Chapter XVII

The Action of the Divine Shakti

This is the nature of the divine Shakti that it is the timeless power of the Divine which manifests itself in time as a universal force creating, constituting, maintaining and directing all the movements and workings of the universe. This universal Power is apparent to us first on the lower levels of existence as a mental, vital and material cosmic energy of which all our mental, vital and physical activities are the operations. It is necessary for our sadhana that we should thoroughly realise this truth in order to escape from the pressure of the limiting ego view and universalise ourselves even on these lower levels where ordinarily the ego reigns in full force. To see that we are not the originators of action but that it is rather this Power that acts in ourselves and in all others, not I and others the doers, but the one Prakriti, which is the rule of the Karmayoga, is also the right rule here. The ego sense serves to limit, separate and sharply differentiate, to make the most of the individual form and it is there because it is indispensable to the evolution of the lower life. But when we would rise above to a higher divine life we must loosen the force of the ego and eventually get rid of it — as for the lower life the development of ego, so for the higher life this reverse movement of elimination of the ego is indispensable. To see our actions as not our own but those of the divine Shakti working in the form of the lower Prakriti on the inferior levels of the conscious being, helps powerfully towards this change. And if we can do this, then the separation of our mental, vital and physical consciousness from that of other beings thins and lessens; the limitations of its workings remain indeed, but they are broadened and taken up into a large sense and vision of the universal working; the specialising and individualising differentiations of Nature abide for their own proper purpose, but are no longer a prison. The individual feels
his mind, life and physical existence to be one with that of others amid all differences and one with the total power of the spirit in Nature.

This however is a stage and not the whole perfection. The existence, however comparatively large and free, is still subject to the inferior nature. The sattwic, rajasic and tamasic ego is diminished but not eliminated; or if it seems to disappear, it has only sunk in our parts of action into the universal operation of the gunas, remains involved in them and is still working in a covert, subconscious fashion and may force itself to the front at any time. The sadhaka has therefore first to keep the idea and get the realisation of a one self or spirit in all behind all these workings. He must be aware behind Prakriti of the one supreme and universal Purusha. He must see and feel not only that all is the self-shaping of the one Force, Prakriti or Nature, but that all her actions are those of the Divine in all, the one Godhead in all, however veiled, altered and as it were perverted — for perversion comes by a conversion into lower forms — by transmission through the ego and the gunas. This will farther diminish the open or covert insistence of the ego and, if thoroughly realised, it will make it difficult or impossible for it to assert itself in such a way as to disturb or hamper the farther progress. The ego-sense will become, so far as it interferes at all, a foreign intrusive element and only a fringe of the mist of the old ignorance hanging on to the outskirts of the consciousness and its action. And, secondly, the universal Shakti must be realised, must be seen and felt and borne in the potent purity of its higher action, its supramental and spiritual workings. This greater vision of the Shakti will enable us to escape from the control of the gunas, to convert them into their divine equivalents and dwell in a consciousness in which the Purusha and Prakriti are one and not separated or hidden in or behind each other. There the Shakti will be in its every movement evident to us and naturally, spontaneously, irresistibly felt as nothing else but the active presence of the Divine, the shape of power of the supreme Self and Spirit.

The Shakti in this higher status reveals itself as the presence
or potentiality of the infinite existence, consciousness, will, delight, and when it is so seen and felt, the being turns towards it in whatever way, with its adoration or its will of aspiration or some kind of attraction of the lesser to the greater, to know it, to be full of and possessed by it, to be one with it in the sense and action of the whole nature. But at first while we still live in the mind, there is a gulf of division or else a double action. The mental, vital and physical energy in us and the universe is felt to be a derivation from the supreme Shakti, but at the same time an inferior, separated and in some sense another working. The real spiritual force may send down its messages or the light and power of its presence above us to the lower levels or may descend occasionally and even for a time possess, but it is then mixed with the inferior workings and partially transforms and spiritualises them, but is itself diminished and altered in the process. There is an intermittent higher action or a dual working of the nature. Or we find that the Shakti for a time raises the being to a higher spiritual plane and then lowers it back into the inferior levels. These alternations must be regarded as the natural vicissitudes of a process of transformation from the normal to the spiritual being. The transformation, the perfection cannot for the integral Yoga be complete until the link between the mental and the spiritual action is formed and a higher knowledge applied to all the activities of our existence. That link is the supramental or gnostic energy in which the incalculable infinite power of the supreme being, consciousness, delight formulates itself as an ordering divine will and wisdom, a light and power in the being which shapes all the thought, will, feeling, action and replaces the corresponding individual movements.

This supramental Shakti may form itself as a spiritualised intuitive light and power in the mind itself, and that is a great but still a mentally limited spiritual action. Or it may transform altogether the mind and raise the whole being to the supramental level. In any case this is the first necessity of this part of the Yoga, to lose the ego of the doer, the ego idea and the sense of one’s own power of action and initiation of action and control of the result of action and merge it in the sense and vision of
the universal Shakti originating, shaping, turning to its ends
the action of ourselves and others and of all the persons and
forces of the world. And this realisation can become absolute
and complete in all the parts of our being only if we can have
that sense and vision of it in all its forms, on all the levels of
our being and the world being, as the material, vital, mental and
supramental energy of the Divine, but all these, all the powers
of all the planes must be seen and known as self-formulations
of the one spiritual Shakti, infinite in being, consciousness and
Ananda. It is not the invariable rule that this power should first
manifest itself on the lower levels in the lower forms of energy
and then reveal its higher spiritual nature. And if it does so
come, first in its mental, vital or physical universalism, we must
be careful not to rest content there. It may come instead at once
in its higher reality, in the might of the spiritual splendour. The
difficulty then will be to bear and hold the Power until it has laid
powerful hands on and transformed the energies of the lower
levels of the being. The difficulty will be less in proportion as we
have been able to attain to a large quiet and equality, samatā,
and either to realise, feel and live in the one tranquil immutable
self in all or else to make a genuine and complete surrender of
ourselves to the divine Master of the Yoga.

It is necessary here to keep always in mind the three powers
of the Divine which are present and have to be taken account
of in all living existences. In our ordinary consciousness we see
these three as ourselves, the Jiva in the form of the ego, God—
whatever conception we may have of God, and Nature. In the
spiritual experience we see God as the supreme Self or Spirit,
or as the Being from whom we come and in whom we live and
move. We see Nature as his Power or God as Power, Spirit in
Power acting in ourselves and the world. The Jiva is then himself
this Self, Spirit, Divine, so 'ham, because he is one with him in
essence of his being and consciousness, but as the individual he
is only a portion of the Divine, a self of the Spirit, and in his
natural being a form of the Shakti, a power of God in movement
and action, parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā. At first, when we become
conscious of God or of the Shakti, the difficulties of our relation
with them arise from the ego consciousness which we bring into the spiritual relation. The ego in us makes claims on the Divine other than the spiritual claim, and these claims are in a sense legitimate, but so long as and in proportion as they take the egoistic form, they are open to much grossness and great perversions, burdened with an element of falsehood, undesirable reaction and consequent evil, and the relation can only be wholly right, happy and perfect when these claims become part of the spiritual claim and lose their egoistic character. And in fact the claim of our being upon the Divine is fulfilled absolutely only then when it ceases at all to be a claim and is instead a fulfilment of the Divine through the individual, when we are satisfied with that alone, when we are content with the delight of oneness in being, content to leave the supreme Self and Master of existence to do whatever is the will of his absolute wisdom and knowledge through our more and more perfected Nature. This is the sense of the self-surrender of the individual self to the Divine, ātma-samarpaṇa. It does not exclude a will for the delight of oneness, for participation in the divine consciousness, wisdom, knowledge, light, power, perfection, for the satisfaction of the divine fulfilment in us, but the will, the aspiration is ours because it is his will in us. At first, while there is still insistence on our own personality, it only reflects that, but becomes more and more indistinguishable from it, less personal and eventually it loses all shade of separateness, because the will in us has grown identical with the divine Tapas, the action of the divine Shakti.

And equally when we first become aware of the infinite Shakti above us or around or in us, the impulse of the egoistic sense in us is to lay hold on it and use this increased might for our egoistic purpose. This is a most dangerous thing, for it brings with it a sense and some increased reality of a great, sometimes a titanic power, and the rajasic ego, delighting in this sense of new enormous strength, may instead of waiting for it to be purified and transformed throw itself out in a violent and impure action and even turn us for a time or partially into the selfish and arrogant Asura using the strength given him for his own and not for the divine purpose: but on that way lies, in the
end, if it is persisted in, spiritual perdition and material ruin. And even to regard oneself as the instrument of the Divine is not a perfect remedy; for when a strong ego meddles in the matter, it falsifies the spiritual relation and under cover of making itself an instrument of the Divine is really bent on making instead God its instrument. The one remedy is to still the egoistic claim of whatever kind, to lessen persistently the personal effort and individual straining which even the sattwic ego cannot avoid and instead of laying hold on the Shakti and using it for its purpose rather to let the Shakti lay hold on us and use us for the divine purpose. This cannot be done perfectly at once — nor can it be done safely if it is only the lower form of the universal energy of which we are aware, for then, as has already been said, there must be some other control, either of the mental Purusha or from above,— but still it is the aim which we must have before us and which can be wholly carried out when we become insistently aware of the highest spiritual presence and form of the divine Shakti. This surrender too of the whole action of the individual self to the Shakti is in fact a form of real self-surrender to the Divine.

It has been seen that a most effective way of purification is for the mental Purusha to draw back, to stand as the passive witness and observe and know himself and the workings of Nature in the lower, the normal being; but this must be combined, for perfection, with a will to raise the purified nature into the higher spiritual being. When that is done, the Purusha is no longer only a witness, but also the master of his prakriti, īśvara. At first it may not be apparent how this ideal of active self-mastery can be reconciled with the apparently opposite ideal of self-surrender and of becoming the assenting instrument of the divine Shakti. But in fact on the spiritual plane there is no difficulty. The Jiva cannot really become master except in proportion as he arrives at oneness with the Divine who is his supreme Self. And in that oneness and in his unity with the universe he is one too in the universal self with the will that directs all the operations of Nature. But more directly, less transcendentally, in his individual action too, he is a portion of the Divine and participates in the
mastery over his nature of that to which he has surrendered himself. Even as instrument, he is not a mechanical but a conscious instrument. On the Purusha side of him he is one with the Divine and participates in the divine mastery of the Ishwara. On the nature side of him he is in his universality one with the power of the Divine, while in his individual natural being he is an instrument of the universal divine Shakti, because the individualised power is there to fulfil the purpose of the universal Power. The Jiva, as has been seen, is the meeting-place of the play of the dual aspect of the Divine, Prakriti and Purusha, and in the higher spiritual consciousness he becomes simultaneously one with both these aspects, and there he takes up and combines all the divine relations created by their interaction. This it is that makes possible the dual attitude.

There is however a possibility of arriving at this result without the passage through the passivity of the mental Purusha, by a more persistently and predominantly kinetic Yoga. Or there may be a combination of both the methods, alternations between them and an ultimate fusion. And here the problem of spiritual action assumes a more simple form. In this kinetic movement there are three stages. In the first the Jiva is aware of the supreme Shakti, receives the power into himself and uses it under her direction, with a certain sense of being the subordinate doer, a sense of minor responsibility in the action, — even at first, it may be, a responsibility for the result; but that disappears, for the result is seen to be determined by the higher Power, and only the action is felt to be partly his own. The sadhaka then feels that it is he who is thinking, willing, doing, but feels too the divine Shakti or Prakriti behind driving and shaping all his thought, will, feeling and action: the individual energy belongs in a way to him, but is still only a form and an instrument of the universal divine Energy. The Master of the Power may be hidden from him for a time by the action of the Shakti, or he may be aware of the Ishwara sometimes or continually manifest to him. In the latter case there are three things present to his consciousness, himself as the servant of the Ishwara, the Shakti behind as a great Power supplying the energy, shaping the action, formulating the results,
the Ishwara above determining by his will the whole action.

In the second stage the individual doer disappears, but there is not necessarily any quietistic passivity; there may be a full kinetic action, only all is done by the Shakti. It is her power of knowledge which takes shape as thought in the mind; the sadhaka has no sense of himself thinking, but of the Shakti thinking in him. The will and the feelings and action are also in the same way nothing but a formation, operation, activity of the Shakti in her immediate presence and full possession of all the system. The sadhaka does not think, will, act, feel, but thought, will, feeling, action happen in his system. The individual on the side of action has disappeared into oneness with universal Prakriti, has become an individualised form and action of the divine Shakti. He is still aware of his personal existence, but it is as the Purusha supporting and observing the whole action, conscious of it in his self-knowledge and enabling by his participation the divine Shakti to do in him the works and the will of the Ishwara. The Master of the power is then sometimes hidden by the action of the power, sometimes appears governing it and compelling its workings. Here too there are three things present to the consciousness, the Shakti carrying on all the knowledge, thought, will, feeling, action for the Ishwara in an instrumental human form, the Ishwara, the Master of existence governing and compelling all her action, and ourself as the soul, the Purusha of her individual action enjoying all the relations with him which are created by her workings. There is another form of this realisation in which the Jiva disappears into and becomes one with the Shakti and there is then only the play of the Shakti with the Ishwara, Mahadeva and Kali, Krishna and Radha, the Deva and the Devi. This is the intensest possible form of the Jiva's realisation of himself as a manifestation of Nature, a power of the being of the Divine, parā prakṛtir jīva-bhūtā.

A third stage comes by the increasing manifestation of the Divine, the Ishwara in all our being and action. This is when we are constantly and uninterruptedly aware of him. He is felt in us as the possessor of our being and above us as the ruler of all its workings and they become to us nothing but a manifestation
of him in the existence of the Jiva. All our consciousness is his consciousness, all our knowledge is his knowledge, all our thought is his thought, all our will is his will, all our feeling is his Ananda and form of his delight in being, all our action is his action. The distinction between the Shakti and the Ishwara begins to disappear; there is only the conscious activity in us of the Divine with the great self of the Divine behind and around and possessing it; all the world and Nature is seen to be only that, but here it has become fully conscious, the Maya of the ego removed, and the Jiva is there only as an eternal portion of his being, ānāśa sanātana, put forth to support a divine individualisation and living now fulfilled in the complete presence and power of the Divine, the complete joy of the Spirit manifested in the being. This is the highest realisation of the perfection and delight of the active oneness; for beyond it there could be only the consciousness of the Avatara, the Ishwara himself assuming a human name and form for action in the Lila.