concomitants, they are not felt with the same vigor or in the same measure in everyone. I myself admit that if we follow a certain doctrine, then the facts pertaining to that doctrine become more tangible to us in our experience than those not corroborated or mentioned by our own system of belief. That may be the explanation of why some have felt the rise of the *kuṇḍalinī* and others not; but so many people have confirmed this doctrine from their personal experience that you cannot gainsay the facts; you cannot deny that there is such a thing as this *kuṇḍalinī* lying asleep or unconscious in the lower part of our being; nor can you deny that this power leaves that lowest center and goes higher and higher until it reaches the head.

There was a disciple of whom Sri Ramakrishna had a very high opinion. He used to say, "He is a large fragment of Divinity." He came to Sri Ramakrishna when he was just a schoolboy, shortly before the Master passed away. His name was Purna—*pūrṇa* means complete, full, perfect—Sri Ramakrishna said, "He is the last of my disciples who were preordained to come to me. With the coming of Purna the list has become *pūrṇa*, complete." Well, he became a householder and held a very important job in the government secretariat, but his spirituality shone unclouded all the time. In later life he said to one of the devotees, "You know, I am conscious only of my head. The rest of my body I am not conscious of at all." That was his natural state.

This, they say, is what happens: When you start the return journey and God takes the soul upwards, when there has been a complete withdrawal from one stage, then you are not aware of that part of the body at all, it becomes unconscious. Mechanically it may behave, but you cannot feel it any more. You might say, "That is not existing nicely. Who wants to be aware only of his head?" A man wants to flex his muscles before a mirror and think what a wonderful Grecian figure he has. Poor man, what does he know? Flexing his muscles! In three days those muscles will become strings and then they will become reduced to a handful of ashes—and he is feeling proud of them!

The only thing to be proud of is one's own true nature. A man who has caught even a distant glimpse of his true nature will hate to become associated with his body. It is said of Plotinus that he was ashamed to be associated with a body. He was a true man: he had found what he truly was. It is as if a great man had been imprisoned in a foul cell by a worthless person and kept in filth and darkness. The spirit is imprisoned in this body, and one becomes proud of this! That just shows perversion of mind. I do not mean that you have to neglect this body or think ill of it. But why make much of it? Keep it clean, feed it, take care of it. Finished. Only a man without discrimination will make much of the body and give it the highest place in his estimation.

Now, don't say to me, "Well, that might be the Hindu ideal; we have the Greek ideal." Greek ideal! All I can say is the Greeks did not know enough. We should have both ideals. We should be able to say, "Yes, I have seen the Spirit, I always see the Spirit. I am the Spirit." Then that knowledge will be reflected in our daily life and in everything we do or say or feel. That is the true man.

In the telling of it, it sounds awfully queer that a person is aware only of his head and nothing else. But it is a wonderful condition to be in. We, being aware of ourselves as the body, have become like a faint spark. He, being aware only of his head, has become like a shining sun in the infinite sky; that is

the difference. When the *kuṇḍalinī* wakes up, when the sleeping Divinity wakes up in man, then step by step, step by step there comes a transformation of the mind, transformation of consciousness until we have regained our own true being, our higher consciousness, in which alone is found the eternal truth, the eternal reality and, through such finding, eternal satisfaction. That is the destiny of the soul.



*In this series of eight lectures Swami Ashokananda traces the "descent" of the individual from his true divine status to his present condition and describes his "ascent" back to God. The Swami explains how the various aspects of man's relative existence can be instrumental in the realization of his perfect being, which, in fact, he has never lost. The series is, in short, an explanation of the involution and evolution of the soul. One finds in these lectures the Vedantic answers to many of the Big Questions that we have asked since we first started asking. It provides not only an intellectual understanding of the soul's journey, but practical counsel on how to speed it along.*



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