Chapter VI

The Synthesis of the Disciplines of Knowledge

IN THE last chapter we have spoken of renunciation in its most general scope, even as we spoke of concentration in all its possibilities; what has been said, applies therefore equally to the path of Works and the path of Devotion as to the path of Knowledge; for on all three concentration and renunciation are needed, though the way and spirit in which they are applied may vary. But we must now turn more particularly to the actual steps of the Path of Knowledge on which the double force of concentration and renunciation must aid us to advance. Practically, this path is a reascent up the great ladder of being down which the soul has descended into the material existence.

The central aim of Knowledge is the recovery of the Self, of our true self-existence, and this aim presupposes the admission that our present mode of being is not our true self-existence. No doubt, we have rejected the trenchant solutions which cut the knot of the riddle of the universe; we recognise it neither as a fiction of material appearance created by Force, nor as an unreality set up by the Mind, nor as a bundle of sensations, ideas and results of idea and sensation with a great Void or a great blissful Zero behind it to strive towards as our true truth of eternal non-existence. We accept the Self as a reality and the universe as a reality of the Self, a reality of its consciousness and not of mere material force and formation, but none the less or rather all the more for that reason a reality. Still, though the universe is a fact and not a fiction, a fact of the divine and universal and not a fiction of the individual self, our state of existence here is a state of ignorance, not the true truth of our being. We conceive of ourselves falsely, we see ourselves as we are not; we live in a false relation with our environment, because we know neither
the universe nor ourselves for what they really are but with an imperfect view founded on a temporary fiction which the Soul and Nature have established between themselves for the convenience of the evolving ego. And this falsity is the root of a general perversion, confusion and suffering which besiege at every step both our internal life and our relations with our environment. Our personal life and our communal life, our commerce with ourselves and our commerce with our fellows are founded on a falsity and are therefore false in their recognised principles and methods, although through all this error a growing truth continually seeks to express itself. Hence the supreme importance to man of Knowledge, not what is called the practical knowledge of life, but of the profoundest knowledge of the Self and Nature on which alone a true practice of life can be founded.

The error proceeds from a false identification. Nature has created within her material unity separate-seeming bodies which the Soul manifested in material Nature enfolds, inhabits, possesses, uses; the Soul forgetting itself experiences only this single knot in Matter and says “I am this body.” It thinks of itself as the body, suffers with the body, enjoys with the body, is born with the body, is dissolved with the body; or so at least it views its self-existence. Again, Nature has created within her unity of universal life separate-seeming currents of life which form themselves into a whorl of vitality around and in each body, and the Soul manifested in vital Nature seizes on and is seized by that current, is imprisoned momentarily in that little whirling vortex of life. The Soul, still forgetting itself, says “I am this life”; it thinks of itself as the life, craves with its cravings or desires, wallows in its pleasures, bleeds with its wounds, rushes or stumbles with its movements. If it is still mainly governed by the body-sense, it identifies its own existence with that of the whorl and thinks “When this whorl is dissipated by the dissolution of the body round which it has formed itself, then I shall be no more.” If it has been able to sense the current of life which has formed the vortex, it thinks of itself as that

1 ātmajñāna and tattvajñāna.
current and says “I am this stream of life; I have entered upon the possession of this body, I shall leave it and enter upon the possession of other bodies: I am an immortal life revolving in a cycle of constant rebirth.”

But again Nature has created within her mental unity, formed in the universal Mind separate-seeming dynamos as it were of mentality, constant centres for the generation, distribution and reabsorption of mental force and mental activities, stations as it were in a system of mental telegraphy where messages are conceived, written, sent, received, deciphered, and these messages and these activities are of many kinds, sensational, emotional, perceptual, conceptual, intuitional, all of which the Soul manifested in mental Nature accepts, uses for its outlook on the world and seems to itself to project and to receive their shocks, to suffer or to master their consequences. Nature instals the base of these dynamos in the material bodies she has formed, makes these bodies the ground for her stations and connects the mental with the material by a nerve-system full of the movement of vital currents through which the mind becomes conscious of the material world and, so far as it chooses, of the vital world of Nature. Otherwise the mind would be conscious of the mental world first and chiefly and would only indirectly glimpse the material. As it is, its attention is fixed on the body and the material world in which it has been installed and it is aware of the rest of existence only dimly, indirectly or subconsciously in that vast remainder of itself with regard to which superficially it has become irresponsible and oblivious.

The Soul identifies itself with this mental dynamo or station and says “I am this mind.” And since the mind is absorbed in the bodily life, it thinks “I am a mind in a living body” or, still more commonly, “I am a body which lives and thinks.” It identifies itself with the thoughts, emotions, sensations of the embodied mind and imagines that because when the body is dissolved all this will dissolve, itself also will cease to exist. Or if it becomes conscious of the current of persistence of mental personality, it thinks of itself as a mental soul occupying the body whether
once or repeatedly and returning from earthly living to mental worlds beyond; the persistence of this mental being mentally enjoying or suffering sometimes in the body, sometimes on the mental or vital plane of Nature it calls its immortal existence. Or else, because the mind is a principle of light and knowledge, however imperfect, and can have some notion of what is beyond it, it sees the possibility of a dissolution of the mental being into that which is beyond, some Void or some eternal Existence, and it says, “There I, the mental soul, cease to be.” Such dissolution it dreads or desires, denies or affirms according to its measure of attachment to or repulsion from this present play of embodied mind and vitality.

Now, all this is a mixture of truth and falsehood. Mind, Life, Matter exist and mental, vital, physical individualisation exists as facts in Nature, but the identification of the soul with these things is a false identification. Mind, Life and Matter are ourselves only in this sense that they are principles of being which the true self has evolved by the meeting and interaction of Soul and Nature in order to express a form of its one existence as the Cosmos. Individual mind, life and body are a play of these principles which is set up in the commerce of Soul and Nature as a means for the expression of that multiplicity of itself of which the one Existence is eternally capable and which it holds eternally involved in its unity. Individual mind, life and body are forms of ourselves in so far as we are centres of the multiplicity of the One; universal Mind, Life and Body are also forms of our self, because we are that One in our being. But the self is more than universal or individual mind, life and body and when we limit ourselves by identification with these things, we found our knowledge on a falsehood, we falsify our determining view and our practical experience not only of our self-being but of our cosmic existence and of our individual activities.

The Self is an eternal utter Being and pure existence of which all these things are becomings. From this knowledge we have to proceed; this knowledge we have to realise and make it the foundation of the inner and the outer life of the individual. The Yoga of Knowledge, starting from this primary truth, has conceived
a negative and positive method of discipline by which we shall get rid of these false identifications and recoil back from them into true self-knowledge. The negative method is to say always “I am not the body” so as to contradict and root out the false idea “I am the body”, to concentrate on this knowledge and by renunciation of the attachment of the soul to the physical get rid of the body-sense. We say again “I am not the life” and by concentration on this knowledge and renunciation of attachment to the vital movements and desires, get rid of the life-sense. We say, finally, “I am not the mind, the motion, the sense, the thought” and by concentration on this knowledge and renunciation of the mental activities, get rid of the mind-sense. When we thus constantly create a gulf between ourselves and the things with which we identified ourselves, their veils progressively fall away from us and the Self begins to be visible to our experience. Of that then we say “I am That, the pure, the eternal, the self-blissful” and by concentrating our thought and being upon it we become That and are able finally to renounce the individual existence and the Cosmos. Another positive method belonging rather to the Rajayoga is to concentrate on the thought of the Brahman and shut out from us all other ideas, so that this dynamo of mind shall cease to work upon our external or varied internal existence; by mental cessation the vital and physical play also shall fall to rest in an eternal samadhi, some inexpressible deepest trance of the being in which we shall pass into the absolute Existence.

This discipline is evidently a self-centred and exclusive inner movement which gets rid of the world by denying it in thought and shutting the eyes of the soul to it in vision. But the universe is there as a truth in God even though the individual soul may have shut its eyes to it and the Self is there in the universe really and not falsely, supporting all that we have rejected, truly immanent in all things, really embracing the individual in the universal as well as embracing the universe in that which exceeds and transcends it. What shall we do with this eternal Self in this persistent universe which we see encompassing us every time we come out of the trance of inner meditation? The ascetic Path of Knowledge has its solution and its discipline for the soul that
looks out on the universe. It is to regard the immanent and all-encompassing and all-constituting Self in the image of the ether in which all forms are, which is in all forms, of which all forms are made. In that ether cosmic Life and Mind move as the Breath of things, an atmospheric sea in the ethereal, and constitute from it all these forms; but what they constitute are merely name and form and not realities; the form of the pot we see is a form of earth only and goes back into the earth, earth a form resolvable into the cosmic Life, the cosmic Life a movement that falls to rest in that silent immutable Ether. Concentrating on this knowledge, rejecting all phenomenon and appearance, we come to see the whole as an illusion of name and form in the ether that is Brahman; it becomes unreal to us; and the universe becoming unreal the immanence becomes unreal and there is only the Self upon which our mind has falsely imposed the name and form of the universe. Thus are we justified in the withdrawal of the individual self into the Absolute.

Still, the Self goes on with its imperishable aspect of immanence, its immutable aspect of divine envelopment, its endless trick of becoming each thing and all things; our detection of the cheat and our withdrawal do not seem to affect one tittle either the Self or the universe. Must we not then know also what it is that thus persists superior to our acceptance and rejection and too great, too eternal to be affected by it? Here too there must be some invincible reality at work and the integrality of Knowledge demands that we shall see and realise it; otherwise it may prove that our own knowledge and not the Lord in the universe was the cheat and the illusion. Therefore we must concentrate again and see and realise also this which persists so sovereignly and must know the Self as no other than the Supreme Soul which is the Lord of Nature, the upholder of cosmic existence by whose sanction it proceeds, whose will compels its multitudinous actions and determines its perpetual cycles. And we must yet concentrate once again and see and realise and must know the Self as the one Existence who is both the Soul of all and the Nature of all, at once Purusha and Prakriti and so able both to express himself in all these forms of things and to be all these
formations. Otherwise we have excluded what the Self does not exclude and made a wilful choice in our knowledge.

The old ascetic Path of Knowledge admitted the unity of things and the concentration on all these aspects of the one Existence, but it made a distinction and a hierarchy. The Self that becomes all these forms of things is the Virat or universal Soul; the Self that creates all these forms is Hiranyagarbha, the luminous or creatively perceptive Soul; the Self that contains all these things involved in it is Prajna, the conscious Cause or originally determining Soul; beyond all these is the Absolute who permits all this unreality, but has no dealings with it. Into That we must withdraw and have no farther dealings with the universe, since Knowledge means the final Knowledge, and therefore these lesser realisations must fall away from us or be lost in That. But evidently from our point of view these are practical distinctions made by the mind which have a value for certain purposes, but no ultimate value. Our view of the world insists on unity; the universal Self is not different from the perceptive and creative, nor the perceptive from the causal, nor the causal from the Absolute, but it is one “Self-being which has become all becomings”, and which is not any other than the Lord who manifests Himself as all these individual existences nor the Lord any other than the sole-existing Brahman who verily is all this that we can see, sense, live or mentalise. That Self, Lord, Brahman we would know that we may realise our unity with it and with all that it manifests and in that unity we would live. For we demand of knowledge that it shall unite; the knowledge that divides must always be a partial knowing good for certain practical purposes; the knowledge that unites is the knowledge.

Therefore our integral Yoga will take up these various disciplines and concentrations, but harmonise and if possible fuse them by a synthesis which removes their mutual exclusions. Not realising the Lord and the All only to reject them for silent Self or unknowable Absolute as would an exclusively transcendental, nor living for the Lord alone or in the All alone as would an exclusively theistic or an exclusively pantheistic Yoga, the seeker
of integral knowledge will limit himself neither in his thought nor in his practice nor in his realisation by any religious creed or philosophical dogma. He will seek the Truth of existence in its completeness. The ancient disciplines he will not reject, for they rest upon eternal truths, but he will give them an orientation in conformity with his aim.

We must recognise that our primary aim in knowledge must be to realise our own supreme Self more than that Self in others or as the Lord of Nature or as the All; for that is the pressing need of the individual, to arrive at the highest truth of his own being, to set right its disorders, confusions, false identifications, to arrive at its right concentration and purity and to know and mount to its source. But we do this not in order to disappear into its source, but so that our whole existence and all the members of this inner kingdom may find their right basis, may live in our highest self, live for our highest self only and obey no other law than that which proceeds from our highest self and is given to our purified being without any falsification in the transmitting mentality. And if we do this rightly we shall discover that in finding this supreme Self we have found the one Self in all, the one Lord of our nature and of all Nature, the All of ourselves who is the All of the universe. For this that we see in ourselves we must necessarily see everywhere, since that is the truth of His unity. By discovering and using rightly the Truth of our being the barrier between our individuality and the universe will necessarily be forced open and cast away and the Truth that we realise in our own being cannot fail to realise itself to us in the universality which will then be our self. Realising in ourselves the “I am He” of the Vedanta, we cannot but realise in looking upon all around us the identical knowledge on its other side, “Thou art That.” We have only to see how practically the discipline must be conducted in order that we may arrive successfully at this great unification.