Chapter V

The Instruments of the Spirit

If there is to be an active perfection of our being, the first necessity is a purification of the working of the instruments which it now uses for a music of discords. The being itself, the spirit, the divine Reality in man stands in no need of purification; it is for ever pure, not affected by the faults of its instrumentation or the stumblings of mind and heart and body in their work, as the sun, says the Upanishad, is not touched or stained by the faults of the eye of vision. Mind, heart, the soul of vital desire, the life in the body are the seats of impurity; it is they that must be set right if the working of the spirit is to be a perfect working and not marked by its present greater or less concession to the devious pleasure of the lower nature. What is ordinarily called purity of the being, is either a negative whiteness, a freedom from sin gained by a constant inhibition of whatever action, feeling, idea or will we think to be wrong, or else, the highest negative or passive purity, the entire God-content, inaction, the complete stilling of the vibrant mind and the soul of desire, which in quietistic disciplines leads to a supreme peace; for then the spirit appears in all the eternal purity of its immaculate essence. That gained, there would be nothing farther to be enjoyed or done. But here we have the more difficult problem of a total, unabated, even an increased and more powerful action founded on perfect bliss of the being, the purity of the soul’s instrumental as well as the spirit’s essential nature. Mind, heart, life, body are to do the works of the Divine, all the works which they do now and yet more, but to do them divinely, as now they do not do them. This is the first appearance of the problem before him on which the seeker of perfection has to lay hold, that it is not a negative, prohibitory, passive or quietistic, but a positive, affirmative, active purity which is his object. A divine quietism discovers the immaculate eternity of the Spirit, a divine kinetism
adds to it the right pure undeviating action of the soul, mind and body.

Moreover, it is a total purification of all the complex instrumentality in all the parts of each instrument that is demanded of us by the integral perfection. It is not, ultimately, the narrower moral purification of the ethical nature. Ethics deals only with the desire-soul and the active outward dynamical part of our being; its field is confined to character and action. It prohibits and inhibits certain actions, certain desires, impulses, propensities, — it inculcates certain qualities in the act, such as truthfulness, love, charity, compassion, chastity. When it has got this done and assured a base of virtue, the possession of a purified will and blameless habit of action, its work is finished. But the Siddha of the integral perfection has to dwell in a larger plane of the Spirit’s eternal purity beyond good and evil. By this phrase it is not meant, as the rash hastily concluding intellect would be prone to imagine, that he will do good and evil indifferently and declare that to the spirit there is no difference between them, which would be in the plane of individual action an obvious untruth and might serve to cover a reckless self-indulgence of the imperfect human nature. Neither is it meant that since good and evil are in this world inextricably entangled together, like pain and pleasure, — a proposition which, however true at the moment and plausible as a generalisation, need not be true of the human being’s greater spiritual evolution, — the liberated man will live in the spirit and stand back from the mechanical continued workings of a necessarily imperfect nature. This, however possible as a stage towards a final cessation of all activity, is evidently not a counsel of active perfection. But it is meant that the Siddha of the active integral perfection will live dynamically in the working of the transcendent power of the divine Spirit as a universal will through the supermind individualised in him for action. His works will therefore be the works of an eternal Knowledge, an eternal Truth, an eternal Might, an eternal Love, an eternal Ananda; but the truth, knowledge, force, love, delight will be the whole essential spirit of whatever work he will do and will not depend on its form; they will determine his
action from the spirit within and the action will not determine
the spirit or subject it to a fixed standard or rigid mould of
working. He will have no dominant mere habit of character,
but only a spiritual being and will with at the most a free and
flexible temperamental mould for the action. His life will be
a direct stream from the eternal fountains, not a form cut to
some temporary human pattern. His perfection will not be a
sattvic purity, but a thing uplifted beyond the gunas of Nature,
a perfection of spiritual knowledge, spiritual power, spiritual
delight, unity and harmony of unity; the outward perfection of
his works will be freely shaped as the self-expression of this inner
spiritual transcendence and universality. For this change he must
make conscient in him that power of spirit and supermind which
is now superconscient to our mentality. But that cannot work
in him so long as his present mental, vital, physical being is not
liberated from its actual inferior working. This purification is
the first necessity.

In other words, purification must not be understood in any
limited sense of a selection of certain outward kinetic move-
ments, their regulation, the inhibition of other action or a libera-
tion of certain forms of character or particular mental and moral
capacities. These things are secondary signs of our derivative
being, not essential powers and first forces. We have to take a
wider psychological view of the primary forces of our nature. We
have to distinguish the formed parts of our being, find out their
basic defect of impurity or wrong action and correct that, sure
that the rest will then come right naturally. We have not to doctor
symptoms of impurity, or that only secondarily, as a minor help,
— but to strike at its roots after a deeper diagnosis. We then
find that there are two forms of impurity which are at the root
of the whole confusion. One is a defect born of the nature of
our past evolution, which has been a nature of separative igno-
rance; this defect is a radically wrong and ignorant form given
to the proper action of each part of our instrumental being. The
other impurity is born of the successive process of an evolution,
where life emerges in and depends on body, mind emerges in
and depends on life in the body, supermind emerges in and lends
itself to instead of governing mind, soul itself is apparent only as a circumstance of the bodily life of the mental being and veils up the spirit in the lower imperfections. This second defect of our nature is caused by this dependence of the higher on the lower parts; it is an immixture of functions by which the impure working of the lower instrument gets into the characteristic action of the higher function and gives to it an added imperfection of embarrassment, wrong direction and confusion.

Thus the proper function of the life, the vital force, is enjoyment and possession, both of them perfectly legitimate, because the Spirit created the world for Ananda, enjoyment and possession of the many by the One, of the One by the many and of the many too by the many; but, — this is an instance of the first kind of defect, — the separative ignorance gives to it the wrong form of desire and craving which vitiates the whole enjoyment and possession and imposes on it its opposites, want and suffering. Again, because mind is entangled in life from which it evolves, this desire and craving get into the action of the mental will and knowledge; that makes the will a will of craving, a force of desire instead of a rational will and a discerning force of intelligent effectuation, and it distorts the judgment and reason so that we judge and reason according to our desires and prepossessions and not with the disinterested impartiality of a pure judgment and the rectitude of a reason which seeks only to distinguish truth and understand rightly the objects of its workings. That is an example of immixture. These two kinds of defect, wrong form of action and illegitimate mixture of action, are not limited to these signal instances, but belong to each instrument and to each combination of their functionings. They pervade the whole economy of our nature. They are fundamental defects of our lower instrumental nature, and if we can set them right, we shall get our instrumental being into a state of purity, enjoy the clarity of a pure will, a pure heart of emotion, a pure enjoyment of our vitality, a pure body. That will be a preliminary, a human perfection, but it can be made the basis and open out in its effort of self-attainment into the greater, the divine perfection.

Mind, life and body are the three powers of our lower
nature. But they cannot be taken quite separately because the life acts as a link and gives its character to body and to a great extent to our mentality. Our body is a living body; the life-force mingles in and determines all its functionings. Our mind too is largely a mind of life, a mind of physical sensation; only in its higher functions is it normally capable of something more than the workings of a physical mentality subjected to life. We may put it in this ascending order. We have first a body supported by the physical life-force, the physical prana which courses through the whole nervous system and gives its stamp to our corporeal action, so that all is of the character of the action of a living and not an inert mechanical body. Prana and physicality together make the gross body, *sthūla śārīra*. This is only the outer instrument, the nervous force of life acting in the form of body with its gross physical organs. Then there is the inner instrument, *antahkāraṇa*, the conscious mentality. This inner instrument is divided by the old system into four powers; *citta* or basic mental consciousness; *manas*, the sense mind; *buddhi*, the intelligence; *ahāṅkāra*, the ego-idea. The classification may serve as a starting-point, though for a greater practicality we have to make certain farther distinctions. This mentality is pervaded by the life-force, which becomes here an instrument for psychic consciousness of life and psychic action on life. Every fibre of the sense mind and basic consciousness is shot through with the action of this psychic prana, it is a nervous or vital and physical mentality. Even the buddhi and ego are overpowered by it, although they have the capacity of raising the mind beyond subjection to this vital, nervous and physical psychology. This combination creates in us the sensational desire-soul which is the chief obstacle to a higher human as well as to the still greater divine perfection. Finally, above our present conscious mentality is a secret supermind which is the proper means and native seat of that perfection.

Chitta, the basic consciousness, is largely subconscient; it has, open and hidden, two kinds of action, one passive or receptive, the other active or reactive and formative. As a passive power it receives all impacts, even those of which the mind is
unaware or to which it is inattentive, and it stores them in an immense reserve of passive subconscious memory on which the mind as an active memory can draw. But ordinarily the mind draws only what it had observed and understood at the time, — more easily what it had observed well and understood carefully, less easily what it had observed carelessly or ill understood; at the same time there is a power in consciousness to send up to the active mind for use what that mind had not at all observed or attended to or even consciously experienced. This power only acts observably in abnormal conditions, when some part of the subconscious chitta comes as it were to the surface or when the subliminal being in us appears on the threshold and for a time plays some part in the outer chamber of mentality where the direct intercourse and commerce with the external world takes place and our inner dealings with ourselves develop on the surface. This action of memory is so fundamental to the entire mental action that it is sometimes said, memory is the man. Even in the submental action of the body and life, which is full of this subconscious chitta, though not under the control of the conscious mind, there is a vital and physical memory. The vital and physical habits are largely formed by this submental memory. For this reason they can be changed to an indefinite extent by a more powerful action of conscious mind and will, when that can be developed and can find means to communicate to the subconscious chitta the will of the spirit for a new law of vital and physical action. Even, the whole constitution of our life and body may be described as a bundle of habits formed by the past evolution in Nature and held together by the persistent memory of this secret consciousness. For chitta, the primary stuff of consciousness, is like prana and body universal in Nature, but is subconscious and mechanical in nature of Matter.

But in fact all action of the mind or inner instrument arises out of this chitta or basic consciousness, partly conscient, partly subconscious or subliminal to our active mentality. When it is struck by the world’s impacts from outside or urged by the reflective powers of the subjective inner being, it throws up certain habitual activities, the mould of which has been determined by
our evolution. One of these forms of activity is the emotional mind, — the heart, as we may call it for the sake of a convenient brevity. Our emotions are the waves of reaction and response which rise up from the basic consciousness, *citta-vṛtti*. Their action too is largely regulated by habit and an emotive memory. They are not imperative, not laws of Necessity; there is no really binding law of our emotional being to which we must submit without remedy; we are not obliged to give responses of grief to certain impacts upon the mind, responses of anger to others, to yet others responses of hatred or dislike, to others responses of liking or love. All these things are only habits of our affective mentality; they can be changed by the conscious will of the spirit; they can be inhibited; we may even rise entirely above all subjection to grief, anger, hatred, the duality of liking and disliking. We are subject to these things only so long as we persist in subjection to the mechanical action of the chitta in the emotive mentality, a thing difficult to get rid of because of the power of past habit and especially the importunate insistence of the vital part of mentality, the nervous life-mind or psychic prana. This nature of the emotive mind as a reaction of chitta with a certain close dependence upon the nervous life sensations and the responses of the psychic prana is so characteristic that in some languages it is called chitta and prana, the heart, the life soul; it is indeed the most directly agitating and powerfully insistent action of the desire-soul which the immixture of vital desire and responsive consciousness has created in us. And yet the true emotive soul, the real psyche in us, is not a desire-soul, but a soul of pure love and delight; but that, like the rest of our true being, can only emerge when the deformation created by the life of desire is removed from the surface and is no longer the characteristic action of our being. To get that done is a necessary part of our purification, liberation, perfection.

The nervous action of the psychic prana is most obvious in our purely sensational mentality. This nervous mentality pursues indeed all the action of the inner instrument and seems often to form the greater part of things other than sensation. The emotions are especially assailed and have the pranic stamp; fear
is more even of a nervous sensation than an emotion, anger is largely or often a sensational response translated into terms of emotion. Other feelings are more of the heart, more inward, but they ally themselves to the nervous and physical longings or outward-going impulses of the psychic prana. Love is an emotion of the heart and may be a pure feeling,—all mentality, since we are embodied minds, must produce, even thought produces, some kind of life effect and some response in the stuff of body, but they need not for that reason be of a physical nature,—but the heart’s love allies itself readily with a vital desire in the body. This physical element may be purified of that subjection to physical desire which is called lust, it may become love using the body for a physical as well as a mental and spiritual nearness; but love may, too, separate itself from all, even the most innocent physical element, or from all but a shadow of it, and be a pure movement to union of soul with soul, psyche with psyche. Still the proper action of the sensational mind is not emotion, but conscious nervous response and nervous feeling and affection, impulse of the use of physical sense and body for some action, conscious vital craving and desire. There is a side of receptive response, a side of dynamic reaction. These things get their proper normal use when the higher mind is not mechanically subject to them, but controls and regulates their action. But a still higher state is when they undergo a certain transformation by the conscious will of the spirit which gives its right and no longer its wrong or desire form of characteristic action to the psychic prana.

Manas, the sense mind, depends in our ordinary consciousness on the physical organs of receptive sense for knowledge and on the organs of the body for action directed towards the objects of sense. The superficial and outward action of the senses is physical and nervous in its character, and they may easily be thought to be merely results of nerve-action; they are sometimes called in the old books prāṇas, nervous or life activities. But still the essential thing in them is not the nervous excitation, but the consciousness, the action of the chitta, which makes use of the organ and of the nervous impact of which it is the
channel. Manas, sense-mind, is the activity, emerging from the basic consciousness, which makes up the whole essentiality of what we call sense. Sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch are really properties of the mind, not of the body; but the physical mind which we ordinarily use, limits itself to a translation into sense of so much of the outer impacts as it receives through the nervous system and the physical organs. But the inner Manas has also a subtle sight, hearing, power of contact of its own which is not dependent on the physical organs. And it has, moreover, a power not only of direct communication of mind with object — leading even at a high pitch of action to a sense of the contents of an object within or beyond the physical range, — but direct communication also of mind with mind. Mind is able too to alter, modify, inhibit the incidence, values, intensities of sense impacts. These powers of the mind we do not ordinarily use or develop; they remain subliminal and emerge sometimes in an irregular and fitful action, more readily in some minds than in others, or come to the surface in abnormal states of the being. They are the basis of clairvoyance, clairaudience, transference of thought and impulse, telepathy, most of the more ordinary kinds of occult powers, — so called, though these are better described less mystically as powers of the now subliminal action of the Manas. The phenomena of hypnotism and many others depend upon the action of this subliminal sense-mind; not that it alone constitutes all the elements of the phenomena, but it is the first supporting means of intercourse, communication and response, though much of the actual operation belongs to an inner Buddhhi. Mind physical, mind supraphysical, — we have and can use this double sense mentality.

Buddhi is a construction of conscious being which quite exceeds its beginnings in the basic chitta; it is the intelligence with its power of knowledge and will. Buddhhi takes up and deals with all the rest of the action of the mind and life and body. It is in its nature thought-power and will-power of the Spirit turned into the lower form of a mental activity. We may distinguish three successive gradations of the action of this intelligence. There is first an inferior perceptive understanding which simply takes
up, records, understands and responds to the communications of the sense-mind, memory, heart and sensational mentality. It creates by their means an elementary thinking mind which does not go beyond their data, but subjects itself to their mould and rings out their repetitions, runs round and round in the habitual circle of thought and will suggested by them or follows, with an obedient subservience of the reason to the suggestions of life, any fresh determinations which may be offered to its perception and conception. Beyond this elementary understanding, which we all use to an enormous extent, there is a power of arranging or selecting reason and will-force of the intelligence which has for its action and aim an attempt to arrive at a plausible, sufficient, settled ordering of knowledge and will for the use of an intellectual conception of life.

In spite of its more purely intellectual character this secondary or intermediate reason is really pragmatic in its intention. It creates a certain kind of intellectual structure, frame, rule into which it tries to cast the inner and outer life so as to use it with a certain mastery and government for the purposes of some kind of rational will. It is this reason which gives to our normal intellectual being our set aesthetic and ethical standards, our structures of opinion and our established norms of idea and purpose. It is highly developed and takes the primacy in all men of an at all developed understanding. But beyond it there is a reason, a highest action of the buddhi which concerns itself disinterestedly with a pursuit of pure truth and right knowledge; it seeks to discover the real Truth behind life and things and our apparent selves and to subject its will to the law of Truth. Few, if any of us, can use this highest reason with any purity, but the attempt to do it is the topmost capacity of the inner instrument, the antahkarana.

Buddhi is really an intermediary between a much higher Truth-mind not now in our active possession, which is the direct instrument of Spirit, and the physical life of the human mind evolved in body. Its powers of intelligence and will are drawn from this greater direct Truth-mind or supermind. Buddhi centres its mental action round the ego-idea, the idea that I am
this mind, life and body or am a mental being determined by their action. It serves this ego-idea whether limited by what we call egoism or extended by sympathy with the life around us. An ego-sense is created which reposes on the separative action of the body, of the individualised life, of the mind-responses, and the ego-idea in the buddhi centralises the whole action of this ego's thought, character, personality. The lower understanding and the intermediary reason are instruments of its desire of experience and self-enlargement. But when the highest reason and will develop, we can turn towards that which these outward things mean to the higher spiritual consciousness. The “I” can then be seen as a mental reflection of the Self, the Spirit, the Divine, the one existence transcendent, universal, individual in its multiplicity; the consciousness in which these things meet, become aspects of one being and assume their right relations, can then be unveiled out of all these physical and mental coverings. When the transition to supermind takes place, the powers of the Buddhi do not perish, but have all to be converted to their supramental values. But the consideration of the supermind and the conversion of the buddhi belongs to the question of the higher siddhi or divine perfection. At present we have to consider the purification of the normal being of man, preparatory to any such conversion, which leads to the liberation from the bonds of our lower nature.