Chapter IX

The Release from the Ego

THE FORMATION of a mental and vital ego tied to the body-sense was the first great labour of the cosmic Life in its progressive evolution; for this was the means it found for creating out of matter a conscious individual. The dissolution of this limiting ego is the one condition, the necessary means for this very same Life to arrive at its divine fruition: for only so can the conscious individual find either his transcendent self or his true Person. This double movement is usually represented as a fall and a redemption or a creation and a destruction,—the kindling of a light and its extinction or the formation first of a smaller temporary and unreal self and a release from it into our true self's eternal largeness. For human thought falls apart towards two opposite extremes: one, mundane and pragmatic, regards the fulfilment and satisfaction of the mental, vital and physical ego-sense individual or collective as the object of life and looks no farther, while the other, spiritual, philosophic or religious, regards the conquest of the ego in the interests of the soul, spirit or whatever be the ultimate entity, as the one thing supremely worth doing. Even in the camp of the ego there are two divergent attitudes which divide the mundane or materialist theory of the universe. One tendency of this thought regards the mental ego as a creation of our mentality which will be dissolved with the dissolution of mind by the death of the body; the one abiding truth is eternal Nature working in the race — this or another — and her purpose should be followed, not ours, — the fulfilment of the race, the collective ego, and not that of the individual should be the rule of life. Another trend of thought, more vitalistic in its tendencies, fixes on the conscious ego as the supreme achievement of Nature, no matter how transitory, ennobles it into a human representative of the Will-to-be and holds up its greatness and satisfaction as the highest aim of our
existence. In the more numerous systems that take their stand on some kind of religious thought or spiritual discipline there is a corresponding divergence. The Buddhist denies the existence of a real self or ego, admits no universal or transcendent Being. The Adwaitin declares the apparently individual soul to be none other than the supreme Self and Brahman, its individuality an illusion; the putting off of individual existence is the only true release. Other systems assert, in flat contradiction of this view, the eternal persistence of the human soul; a basis of multiple consciousness in the One or else a dependent but still separate entity, it is constant, real, imperishable.

Amidst these various and conflicting opinions the seeker of the Truth has to decide for himself which shall be for him the Knowledge. But if our aim is a spiritual release or a spiritual fulfilment, then the exceeding of this little mould of ego is imperative. In human egoism and its satisfaction there can be no divine culmination and deliverance. A certain purification from egoism is the condition even of ethical progress and elevation, for social good and perfection; much more is it indispensable for inner peace, purity and joy. But a much more radical deliverance, not only from egoism but from ego-idea and ego-sense, is needed if our aim is to raise human into divine nature. Experience shows that, in proportion as we deliver ourselves from the limiting mental and vital ego, we command a wider life, a larger existence, a higher consciousness, a happier soul-state, even a greater knowledge, power and scope. Even the aim which the most mundane philosophy pursues, the fulfilment, perfection, satisfaction of the individual, is best assured not by satisfying the narrow ego but by finding freedom in a higher and larger self. There is no happiness in smallness of the being, says the Scripture, it is with the large being that happiness comes. The ego is by its nature a smallness of being; it brings contraction of the consciousness and with the contraction limitation of knowledge, disabling ignorance, — confinement and a diminution of power and by that diminution incapacity and weakness, — scission of oneness and by that scission disharmony and failure of sympathy and love and understanding, — inhibition or fragmentation of
delight of being and by that fragmentation pain and sorrow. To recover what is lost we must break out of the walls of ego. The ego must either disappear in impersonality or fuse into a larger I: it must fuse into the wider cosmic “I” which comprehends all these smaller selves or the transcendent of which even the cosmic self is a diminished image.

But this cosmic self is spiritual in essence and in experience; it must not be confused with the collective existence, with any group soul or the life and body of a human society or even of all mankind. The subordination of the ego to the progress and happiness of the human race is now a governing idea in the world’s thought and ethics; but this is a mental and moral and not a spiritual ideal. For that progress is a series of constant mental, vital and physical vicissitudes, it has no firm spiritual content, and offers no sure standing-ground to the soul of man. The consciousness of collective humanity is only a larger comprehensive edition or a sum of individual egos. Made of the same substance, in the same mould of nature, it has not in it any greater light, any more eternal sense of itself, any purer source of peace, joy and deliverance. It is rather even more tortured, troubled and obscured, certainly more vague, confused and unprogressive. The individual is in this respect greater than the mass and cannot be called on to subordinate his more luminous possibilities to this darker entity. If light, peace, deliverance, a better state of existence are to come, they must descend into the soul from something wider than the individual, but also from something higher than the collective ego. Altruism, philanthropy, the service of mankind are in themselves mental or moral ideals, not laws of the spiritual life. If into the spiritual aim there enters the impulse to deny the personal self or to serve humanity or the world at large, it comes not from the ego nor from the collective sense of the race, but from something more occult and profound transcendent of both these things; for it is founded on a sense of the Divine in all and it works not for the sake of the ego or the race but for the sake of the Divine and its purpose in the person or group or collective. It is this transcendent Source which we must seek and serve, this vaster
being and consciousness to which the race and the individual are minor terms of its existence.

There is indeed a truth behind the pragmatic impulse which an exclusive one-sided spirituality is apt to ignore or deny or belittle. It is this that since the individual and the universal are terms of that higher and vaster Being, their fulfilment must have some real place in the supreme Existence. There must be behind them some high purpose in the supreme Wisdom and Knowledge, some eternal strain in the supreme Delight; they cannot have been, they were not created in vain. But the perfection and satisfaction of humanity like the perfection and satisfaction of the individual, can only be securely compassed and founded upon a more eternal yet unseized truth and right of things. Minor terms of some greater Existence, they can fulfil themselves only when that of which they are the terms is known and possessed. The greatest service to humanity, the surest foundation for its true progress, happiness and perfection is to prepare or find the way by which the individual and the collective man can transcend the ego and live in its true self, no longer bound to ignorance, incapacity, disharmony and sorrow. It is by the pursuit of the eternal and not by living bound in the slow collective evolution of Nature that we can best assure even that evolutionary, collective, altruistic aim our modern thought and idealism have set before us. But it is in itself a secondary aim; to find, know and possess the Divine existence, consciousness and nature and to live in it for the Divine is our true aim and the one perfection to which we must aspire.

It is then in the way of the spiritual philosophies and religions, not in that of any earth-bound materialistic doctrine, that the seeker of the highest knowledge has to walk, even if with enriched aims and a more comprehensive spiritual purpose. But how far has he to proceed in the elimination of the ego? In the ancient way of knowledge we arrive at the elimination of the ego-sense which attaches itself to the body, to the life, to the mind and says of all or any of them, “This is I”. Not only do we, as in the way of works, get rid of the “I” of the worker and see the Lord alone as the true source of all works and sanction
of works and His executive Nature-power or else His supreme Shakti as the sole agent and worker,—but we get rid also of the ego-sense which mistakes the instruments or the expressions of our being for our true self and spirit. But even if all this has been done, something remains still; there remains a substratum of all these, a general sense of the separate I. This substratum ego is something vague, indefinable, elusive; it does not or need not attach itself to anything in particular as the self; it does not identify itself with anything collective; it is a sort of fundamental form or power of the mind which compels the mental being to feel himself as a perhaps indefinable but still a limited being which is not mind, life or body, but under which their activities proceed in Nature. The others were a qualified ego-idea and ego-sense supporting themselves on the play of the Prakriti; but this is the pure fundamental ego-power supporting itself on the consciousness of the mental Purusha. And because it seems to be above or behind the play and not in it, because it does not say “I am the mind, life or body,” but “I am a being on whom the action of mind, life and body depends,” many think themselves released and mistake this elusive Ego for the One, the Divine, the true Purusha or at the very least for the true Person within them,—mistaking the indefinable for the Infinite. But so long as this fundamental ego-sense remains, there is no absolute release. The egoistic life, even if diminished in force and intensity, can still continue well enough with this support. If there is the error in identification, the ego life may under that pretext get rather an exaggerated intensity and force. Even if there is no such error, the ego life may be wider, purer, more flexible and release may be now much easier to attain and nearer to accomplishment, but still there is as yet no definitive release. It is imperative to go farther, to get rid of this indefinable but fundamental ego-sense also and get back to the Purusha on whom it is supporting itself, of whom it is a shadow; the shadow has to disappear and by its disappearance reveal the spirit’s unclouded substance.

That substance is the self of the man called in European thought the Monad, in Indian philosophy, Jiva or Jivatman, the living entity, the self of the living creature. This Jiva is not the
mental ego-sense constructed by the workings of Nature for her temporary purpose. It is not a thing bound, as the mental being, the vital, the physical are bound, by her habits, laws or processes. The Jiva is a spirit and self, superior to Nature. It is true that it consents to her acts, reflects her moods and upholds the triple medium of mind, life and body through which she casts them upon the soul’s consciousness; but it is itself a living reflection or a soul-form or a self-creation of the Spirit universal and transcendent. The One Spirit who has mirrored some of His modes of being in the world and in the soul, is multiple in the Jiva. That Spirit is the very Self of our self, the One and the Highest, the Supreme we have to realise, the infinite existence into which we have to enter. And so far the teachers walk in company, all agreeing that this is the supreme object of knowledge, of works and of devotion, all agreeing that if it is to be attained, the Jiva must release himself from the ego-sense which belongs to the lower Nature or Maya. But here they part company and each goes his own way. The Monist fixes his feet on the path of an exclusive Knowledge and sets for us as sole ideal an entire return, loss, immersion or extinction of the Jiva in the Supreme. The Dualist or the partial Monist turns to the path of Devotion and directs us to shed indeed the lower ego and material life, but to see as the highest destiny of the spirit of man, not the self-annihilation of the Buddhist, not the self-immersion of the Adwaitin, not a swallowing up of the many by the One, but an eternal existence absorbed in the thought, love and enjoyment of the Supreme, the One, the All-Lover.

For the disciple of an integral Yoga there can be no hesitation; as a seeker of knowledge it is the integral knowledge and not anything either half-way and attractive or high-pinnacled and exclusive he must seek. He must soar to the utmost height, but also circle and spread to the most all-embracing wideness, not binding himself to any rigid structure of metaphysical thought, but free to admit and combine all the soul’s highest and greatest and fullest and most numerous experiences. If the highest height of spiritual experience, the sheer summit of all realisation is the absolute union of the soul with the Transcendent
who exceeds the individual and the universe, the widest scope of that union is the discovery of that very Transcendent as the source, support, continent, informing and constituent spirit and substance of both these manifesting powers of the divine Essence and the divine Nature. Whatever the path, this must be for him the goal. The Yoga of Action also is not fulfilled, is not absolute, is not victoriously complete until the seeker has felt and lives in his essential and integral oneness with the Supreme. One he must be with the Divine both in his highest and inmost and in his widest being and consciousness, in his work, his will, his power of action, his mind, body, life. Otherwise he is only released from the illusion of individual works, but not released from the illusion of separate being and instrumentality. As the servant and instrument of the Divine he works, but the crown of his labour and its perfect base or motive is oneness with that which he serves and fulfils. The Yoga of devotion too is complete only when the lover and the Beloved are unified and difference is abolished in the ecstasy of a divine oneness; and yet in the mystery of this unification there is the sole existence of the Beloved but no extinction or absorption of the lover. It is the highest unity which is the express direction of the path of knowledge, the call to absolute oneness is its impulse, the experience of it its magnet, but it is this very highest unity which takes as its field of manifestation in him the largest possible cosmic wideness. Obeying the necessity to withdraw successively from the practical egoism of our triple nature and its fundamental ego-sense, we come to the realisation of the spirit, the self, lord of this individual human manifestation, but our knowledge is not integral if we do not make this self in the individual one with the cosmic spirit and find their greater reality above in an inexpressible but not unknowable Transcendence. The Jiva, possessed of himself, must give himself up into the being of the Divine. The self of the man must be made one with the Self of all; the self of the finite individual must pour itself into the boundless finite and that cosmic spirit too must be exceeded in the transcendent Infinite.

This cannot be done without an uncompromising abolition
of the ego-sense at its very basis and source. In the path of Knowledge one attempts this abolition, negatively by a denial of the reality of the ego, positively by a constant fixing of the thought upon the idea of the One and the Infinite in itself or the One and Infinite everywhere. This, if persistently done, changes in the end the mental outlook on oneself and the whole world and there is a kind of mental realisation; but afterwards by degrees or perhaps rapidly and imperatively and almost at the beginning the mental realisation deepens into spiritual experience — a realisation in the very substance of our being. More and more frequent conditions come of something indefinable and illimitable, a peace, a silence, a joy, a bliss beyond expression, a sense of absolute impersonal Power, a pure existence, a pure consciousness, an all-pervading Presence. The ego persists in itself or in its habitual movements, but the place of the one becomes more and more loosened, the others are broken, crushed, more and more rejected, becoming weak in their intensity, limp or mechanical in their action. In the end there is a constant giving up of the whole consciousness into the being of the Supreme. In the beginning when the restless confusion and obscuring impurity of our outward nature is active, when the mental, vital, physical ego-sense are still powerful, this new mental outlook, these experiences may be found difficult in the extreme: but once that triple egoism is discouraged or moribund and the instruments of the Spirit are set right and purified, in an entirely pure, silent, clarified, widened consciousness the purity, infinity, stillness of the One reflects itself like the sky in a limpid lake. A meeting or a taking in of the reflected Consciousness by that which reflects it becomes more and more pressing and possible; the bridging or abolition of the atmospheric gulf between that immutable ethereal impersonal vastness and this once mobile whirl or narrow stream of personal existence is no longer an arduous improbability and may be even a frequent experience, if not yet an entirely permanent state. For even before complete purification, if the strings of the egoistic heart and mind are already sufficiently frayed and loosened, the Jiva can by a sudden snapping of the main cords escape, ascending like a
bird freed into the spaces or widening like a liberated flood into the One and Infinite. There is first a sudden sense of a cosmic consciousness, a casting of oneself into the universal; from that universality one can aspire more easily to the Transcendent. There is a pushing back and rending or a rushing down of the walls that imprisoned our conscious being; there is a loss of all sense of individuality and personality, of all placement in Space or Time or action and law of Nature; there is no longer an ego, a person definite and definable, but only consciousness, only existence, only peace or bliss; one becomes immortality, becomes eternity, becomes infinity. All that is left of the personal soul is a hymn of peace and freedom and bliss vibrating somewhere in the Eternal.

When there is an insufficient purity in the mental being, the release appears at first to be partial and temporary; the Jiva seems to descend again into the egoistic life and the higher consciousness to be withdrawn from him. In reality, what happens is that a cloud or veil intervenes between the lower nature and the higher consciousness and the Prakriti resumes for a time its old habit of working under the pressure but not always with a knowledge or present memory of that high experience. What works in it then is a ghost of the old ego supporting a mechanical repetition of the old habits upon the remnants of confusion and impurity still left in the system. The cloud intervenes and disappears, the rhythm of ascent and descent renews itself until the impurity has been worked out. This period of alternations may easily be long in the integral Yoga; for there an entire perfection of the system is required; it must be capable at all times and in all conditions and all circumstances, whether of action or inaction, of admitting and then living in the consciousness of the supreme Truth. Nor is it enough for the sadhaka to have the utter realisation only in the trance of Samadhi or in a motionless quietude, but he must in trance or in waking, in passive reflection or energy of action be able to remain in the constant Samadhi of the firmly founded Brahmic consciousness. But if

1 Gita.
or when our conscious being has become sufficiently pure and clear, then there is a firm station in the higher consciousness. The impersonalised Jiva, one with the universal or possessed by the Transcendent, lives high-seated above and looks down undisturbed at whatever remnants of the old working of Nature may revisit the system. He cannot be moved by the workings of the three modes of Prakriti in his lower being, nor can he be shaken from his station by the attacks even of grief and suffering. And finally, there being no veil between, the higher peace overpowers the lower disturbance and mobility. There is a settled silence in which the soul can take sovereign possession of itself above and below and altogether.

Such possession is not indeed the aim of the traditional Yoga of knowledge whose object is rather to get away from the above and the below and the all into the indefinable Absolute. But whatever the aim, the path of knowledge must lead to one first result, an absolute quietude; for unless the old action of Nature in us be entirely quieted, it is difficult if not impossible to found either any true soul-status or any divine activity. Our nature acts on a basis of confusion and restless compulsion to action, the Divine acts freely out of a fathomless calm. Into that abyss of tranquillity we must plunge and become that, if we are to annul the hold of this lower nature upon the soul. Therefore the universalised Jiva first ascends into the Silence; it becomes vast, tranquil, actionless. What action takes place, whether of body and these organs or any working whatever, the Jiva sees but does not take part in, authorise or in any way associate itself with it. There is action, but no personal actor, no bondage, no responsibility. If personal action is needed, then the Jiva has to keep or recover what has been called the form of the ego, a sort of mental image of an “I” that is the knower, devotee, servant or instrument, but an image only and not a reality. If even that is not there, still action can continue by the mere continued force of Prakriti, without any personal actor, without indeed there

2 Udāsīna, the word for the spiritual “indifference”, that is to say the unattached freedom of the soul touched by the supreme knowledge.
being any sense of an actor at all; for the Self into which the Jiva has cast its being is the actionless, the fathomlessly still. The path of works leads to the realisation of the Lord, but here even the Lord is not known; there is only the silent Self and Prakriti doing her works, even, as it seems at first, not with truly living entities but with names and forms existing in the Self but which the Self does not admit as real. The soul may go even beyond this realisation; it may either rise to the Brahman on the other side of all idea of Self as a Void of everything that is here, a Void of unnameable peace and extinction of all, even of the Sat, even of that Existent which is the impersonal basis of individual or universal personality; or else it may unite with it as an ineffable “That” of which nothing can be said; for the universe and all that is does not even exist in That, but appears to the mind as a dream more unsubstantial than any dream ever seen or imagined, so that even the word dream seems too positive a thing to express its entire unreality. These experiences are the foundation of that lofty Illusionism which takes such firm hold of the human mind in its highest overleapings of itself.

These ideas of dream and illusion are simply results in our still existent mentality of the new poise of the Jiva and its denial of the claim made upon it by its old mental associations and view of life and existence. In reality, the Prakriti does not act for itself or by its own motion, but with the Self as lord; for out of that Silence wells all this action, that apparent Void looses out as if into movement all these infinite riches of experience. To this realisation the sadhaka of the integral Yoga must arrive by the process that we shall hereafter describe. What then, when he so resumes his hold upon the universe and views no longer himself in the world but the cosmos in himself, will be the position of the Jiva or what will fill in his new consciousness the part of the ego-sense? There will be no ego-sense even if there is a sort of individualisation for the purposes of the play of universal consciousness in an individual mind and frame; and for this reason that all will be unforgettably the One and every Person or Purusha will be to him the One in many forms or rather in many aspects and poises, Brahman acting upon Brahman, one
Nara-Narayana\(^3\) everywhere. In that larger play of the Divine the joy of the relations of divine love also is possible without the lapse into the ego-sense,—just as the supreme state of human love likewise is described as the unity of one soul in two bodies. The ego-sense is not indispensable to the world-play in which it is so active and so falsifies the truth of things; the truth is always the One at work on itself, at play with itself, infinite in unity, infinite in multiplicity. When the individualised consciousness rises to and lives in that truth of the cosmic play, then even in full action, even in possession of the lower being the Jiva remains still one with the Lord, and there is no bondage and no delusion. He is in possession of Self and released from the ego.

\(^3\) The Divine, Narayana, making itself one with humanity even as the human, Nara becomes one with the Divine.