Chapter VIII

The Supreme Will

IN THE light of this progressive manifestation of the Spirit, first apparently bound in the Ignorance, then free in the power and wisdom of the Infinite, we can better understand the great and crowning injunction of the Gita to the Karma-yogin, “Abandoning all dharmas, all principles and laws and rules of conduct, take refuge in me alone.” All standards and rules are temporary constructions founded upon the needs of the ego in its transition from Matter to Spirit. These makeshifts have a relative imperative So long as we rest satisfied in the stages of transition, content with the physical and vital life, attached to the mental movement, or even fixed in the ranges of the mental plane that are touched by the spiritual lustres. But beyond is the unwalled wideness of a supramental infinite consciousness and there all temporary structures cease. It is not possible to enter utterly into the spiritual truth of the Eternal and Infinite if we have not the faith and courage to trust ourselves into the hands of the Lord of all things and the Friend of all creatures and leave utterly behind us our mental limits and measures. At one moment we must plunge without hesitation, reserve, fear or scruple into the ocean of the free, the infinite, the Absolute. After the Law, Liberty; after the personal, after the general, after the universal standards there is something greater, the impersonal plasticity, the divine freedom, the transcendent force and the supernal impulse. After the strait path of the ascent the wide plateaus on the summit.

There are three stages of the ascent, — at the bottom the bodily life enslaved to the pressure of necessity and desire, in the middle the mental, higher emotional and psychic rule that feels after greater interests, aspirations, experiences, at the summits first a deeper psychic and spiritual state and then a supramental eternal consciousness in which all our aspirations and seekings
discover their own intimate significance. In the bodily life first desire and need and then the practical good of the individual and the society are the governing consideration, the dominant force. In the mental life ideas and ideals rule, ideas that are half-lights wearing the garb of Truth, ideals formed by the mind as a result of a growing but still imperfect intuition and experience. Whenever the mental life prevails and the bodily diminishes its brute insistence, man the mental being feels pushed by the urge of mental Nature to mould in the sense of the idea or the ideal the life of the individual, and in the end even the vaguer more complex life of the society is forced to undergo this subtle process. In the spiritual life, or when a higher power than Mind has manifested and taken possession of the nature, these limited motive-forces recede, dwindle, tend to disappear. The spiritual or supramental Self, the Divine Being, the supreme and immanent Reality, must be alone the Lord within us and shape freely our final development according to the highest, widest, most integral expression possible of the law of our nature. In the end that nature acts in the perfect Truth and its spontaneous freedom; for it obeys only the luminous power of the Eternal. The individual has nothing further to gain, no desire to fulfil; he has become a portion of the impersonality or the universal personality of the Eternal. No other object than the manifestation and play of the Divine Spirit in life and the maintenance and conduct of the world in its march towards the divine goal can move him to action. Mental ideas, opinions, constructions are his no more; for his mind has fallen into silence, it is only a channel for the Light and Truth of the divine knowledge. Ideals are too narrow for the vastness of his spirit; it is the ocean of the Infinite that flows through him and moves him for ever.

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Whoever sincerely enters the path of works, must leave behind him the stage in which need and desire are the first law of our acts. For whatever desires still trouble his being, he must, if he accepts the high aim of Yoga, put them away from him into the
hands of the Lord within us. The supreme Power will deal with them for the good of the sadhaka and for the good of all. In effect, we find that once this surrender is done, — always provided the rejection is sincere, — egoistic indulgence of desire may for some time recur under the continued impulse of past nature but only in order to exhaust its acquired momentum and to teach the embodied being in his most unteachable part, his nervous, vital, emotional nature, by the reactions of desire, by its grief and unrest bitterly contrasted with calm periods of the higher peace or marvellous movements of divine Ananda, that egoistic desire is not a law for the soul that seeks liberation or aspires to its own original god-nature. Afterwards the element of desire in those impulsions will be thrown away or persistently eliminated by a constant denying and transforming pressure. Only the pure force of action in them (pravr̥tti) justified by an equal delight in all work and result that is inspired or imposed from above will be preserved in the happy harmony of a final perfection. To act, to enjoy is the normal law and right of the nervous being; but to choose by personal desire its action and enjoyment is only its ignorant will, not its right. Alone the supreme and universal Will must choose; action must change into a dynamic movement of that Will; enjoyment must be replaced by the play of a pure spiritual Ananda. All personal will is either a temporary delegation from on high or a usurpation by the ignorant Asura.

The social law, that second term of our progress, is a means to which the ego is subjected in order that it may learn discipline by subordination to a wider collective ego. This law may be quite empty of any moral content and may express only the needs or the practical good of the society as each society conceives it. Or it may express those needs and that good, but modified and coloured and supplemented by a higher moral or ideal law. It is binding on the developing but not yet perfectly developed individual in the shape of social duty, family obligation, communal or national demand, so long as it is not in conflict with his growing sense of the higher Right. But the sadhaka of the Karmayoga will abandon this also to the Lord of works. After he has made this surrender, his social impulses and judgments will,
like his desires, only be used for their exhaustion or, it may be, so far as they are still necessary for a time to enable him to identify his lower mental nature with mankind in general or with any grouping of mankind in its works and hopes and aspirations. But after that brief time is over, they will be withdrawn and a divine government will alone abide. He will be identified with the Divine and with others only through the divine consciousness and not through the mental nature.

For, even after he is free, the sadhaka will be in the world and to be in the world is to remain in works. But to remain in works without desire is to act for the good of the world in general or for the kind or the race or for some new creation to be evolved on the earth or some work imposed by the Divine Will within him. And this must be done either in the framework provided by the environment or the grouping in which he is born or placed or else in one which is chosen or created for him by a divine direction. Therefore in our perfection there must be nothing left in the mental being which conflicts with or prevents our sympathy and free self-identification with the kind, the group or whatever collective expression of the Divine he is meant to lead, help or serve. But in the end it must become a free self-identification through identity with the Divine and not a mental bond or moral tie of union or a vital association dominated by any kind of personal, social, national, communal or credal egoism. If any social law is obeyed, it will not be from physical necessity or from the sense of personal or general interest or for expediency or because of the pressure of the environment or from any sense of duty, but solely for the sake of the Lord of works and because it is felt or known to be the Divine Will that the social law or rule or relation as it stands can still be kept as a figure of the inner life and the minds of men must not be disturbed by its infringement. If, on the other hand, the social law, rule or relation is disregarded, that too will not be for the indulgence of desire, personal will or personal opinion, but because a greater rule is felt that expresses the law of the Spirit or because it is known that there must be in the march of the divine All-Will a movement towards the changing, exceeding or
abolition of existing laws and forms for the sake of a freer larger life necessary to the world's progress.

There is still left the moral law or the ideal and these, even to many who think themselves free, appear for ever sacred and intangible. But the sadhaka, his gaze turned always to the heights, will abandon them to Him whom all ideals seek imperfectly and fragmentarily to express; all moral qualities are only a poor and rigid travesty of his spontaneous and illimitable perfection. The bondage to sin and evil passes away with the passing of nervous desire; for it belongs to the quality of vital passion, impulsion or drive of propensity in us (rajoguna) and is extinguished with the transformation of that mode of Nature. But neither must the aspirant remain subject to the gilded or golden chain of a conventional or a habitual or a mentally ordered or even a high or clear sattwic virtue. That will be replaced by something pro-
founder and more essential than the minor inadequate thing that men call virtue. The original sense of the word was manhood and this is a much larger and deeper thing than the moral mind and its structures. The culmination of Karmayoga is a yet higher and deeper state that may perhaps be called “soulhood”, — for the soul is greater than the man; a free soulhood spontaneously welling out in works of a supreme Truth and Love will replace human virtue. But this supreme Truth cannot be forced to inhabit the petty edifices of the practical reason or even confined in the more dignified constructions of the larger ideative reason that imposes its representations as if they were pure truth on the limited human intelligence. This supreme Love will not necessarily be consistent, much less will it be synonymous, with the partial and feeble, ignorant and emotion-ridden movements of human attraction, sympathy and pity. The petty law cannot bind the vaster movement; the mind’s partial attainment cannot dictate its terms to the soul’s supreme fulfilment.

At first, the higher Love and Truth will fulfil its movement in the sadhaka according to the essential law or way of his own nature. For that is the special aspect of the divine Nature, the particular power of the supreme Shakti, out of which his soul has emerged into the Play, not limited indeed by the forms of this law
or way, for the soul is infinite. But still its stuff of nature bears that stamp, evolves fluently along those lines or turns around the spiral curves of that dominating influence. He will manifest the divine Truth-movement according to the temperament of the sage or the lion-like fighter or the lover and enjoyer or the worker and servant or in any combination of essential attributes (gunas) that may constitute the form given to his being by its own inner urge. It is this self-nature playing freely in his acts which men will see in him and not a conduct cut, chalked out, artificially regulated, by any lesser rule or by any law from outside.

But there is a yet higher attainment, there is an infinity (ānanyatā) in which even this last limitation is exceeded, because the nature is utterly fulfilled and its boundaries vanish. There the soul lives without any boundaries; for it uses all forms and moulds according to the divine Will in it, but it is not restrained, it is not tied down, it is not imprisoned in any power or form that it uses. This is the summit of the path of works and this the utter liberty of the soul in its actions. In reality, it has there no actions; for all its activities are a rhythm of the Supreme and sovereignly proceed from That alone like a spontaneous music out of the Infinite.

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The total surrender, then, of all our actions to a supreme and universal Will, an unconditioned and standardless surrender of all works to the government of something eternal within us which will replace the ordinary working of the ego-nature, is the way and end of Karmayoga. But what is this divine supreme Will and how can it be recognised by our deluded instruments and our blind prisoner intelligence?

Ordinarily, we conceive of ourselves as a separate “I” in the universe that governs a separate body and mental and moral nature, chooses in full liberty its own self-determined actions and is independent and therefore sole master of its works and responsible. It is not easy for the ordinary mind, the mind that has not thought nor looked deeply into its own constitution and
constituents, it is difficult even for minds that have thought but have no spiritual vision and experience, to imagine how there can be anything else in us truer, deeper and more powerful than this apparent “I” and its empire. But the very first step towards self-knowledge as towards the true knowledge of phenomena is to get behind the apparent truth of things and find the real but masked, essential and dynamic truth which their appearances cover.

This ego or “I” is not a lasting truth, much less our essential part; it is only a formation of Nature, a mental form of thought-centralisation in the perceiving and discriminating mind, a vital form of the centralisation of feeling and sensation in our parts of life, a form of physical conscious reception centralising substance and function of substance in our bodies. All that we internally are is not ego, but consciousness, soul or spirit. All that we externally and superficially are and do is not ego but Nature. An executive cosmic force shapes us and dictates through our temperament and environment and mentality so shaped, through our individualised formulation of the cosmic energies, our actions and their results. Truly, we do not think, will or act but thought occurs in us, impulse and act occur in us; our ego-sense gathers around itself, refers to itself all this flow of natural activities. It is cosmic Force, it is Nature that forms the thought, imposes the will, imparts the impulse. Our body, mind and ego are a wave of that sea of force in action and do not govern it, but by it are governed and directed. The sadhaka in his progress towards truth and self-knowledge must come to a point where the soul opens its eyes of vision and recognises this truth of ego and this truth of works. He gives up the idea of a mental, vital, physical “I” that acts or governs action; he recognises that Prakriti, Force of cosmic nature following her fixed modes, is the one and only worker in him and in all things and creatures.

But what has fixed the modes of Nature? Or who has originated and governs the movements of Force? There is a Consciousness — or a Conscient — behind that is the lord, witness, knower, enjoyer, upholder and source of sanction for her works;
this consciousness is Soul or Purusha. Prakriti shapes the action in us; Purusha in her or behind her witnesses, assents, bears and upholds it. Prakriti forms the thought in our minds; Purusha in her or behind her knows the thought and the truth in it. Prakriti determines the result of the action; Purusha in her or behind her enjoys or suffers the consequence. Prakriti forms mind and body, labours over them, develops them; Purusha upholds the formation and evolution and sanctions each step of her works. Prakriti applies the Will-force which works in things and men; Purusha sets that Will-force to work by his vision of that which should be done. This Purusha is not the surface ego, but a silent Self, a source of Power, an originator and receiver of Knowledge behind the ego. Our mental “I” is only a false reflection of this Self, this Power, this Knowledge. This Purusha or supporting Consciousness is therefore the cause, recipient and support of all Nature’s works, but he is not himself the doer. Prakriti, Nature-Force, in front and Shakti, Conscious-Force, Soul-Force behind her,—for these two are the inner and outer faces of the universal Mother,—account for all that is done in the universe. The universal Mother, Prakriti-Shakti, is the one and only worker.

Purusha-Prakriti, Consciousness-Force, Soul supporting Nature,—for the two even in their separation are one and inseparable,—are at once a universal and a transcendent Power. But there is something in the individual too which is not the mental ego, something that is one in essence with this greater reality: it is a pure reflection or portion of the one Purusha; it is the Soul Person or the embodied being, the individual self, Jivatman; it is the Self that seems to limit its power and knowledge so as to support an individual play of transcendent and universal Nature. In deepest reality the infinitely One is also infinitely multiple; we are not only a reflection or portion of That but we are That; our spiritual individuality — unlike our ego — does not preclude our universality and transcendence. But at present the soul or self in us intent on individualisation in Nature allows itself to be confused with the idea of the ego; it has to get rid of this ignorance, it has to know itself as a reflection or portion or being of the supreme and universal Self.
and solely a centre of its consciousness in the world-action. But this Jiva Purusha too is not the doer of works any more than the ego or the supporting consciousness of the Witness and Knower. Again and always it is the transcendent and universal Shakti who is the sole doer. But behind her is the one Supreme who manifests through her as the dual power, Purusha-Prakriti, Ishwara-Shakti. The Supreme becomes dynamic as the Shakti and is by her the sole originator and Master of works in the universe.

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If this is the truth of works, the first thing the sadhaka has to do is to recoil from the egoistic forms of activity and get rid of the sense of an “I” that acts. He has to see and feel that everything happens in him by the plastic conscious or subconscious or sometimes superconscious automatism of his mental and bodily instruments moved by the forces of spiritual, mental, vital and physical Nature. There is a personality on his surface that chooses and wills, submits and struggles, tries to make good in Nature or prevail over Nature, but this personality is itself a construction of Nature and so dominated, driven, determined by her that it cannot be free. It is a formation or expression of the Self in her,—it is a self of Nature rather than a self of Self, his natural and processive, not his spiritual and permanent being, a temporary constructed personality, not the

1 Ishwara-Shakti is not quite the same as Purusha-Prakriti; for Purusha and Prakriti are separate powers, but Ishwara and Shakti contain each other. Ishwara is Purusha who contains Prakriti and rules by the power of the Shakti within him. Shakti is Prakriti ensouled by Purusha and acts by the will of the Ishwara which is her own will and whose presence in her movement she carries always with her. The Purusha-Prakriti realisation is of the first utility to the seeker on the Way of Works; for it is the separation of the conscient being and the Energy and the subjection of the being to the mechanism of the Energy that are the efficient cause of our ignorance and imperfection; by this realisation the being can liberate himself from the mechanical action of the nature and become free and arrive at a first spiritual control over the nature. Ishwara-Shakti stands behind the relation of Purusha-Prakriti and its ignorant action and turns it to an evolutionary purpose. The Ishwara-Shakti realisation can bring participation in a higher dynamism and a divine working and a total unity and harmony of the being in a spiritual nature.
true immortal Person. It is that Person that he must become. He
must succeed in being inwardly quiescent, detach himself as the
observer from the outer active personality and learn the play
of the cosmic forces in him by standing back from all blinding
absorption in its turns and movements. Thus calm, detached, a
student of himself and a witness of his nature, he realises that
he is the individual soul who observes the works of Nature,
accepts tranquilly her results and sanctions or withholds his
sanction from the impulse to her acts. At present this soul or
Purusha is little more than an acquiescent spectator, influencing
perhaps the action and development of the being by the pressure
of its veiled consciousness, but for the most part delegating its
powers or a fragment of them to the outer personality,—in
fact to Nature, for this outer self is not lord but subject to her,
anâśa; but, once unveiled, it can make its sanction or refusal
effective, become the master of the action, dictate sovereignly a
change of Nature. Even if for a long time, as the result of fixed
association and past storage of energy, the habitual movement
takes place independent of the Purusha’s assent and even if the
sanctioned movement is persistently refused by Nature for want
of past habit, still he will discover that in the end his assent
or refusal prevails,—slowly with much resistance or quickly
with a rapid accommodation of her means and tendencies she
modifies herself and her workings in the direction indicated by
his inner sight or volition. Thus he learns in place of mental
control or egoistic will an inner spiritual control which makes
him master of the Nature-forces that work in him and not their
unconscious instrument or mechanic slave. Above and around
him is the Shakti, the universal Mother and from her he can
get all his inmost soul needs and wills if only he has a true
knowledge of her ways and a true surrender to the divine Will
in her. Finally, he becomes aware of that highest dynamic Self
within him and within Nature which is the source of all his
seeing and knowing, the source of the sanction, the source of
the acceptance, the source of the rejection. This is the Lord, the
Supreme, the One-in-all, Ishwara-Shakti, of whom his soul is a
portion, a being of that Being and a power of that Power. The
rest of our progress depends on our knowledge of the ways in which the Lord of works manifests his Will in the world and in us and executes them through the transcendent and universal Shakti.

The Lord sees in his omniscience the thing that has to be done. This seeing is his Will, it is a form of creative Power, and that which he sees the all-conscious Mother, one with him, takes into her dynamic self and embodies, and executive Nature-Force carries it out as the mechanism of their omnipotent omniscience. But this vision of what is to be and therefore of what is to be done arises out of the very being, pours directly out of the consciousness and delight of existence of the Lord, spontaneously, like light from the Sun. It is not our mortal attempt to see, our difficult arrival at truth of action and motive or just demand of Nature. When the individual soul is entirely at one in its being and knowledge with the Lord and directly in touch with the original Shakti, the transcendent Mother, the supreme Will can then arise in us too in the high divine manner as a thing that must be and is achieved by the spontaneous action of Nature. There is then no desire, no responsibility, no reaction; all takes place in the peace, calm, light, power of the supporting and enveloping and inhabiting Divine.

But even before that highest approach to identity is achieved, something of the supreme Will can manifest in us as an imperative impulsion, a God-driven action; we then act by a spontaneous self-determining Force but a fuller knowledge of meaning and aim arises only afterwards. Or the impulse to action may come as an inspiration or intuition, but rather in the heart and body than in the mind; here an effective sight enters in but the complete and exact knowledge is still deferred and comes, if at all, later. But the divine Will may descend too as a luminous single command or a total perception or a continuous current of perception of what is to be done into the will or into the thought or as a direction from above spontaneously fulfilled by the lower members. When the Yoga is imperfect, only some actions can be done in this way, or else a general action may so proceed but only during periods of exaltation and illumination. When the
Yoga is perfect, all action becomes of this character. We may
indeed distinguish three stages of a growing progress by which,
first, the personal will is occasionally or frequently enlightened
or moved by a supreme Will or conscious Force beyond it, then
constantly replaced and, last, identified and merged in that divine
Power-action. The first is the stage when we are still governed by
the intellect, heart and senses; these have to seek or wait for the
divine inspiration and guidance and do not always find or receive
it. The second is the stage when human intelligence is more and
more replaced by a high illumined or intuitive spiritualised mind,
the external human heart by the inner psychic heart, the senses
by a purified and selfless vital force. The third is the stage when
we rise even above spiritualised mind to the supramental levels.

In all three stages the fundamental character of the liberated
action is the same, a spontaneous working of Prakriti no longer
through or for the ego but at the will and for the enjoyment of
the supreme Purusha. At a higher level this becomes the Truth
of the absolute and universal Supreme expressed through the
individual soul and worked out consciously through the nature,
— no longer through a half-perception and a diminished or dis-
torted effectuation by the stumbling, ignorant and all-deforming
energy of lower nature in us but by the all-wise transcendent and
universal Mother.

The Lord has veiled himself and his absolute wisdom and
eternal consciousness in ignorant Nature-Force and suffers her
to drive the individual being, with its complicity, as the ego;
this lower action of Nature continues to prevail, often even in
spite of man’s half-lit imperfect efforts at a nobler motive and
a purer self-knowledge. Our human effort at perfection fails, or
progresses very incompletely, owing to the force of Nature’s past
actions in us, her past formations, her long-rooted associations;
it turns towards a true and high-climbing success only when
a greater Knowledge and Power than our own breaks through
the lid of our ignorance and guides or takes up our personal
will. For our human will is a misled and wandering ray that
has parted from the supreme Puissance. The period of slow
emergence out of this lower working into a higher light and
purer force is the valley of the shadow of death for the striver after perfection; it is a dreadful passage full of trials, sufferings, sorrows, obscurations, stumblings, errors, pitfalls. To abridge and alleviate this ordeal or to penetrate it with the divine delight faith is necessary, an increasing surrender of the mind to the knowledge that imposes itself from within and, above all, a true aspiration and a right and unflinching and sincere practice. “Practise unfalteringly,” says the Gita, “with a heart free from despondency,” the Yoga; for even though in the earlier stage of the path we drink deep of the bitter poison of internal discord and suffering, the last taste of this cup is the sweetness of the nectar of immortality and the honey-wine of an eternal Ananda.