

Chapter Two

Sachchidananda: Existence, Consciousness-Force and Bliss

Sachchidananda

Sachchidananda is the One with a triple aspect. In the Supreme the three are not three but one — existence is consciousness, consciousness is bliss, and they are thus inseparable, not only inseparable but so much each other that they are not distinct at all. In the superior planes of manifestation they become triune — although inseparable, one can be made more prominent and base or lead the others. In the lower planes below they become separable in appearance, though not in their secret reality, and one can exist phenomenally without the others so that we become aware of what seems to us an inscient or a painful existence or a consciousness without Ananda. Indeed without this separation of them in experience pain and ignorance and falsehood and death and what we call inscience could not have manifested themselves — there could not have been this evolution of a limited and suffering consciousness out of the universal nescience of Matter.

*

The Sachchidananda is not in itself an active consciousness, it is simply pure existence, consciousness and bliss. By a Truth Consciousness is meant a knowledge consciousness which is immediately, inherently and directly aware of Truth in manifestation and has not to seek for it like Mind. Sachchidananda is everywhere behind the manifestation and supporting it as well as above it and can be experienced below the supermind — even in mind and vital it can be experienced.

*

The original substance of the spirit is pure existence carrying in it pure self-existent consciousness (or consciousness-force) and pure self-existent Ananda.

*

There is no plane beyond Sachchidananda.

*

People say like that [*the Transcendent is something beyond Sachchidananda*] because the transcendent Absolute is not only what to us is existence but also what to us is non-existence. But there is really no such thing as non-existence. So the Transcendent can be conceived as transcendent Sat, transcendent Chit, transcendent Ananda.

Sat or Pure Existence

You must remember that there are reflections of the higher worlds in the lower planes which can easily be experienced as supreme for that stage of the evolution. But the supreme Sachchidananda is not a world, it is supracosmic. The Sat (Satyaloka) world is the highest of the scale connected with this universe.

*

Substance and being are the same thing. In the creation they can be looked at as two aspects of the Spirit.

*

The Pure Existence is not something abstract, but substantial and concrete. Moreover it is descending into the body, so it is quite natural to feel it materially.

Chit or Consciousness

You seem to want to reduce everything to a catalogue and a scientific analysis. Nobody has ever been able to do that with the working of the consciousness. The elements of a condition of

consciousness cannot be classified like the “elements” of Matter.

*

I had intended to give only a concise answer to your question about consciousness but it began to develop itself at great length and I could not as yet finish it. I send you for the moment a more summary reply.¹

Consciousness is not, to my experience, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of personality to the forces of Nature and amounting to no more than a seeing or interpretation of these reactions. If that were so, then when the personality becomes silent and immobile and gives no reactions, as there would be no seeing or interpretative action, there would therefore be no consciousness. That contradicts some of the fundamental experiences of Yoga, e.g., a silent and immobile consciousness infinitely spread out, not dependent on the personality but impersonal and universal, not seeing and interpreting contacts but motionlessly self-aware, not dependent on the reactions, but persistent in itself even when no reactions take place. The subjective personality itself is only a formation of consciousness which is a power inherent, not in the activity of the temporary manifested personality, but in the being, the Self or Purusha.

Consciousness is a reality inherent in existence. It is there even when it is not active on the surface, but silent and immobile; it is there even when it is invisible on the surface, not reacting on outward things or sensible to them, but withdrawn and either active or inactive within; it is there even when it seems to us to be quite absent and the being to our view unconscious and inanimate.

Consciousness is not only power of awareness of self and things, it is or has also a dynamic and creative energy. It can determine its own reactions or abstain from reactions; it can not only answer to forces, but create or put out from itself forces. Consciousness is Chit but also Chit Shakti.

¹ *Sri Aurobindo's incomplete draft reply, which "began to develop itself at great length", is reproduced immediately after the present letter. — Ed.*

Consciousness is usually identified with mind, but mental consciousness is only the human range which no more exhausts all the possible ranges of consciousness than human sight exhausts all the gradations of colour or human hearing all the gradations of sound — for there is much above or below that is to man invisible and inaudible. So there are ranges of consciousness above and below the human range, with which the normal human has no contact and they seem to it unconscious, — supramental or overmental and submental ranges.

When Yajnavalkya says there is no consciousness in the Brahman state, he is speaking of consciousness as the human being knows it. The Brahman state is that of a supreme existence supremely aware of itself, *svayāṃprakāśa*, — it is Sachchidananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Even if it be spoken of as beyond that, *parātparam*, it does not mean that it is a state of Non-existence or Non-consciousness, but beyond even the highest spiritual substratum (the “foundation above” in the luminous paradox of the Rig Veda) of cosmic existence and consciousness. As it is evident from the description of Chinese Tao and the Buddhist Shunya that that is a Nothingness in which all is, so with the negation of consciousness here. Superconscient and subconscient are only relative terms; as we rise into the superconscient we see that it is a consciousness greater than the highest we yet have and therefore in our normal state inaccessible to us and, if we can go down into the subconscient, we find there a consciousness other than our own at its lowest mental limit and therefore ordinarily inaccessible to us. The Inconscient itself is only an involved state of consciousness which like the Tao or Shunya, though in a different way, contains all things suppressed within it so that under a pressure from above or within all can evolve out of it — “an inert Soul with a somnambulist Force”.

The gradations of consciousness are universal states not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality; rather the outlook of the subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its typical nature or its evolutionary stage.

It will be evident that by consciousness is meant something which is essentially the same throughout but variable in status, condition and operation, in which in some grades or conditions the activities we call consciousness can exist either in a suppressed or an unorganised or a differently organised state; while in other states some other activities may manifest which in us are suppressed, unorganised or latent or else are less perfectly manifested, less intensive, extended and powerful than in those higher grades above our highest mental limit.

*

If your definition is correct, consciousness cannot be a self-existent reality; it is a result, a phenomenon dependent on the reactions of something — you say a personality, but what is a personality apart from consciousness? — to the universal forces of Nature. We can take a purely external view and say that consciousness is the result of a mass of reactions to the impact of outward physical things on the brain and nerves of a physical being. In this case consciousness is a sort of effective hallucination — there is no real and permanent consciousness but only a subjective impression created by a constant activity of reactions. As a number of dancing fires may create a glow in the sky, so consciousness is created by these reactions and is suspended or disappears when they halt or cease. In your definition you add a real (?) subjective personality and supplement the reactions of physical outward things by reactions of inner things or things from above or below. But still the consciousness is only a seeing or interpretation of reactions, — it is a result of them, a phenomenon. If there are no more reactions, consciousness ceases to exist — for what other basis has it or standing place than the impermanent reaction to forces? Unless it is something intrinsic and inherent in the “subjective personality”; but then it is not a result of the reactions or a seeing and interpretation of them, but rather the reactions are the result of a pre-existent consciousness and the seeing or interpretation is merely an activity, perhaps only a very partial and surface activity, of the consciousness already and always inherent in the “personality”. Even if there

were no impact of forces and no reactions, the consciousness would still be there, but static and inactive. But again this activity of consciousness might not be limited to an interpretation or a passive reaction to forces; it might also, if it chose, be the creator or determinant of its reactions — as for instance to a blow on the body or the vital it might refuse the natural reactions of pain or anger and remain still and immobile or it might return an unusual reaction of love or pleasure. Also this consciousness might not be only a recipient and seer of forces, but a creator or putter out of forces — it might be not only a knower, but an energy, a dynamis. In this view, your definition becomes totally inadequate. Farther, the word personality is misleading; for what we usually know as personality is itself only a formation of consciousness. Behind it we are aware of a Person or Purusha who puts forward the mutable surface formation we call personality and who may even have many personalities at a time or different personalities at different times. This Purusha would be then a being and consciousness, would be not a result or an activity, but a constant reality, an intrinsic power of awareness and action inherent in the being, — as the being is self-existent, so the consciousness self-existent in the being, the Purusha. This is the realisation we have of it in Yogic experience, eternal reality of consciousness inherent in the eternal reality of existence, as in the concept and experience of Sachchidananda.

This is the crucial point in the question, what is consciousness, whether it is a temporary phenomenon of Nature or a reality in itself fundamental to existence. The first is the conclusion that is drawn, and must be drawn, from normal experience on the surface. The other is at best a metaphysical speculation or an instinctive feeling in humanity unless we go beyond the normal experience, deepen and widen the range of our present consciousness and test its inner depths and inferior abysses and supernormal heights, until we can touch its fundamental or its ultimate or its total reality as is done in Yoga. To judge from only normal and superficial experience as the ordinary mind does with phenomena is to miss the truth of things — we have to go behind the surface phenomenon to find the reality of what a

thing is. There are no gradations of consciousness if the ordinary phenomenon of consciousness is taken, unless perhaps we distinguish two gradations, the animal and the human; the differences created by the variations of subjective personality amount only to degrees of power of the same human-animal consciousness, a better or worse, cruder or more complex organisation of the instruments by which it receives or reacts to the contacts of Nature. If, on the contrary, consciousness is an inherent power of existence present even when it is not apparent to us or active on the surface, then we can conceive of it arranging its own manifestation in gradations which rise or fall between what seem to us now the subconscious depths and superconscious summits of existence.

The ordinary view of consciousness is based on normal superficial experience plus science. For physical science consciousness is a temporary phenomenon in an unconscious world, something evolved in an animate organisation that somehow develops in an originally inanimate and unconscious Matter. It is not inherent in life, for the plant has it not, it is rather a growing flicker that, once established, lasts intermittently through sleep and waking while life lasts and disappears with the dissolution of life. The ordinary mind identifies consciousness with human waking consciousness possibly shared by the animal — though that is not certain, for many refuse consciousness to the animal. A man is conscious while he lives, when he is dead consciousness disappears, when he is asleep, stunned, drugged, anaesthetised, in trance, then his consciousness is suspended; he is temporarily unconscious. How far is this scientific-superficial view correct or maintainable? For it raises two fundamental questions — is the waking surface consciousness the only form of consciousness possible? and again, is the consciousness synonymous with mind, is all consciousness mental or are other forms of it, supramental or submental, possible?

Outer Consciousness and Inner Consciousness

Consciousness is inherent in Being, though it is here involved and

concealed in things so that it has to emerge out of an apparent unconsciousness and organise itself in individual life. But this is only on the surface which is all of which we are aware because we live on the surface of ourselves. This surface (the ordinary waking mind of man) is what we think to be ourselves, the whole of us, because living awake on the surface we are conscious of that only. But within, with a sort of wall of obscurity or oblivion between it and the outer being, there is an inner being, an inner mind, vital, physical and an inmost or psychic being of which we are not aware. We are only aware of what comes up from there to the surface and do not know its source or how it comes. By Yoga the wall is slowly broken down and we become aware of this inner and inmost being — by doing so we build up a new, a Yogic, consciousness which is able to communicate direct with the universal consciousness around and the higher spiritual above.

As the individual has a consciousness of his own, so too there is a universal consciousness, a cosmic Being, a universal Mind, a universal Life, a universal physical conscious Nature. We are unaware of it because we are shut up in our outer physical selves. By the inner awakening and the opening above we become aware of this cosmic consciousness, cosmic Nature and cosmic Self and its movements; our consciousness can widen and become one with it. The forces of universal Nature are always working on us without our knowing how they act or being able to get any general control over their action on us. By becoming conscious of the universal we are able to detect this working and control it.

*

It all depends upon where the consciousness places itself and centralises itself. If the consciousness places or associates itself within the ego, you are identified with the ego — if in the mind, it is identified with the mind and its activities and so on. If the consciousness puts its stress outside, it is said to live in the external being and becomes oblivious of its inner mind and vital and inmost psychic; if it goes inside, puts its centralising stress there, then it knows itself as the inner being or, still deeper, as the

psychic being; if it ascends out of the body to the planes where self is naturally conscious of its wideness and freedom, it knows itself as the self and not the mind, life or body. It is this stress of consciousness that makes all the difference. That is why one has to concentrate the consciousness in heart or mind in order to go within or go above. It is the disposition of the consciousness that determines everything, makes one predominantly mental, vital, physical or psychic, bound or free, separate in the Purusha or involved in the Prakriti.

*

Good heavens! what a magnificent muddle [*in the correspondent's response to the preceding letter*]! The Jivatman is on the supramental plane and the Jiva is the psychic? It is the consciousness with a clear individual "I" that disposes variously the centralising stress on one part or another of the being and yet the quality of this "I" is determined by the part with which it identifies itself — therefore it must be a pure conscious I? All that has no basis whatever and does not hang together. I never said that the Jivatman belongs to the supramental plane or is situated there. The word Jiva in its ordinary sense is the living creature, but in its philosophic sense it is often used as a short way of speaking of the Jivatman, the individual being. Neither can it be said that the psychic being is the Jiva. Nor is it the fact that it is the consciousness with a clear individual "I" that disposes variously the centralising stress on one part or another of the being. Consciousness has no need of a clear individual "I" to dispose the stress, — it can do that of itself; wherever the stress is put the "I" attaches itself to that, so that one thinks of oneself as a mental being or physical being or whatever it may be. The consciousness in me can be utterly free of any sense of an individual "I" and yet dispose its stress in this way or the other way — it may go down into the physical and work there in the physical nature keeping all the rest behind or above for the time or it may go up into the overhead level and stand above mind, life and body seeing them as instrumental lower forms of itself; or it may not see them at all but rather immerse

in the free undifferentiated Self; or it may throw itself into an active dynamic cosmic consciousness and identify with that or do any number of other things without resorting to the help of this much overrated and meddling fly on the wheel which you call the clear individual “I”. The real “I” — if you want to use that word — is not a “clear individual”, that is, a clear-cut limited separative ego, — it is as wide as the universe and wider, and can contain the universe in itself; it is not the *ahankāra*, it is the Atman.

Consciousness is a fundamental thing, it is the fundamental thing in existence — it is the energy, the action, the movement of consciousness that creates the universe and all that is in it — not only the macrocosm, but the microcosm is nothing but consciousness arranging itself. For instance when consciousness in its movement, or rather a certain stress of movement, forgets itself in the action it becomes an apparently “unconscious” energy; when it forgets itself in the form it becomes the electron, the atom, the material object. In reality it is still consciousness that works in the energy and determines the form and the evolution of form. When it wants to liberate itself, slowly, evolutionarily, out of matter, but still in the form, it emerges as life, as the animal, as man and it can go on evolving itself still farther out of its involution and become something more than mere man. If you can grasp that, then it ought not to be difficult to see farther that it can subjectively formulate itself as a physical, a vital, a mental, a psychic consciousness — all these are present in man, but as they are all mixed up together in our external being and their real status is hidden behind in our inner secret nature one can only become fully aware of them by releasing the original limiting stress of the consciousness which makes us live in our external selves and becoming awake and centred within in the inner being. As the consciousness in us, by its external concentration or stress, has put all these things behind — behind a wall or veil — it has to break down the wall or veil and get back in its stress into these inner parts of existence — that is what we call living within; then our external being seems to us something small and superficial, we are or can become aware of

the large and rich and inexhaustible kingdoms within. So also consciousness in us has drawn a lid or covering or whatever one likes to call it between the lower planes of mind, life, body supported by the psychic and the higher planes which contain the spiritual kingdoms where the self is always free and limitless, — and it can break or open the lid or covering and ascend there and become the Self free and wide and luminous or else bring down the influence, reflection, finally even the presence and power of the higher consciousness into the lower nature.

Now that is what consciousness is — it is not composed of parts, it is fundamental to being and itself formulates any parts it chooses to manifest — developing them from above downward by a progressive coming down from spiritual levels towards the evolution in matter or formulating them in an upward working in the front by this process that we call evolution. If it chooses to work in you through the sense of ego, you think that it is the clear-cut individual I that does everything; if it begins to release itself from that limited working, then you too either begin to expand your sense of I till it bursts into infinity and no longer exists or to shed it and flower into spiritual wideness. Of course this is not what is spoken of in modern materialistic thought as consciousness, because that thought is governed by science. Science sees consciousness only as a phenomenon which emerges out of inconscient Matter and consists of certain reactions of the system to outward things. But that is phenomenon of consciousness, it is not consciousness itself, it is even only a very small part of the possible phenomena of consciousness and can give no clue to the true nature of Consciousness, the spiritual Reality which is of the very essence of existence.

That is all at present. You will have to fix yourself in that — for it is fundamental — before it can be useful to go any farther.

*

Certainly, the mind and the inner being are consciousness. For human beings who have not got deeper into themselves mind and consciousness are synonymous. Only when one becomes more aware of oneself by a growing consciousness, then one

can see different degrees, kinds, powers of consciousness, mental, vital, physical, psychic, spiritual. The Divine has been described as Being-Consciousness-Ananda, even as a Consciousness (Chaitanya), as putting out a force or energy, Shakti, that creates worlds. The mind is a modified consciousness that puts forth a mental energy. But the Divine can stand back from his energy and observe it at its work, it can be the Witness Purusha watching the works of Prakriti. Even the mind can do that — a man can stand back in his mind-consciousness and watch the mental energy doing things, thinking, planning, etc.; all introspection is based upon that fact that one can so divide oneself into a consciousness that observes and an energy that acts. These are quite elementary things supposed to be known to everybody. Anybody can do that merely by a little practice; anybody who observes his own thoughts, feelings, actions has begun doing it already. In Yoga we make the division complete, that is all.

Consciousness and Force or Energy

Consciousness is made up of two elements, awareness of self and things and forces and conscious power. Awareness is the first thing necessary, you have to be aware of things in the right consciousness, in the right way, seeing them in their truth; but awareness by itself is not enough. There must be a Will and a Force that make the consciousness effective. Somebody may have the full consciousness of what has to be changed, what has to go and what has to come in its place, but may be helpless to make the change. Another may have the will-force, but for want of a right awareness may be unable to apply it in the right way at the right place. The advantage of being in the psychic consciousness is that you have the right awareness and its will being in harmony with the Mother's will, you can call in the Mother's Force to make the change. Those who live in the mind and the vital are not so well able to do this; they are obliged to use mostly their personal effort and as the awareness and will and force of the mind and vital are divided and imperfect, the work done is imperfect and not definitive. It is only

in the supermind that Awareness, Will, Force are always one movement and automatically effective.

*

If consciousness and energy are the same thing, there would be no use in having two different words for them. In that case instead of saying, “I am conscious of my defects”, one can say, “I am energetic of my defects.” If a man is running fast, you can say of him, “He is running with great energy.” Do you think it would mean the same if you said, “He is running with great consciousness”? Consciousness is that which is aware of things — energy is a force put in action which does things. Consciousness may have energy and keep it in or put it out, but that does not mean that it is only another word for energy and that it has to go out when the energy goes out and that it cannot stand back and observe the energy in action. You have plenty of inertia in you but that does not mean that you and inertia are the same and when inertia rises and swamps you it is you who rise and swamp yourself.

Force, Energy, Power, Shakti

There is a force behind each action acting in a manner appropriate to that action. It takes all these many forms for the necessity of the working, but it is one Force.

*

I have never classified the different forms [*of Force*] — they can be hundreds or thousands in number. Force varies its form according to the work it has to do.

*

A passive Force has no meaning — Force is always dynamic. Only a Force can act on a basis of calm passivity just as in the material world the Force acts on the basis of inertia.

*

Static and dynamic in reality always go together — it is in appearance that anything seems only dynamic or only static.

*

In each atom of the being there is an Energy, a Shakti — just as there is in every material atom a great material energy. When you see like that, you become aware of these energies. They are neither good nor bad — it depends on how they are used or how they act.

*

Power means strength and force, Shakti, which enables one to face all that can happen and to stand and overcome, also to carry out what the Divine Will proposes. It can include many things, power over men, events, circumstances, means etc. But all this not of the mental or vital kind, but by an action through unity of consciousness with the Divine and with all things and beings. It is not an individual strength depending on certain personal capacities, but the Divine Power using the individual as an instrument. It has no special relation to occult siddhis.

*

Force is the essential Shakti; Energy is the working drive of the Force, its active dynamism; Power is the capacity born of the Force; Strength is energy consolidated and stored in the Adhar.

*

The Divine Force can act on any plane — it is not limited to the Supramental Force. The Supramental is only one aspect of the power of the Divine.

*

The Supreme cannot create through the Transcendent because the Transcendent is the Supreme. It is through the Cosmic Shakti that the Divine creates.

Ananda

Ananda is a thing to be felt — it cannot be defined except negatively that it is not mere joy, but something much more deep and essential.

*

It is the statement of the Upanishad that there is an ether of Ananda in which all breathe and live; if it were not there, none could breathe or live.

*

It is fundamentally true for most people that the pleasure of life, of existence in itself, predominates over the troubles of life; otherwise most people would want to die whereas the fact is that everybody wants to live — and if you proposed to them an easy means of eternal extinction they would decline without thanks. That is what X is saying and it is undeniable. It is also true that this comes from the Ananda of existence which is behind everything and is reflected in the instinctive pleasure of existence. Naturally, this instinctive essential pleasure is not the Ananda, — it is only a pale and dim reflection of it in an inferior life-consciousness — but it is enough for its purpose. I have said that myself somewhere and I do not see anything absurd or excessive in the statement.

*

Why should the joy of creation be unyogic? Every creator feels the joy of creation — including the Divine Creator.