Chapter One

Ascent and Descent

The Meaning of Spiritual Transformation

What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscient. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its full descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation.

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The power of concentration above the head is to bring peace, silence, liberation from the body sense, the identification with mind and life and open the way for the lower (mental-vital-physical) consciousness to rise up to meet the higher Consciousness above and for the powers of the higher (spiritual or divine) Consciousness to descend into mind, life and body. This is what is called in this Yoga the spiritual transformation.

A Double Movement in the Sadhana

There is a double movement in the sadhana — the Divine Consciousness, Power, Light, Peace descending into all the body, the
consciousness from all parts of the body rising upwards to meet the Divine Consciousness above — the descent and the ascent.

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The sadhana is based on the fact that a descent of Forces from the higher planes and an ascent of the lower consciousness to the higher planes is the means of transformation of the lower nature — although naturally it takes time and the complete transformation can only come by the supramental descent. Your experiences here are forms of the widening experiences of this process.

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The practice of this Yoga is double — one side is of an ascent of the consciousness to the higher planes, the other is of a descent of the power of the higher planes into the earth consciousness so as to drive out the Power of darkness and ignorance and transform the nature.

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All the consciousness in the human being who is the mental embodied in living matter has to rise so as to meet the higher consciousness; the higher consciousness has also to descend into mind, into life, into matter. In that way the barriers will be removed and the higher consciousness will be able to take up the whole lower nature and transform it by the power of the supermind.

The earth is a material field of evolution. Mind and life, supermind, Sachchidananda are in principle involved there in the earth consciousness, but only matter is at first organised; then life descends from the life plane and gives shape and organisation and activity to the life principle in matter, creates the plant and animal; then mind descends from the mind plane, creating man. Now supermind is to descend so as to create a supramental race.

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There are two movements — one an ascension of the lower consciousness to meet the higher, the other the descent of the
higher consciousness into the lower. What you first experienced was an uprush of the lower consciousness from all parts so strong as to break the lid of the inner mind — that was the splitting of the skull — and to enable the joining of the two consciousnesses above to be complete. The result was a descent. Usually the first thing that descends from the higher consciousness is its deep and entire peace — the second is the Light, here the white light of the Mother. When the higher consciousness descends or is intensely felt, there is very usually an opening of the limited personal being into the cosmic consciousness — one feels a wide and infinite being which alone exists, the identification with the body and even the sense of the body disappears, the limited personal consciousness is lost in the Cosmic Existence. You had all this first in the impersonal way, but after the burning up of the psychic fire, you felt the Personal wideness, the cosmic consciousness of the Divine Mother and received her blessing.

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If your consciousness rises above the head, that means that it goes beyond the ordinary mind to the centre above which receives the higher consciousness or else towards the ascending levels of the higher consciousness itself. The first result is the silence and peace of the Self which is the basis of the higher consciousness; this may afterwards descend into the lower levels, into the very body. Light also can descend and Force. The navel and the centres below it are those of the vital and the physical; something of the higher Force may have descended there.

Both Ascent and Descent Necessary

The lower consciousness ascends towards the higher to join it — the higher descends into the lower to transform it. It is the rule of the consciousness in this sadhana.

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A going up and up higher, though a part of the total necessary
movement, does not by itself have any effect on the outer being. It only divides the consciousness into two and its only logical outcome is Nirvana. I have always written that the descent is necessary to change the nature; ascent is useful to open the higher planes and exalt the level of the consciousness, but it does not change the lower being except superficially by opening to it certain possibilities it had not before. But the descent must first take place in the inner being. When the higher consciousness is settled in the inner being, then it can change the outer. But necessarily the descent must be dynamic, not merely that of a static peace; the inner peace must itself become dynamic.

The descent whether of peace or force or light or knowledge or Ananda must occupy the whole inner being down to the inner physical. Without that how is the outer to be transformed at all? It is an amazing idea to suppose that the outer can be changed while the inner is left to itself. What you had in the inner being was a static stillness which did not even entirely occupy the inner physical except at times — that was why the dynamic descent was necessary, but in the inner being or if possible the whole being, the inner outflowing into the outer, not in the outer being to the exclusion of the inner.

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In the physical consciousness the descent is the most important. Something of the subtle physical can always go up — but the external physical consciousness can only do it when the force from above comes down and fills it. There is then a sort of unification made when the higher consciousness and the physical are one undivided consciousness and there is an ascent of forces from below and descent from above, simultaneous and mutually interpenetrating.

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I am not speaking of mere rising above [as the means of changing the external nature]. The rising above has to be followed by the descent of the higher consciousness into the different parts of the being. That aided by the psychic development and aiding it
changes the external nature.

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It was an experience (by ascension) of the spiritual plane of being above in which there is absolute peace and light and Ananda. It is this that has to descend into the mind, vital and body and be the constant condition and the basis for the final transformation of the consciousness and nature.

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There are two movements that are necessary — one is the ascent through the increasing of peace and silence to its source above the mind, — that is indicated by the tendency of the consciousness to rise out of the body to the top of the head and above where it is easy to realise the Self in all its stillness and liberation and wideness and to open to the other powers of the Higher Consciousness. The other is the descent of the peace, silence, the spiritual freedom and wideness and the powers of the higher consciousness as they develop into the lower down to the most physical and even the subconscient. To both of these movements there can be a block — a block above due to the mind and lower nature being unhabituated (it is that really and not incapacity) and a block below due to the physical consciousness and its natural slowness to change. Everybody has these blocks but by persistent will, aspiration or abhyāsa they can be overcome.

The Order of Ascent and Descent

There is no fixed rule in such things. With many the descent comes first and the ascension afterwards, with others it is the other way; with some the two processes go on together. If one can fix oneself above so much the better.

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I think the descent is more usual than the ascent. Some sadhaks finish the ascent first or ascents and descents but more often the descents come first and the ascent (above the head) takes place
only when there has been much working of peace, force, Ananda etc. in the body.

* The movement of ascension cannot finish so long as the movement of descent is not ready to finish.

Ascent and Descent of the Kundalini Shakti

The spine is the main channel of the descent and ascent of the Force, by which it connects the lower and the higher consciousness together.

* The sensation in the spine and on both sides of it is a sign of the awakening of the Kundalini power. More precisely, it is felt as a descending or an ascending current or currents, or both at the same time. There are two main nerve channels for the currents, one on each side of the central channel in the spine. The descending current is the Energy from above coming down to touch the sleeping Power in the lowest nerve centre at the bottom of the spine; the ascending current is the release of energy going up from the awakened Kundalini. This movement as it proceeds opens up the six centres of the subtle nervous system and by the opening one escapes from the limitations of the surface consciousness bound to the gross body, and great ranges of experience proper to the larger subliminal self, mental, vital, subtle-physical, are shown to the sadhaka. When the Kundalini meets the higher consciousness, as it ascends through the summit of the head, there is an opening to the higher superconscient reaches above the normal mind. It is by ascending through these in our consciousness and receiving a descent of their energies that it is possible ultimately to reach the supermind. This is the psycho-physical method which is elaborately systematised in the Tantra. In our Yoga it is not necessary to go through the systematised method,—for this psycho-physical process is only a part of the movement of the Yoga and it takes place spontaneously according to need by the force of the aspiration
and the call for the workings of the Divine Power. As soon as there is an opening, the Divine Power descends and conducts the necessary working, does what is needed, each thing in its time, and the Yogic consciousness begins to be born in the sadhaka.

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The force which you felt must evidently have been a rising of the Kundalini ascending to join the Force above and bring down the energy needed to ease the depression and then again rising to enforce the connection between the Above and the lower centres. The seeming expansion of the head is due to the joining of the mind with the consciousness of the Self or Divine above. That consciousness is wide and illimitable and when one rises into it the individual consciousness also breaks its limits and feels wide and illimitable. At such times one often feels as if there were no head and no body but all were a wide self and its consciousness, or else the head or the body is only a circumstance in that. The body or the physical mind is sometimes startled or alarmed at these experiences because they are abnormal to it; but there is no ground for alarm, — these are usual experiences in the Yoga.

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There is a Yoga Shakti lying coiled or asleep in the inner body, not active. When one does Yoga, this force uncoils itself and rises upward to meet the Divine Consciousness and Force that are waiting above us. When this happens, when the awakened Yoga Shakti arises, it is often felt like a snake uncoiling and standing up straight and lifting itself more and more upwards. When it meets the Divine Consciousness above, then the force of the Divine Consciousness can more easily descend into the body and be felt working there to change the nature.

The feeling of your body and eyes being drawn upwards is part of the same movement. It is the inner consciousness in the body and the inner subtle sight in the body that are looking and moving upward and trying to meet the divine consciousness and divine seeing above.

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Yoga means union with the Divine — a union either transcen
dental (above the universe) or cosmic (universal) or individual
or, as in our Yoga, all three together. Or it means getting into
a consciousness in which one is no longer limited by the small
ego, personal mind, personal vital and body but is in union with
the supreme Self or with the universal (cosmic) consciousness or
with some deeper consciousness within in which one is aware
of one’s own soul, one’s own inner being and of the real truth
of existence. In the Yogic consciousness one is not only aware
of things, but of forces, not only of forces but of the conscious
being behind the forces. One is aware of all this not only in
oneself but in the universe.

There is a force which accompanies the growth of the new
consciousness and at once grows with it and helps it to come
about and to perfect itself. This force is the Yoga shakti. It is
here asleep and coiled up in all the centres of our inner being
(chakras) and is at the base what is called in the Tantras the
Kundalini shakti. But it is also above us, above our head as
the Divine Force — not there coiled up, involved, asleep, but
awake, scient, potent, extended and wide; it is there waiting for
manifestation and to this Force we have to open ourselves — to
the power of the Mother. In the mind it manifests itself as a divine
mind-force or a universal mind-force and it can do everything
that the personal mind cannot do; it is then the Yogic mind-
force. When it manifests and works in the vital or physical in
the same way, it is then apparent as a Yogic life-force or a Yogic
body-force. It can awake in all these forms, bursting outwards
and upwards, extending itself into wideness from below; or it
can descend and become there a definite power for things; it
can pour downwards into the body, working, establishing its
reign, extending into wideness from above, link the lowest in us
with the highest above us, release the individual into a cosmic
universality or into absoluteness and transcendence.

Ascent and Descent and Problems of the Lower Nature

If one can remain always in the higher consciousness, so much
the better. But why does not one remain always there? Because the lower is still part of the nature and it pulls you down towards itself. If on the other hand the lower is transformed, it becomes of one kind with the higher and there is nothing lower to pull downwards.

Transformation means that the higher consciousness or nature is brought down into the mind, vital and body and takes the place of the lower. There is a higher consciousness of the true self which is spiritual, but it is above; if one rises above into it, then one is free as long as one remains there, but if one comes down into or uses mind, vital or body — and if one keeps any connection with life, one has to do so, either to come down and act from the ordinary consciousness or else to be in the self but use mind, life and body — then the imperfections of these instruments have to be faced and mended; they can only be mended by transformation.

You say you rise a little above into this higher consciousness, but where do you rise? Into the quieted mind and above the vital or above the mind itself into something always calm and pure and free?

No. I did not intend any sarcasm by my question [at the end of the preceding letter]. You had written that by rising a little above the ordinary consciousness one was free from difficulties and that this was what one felt — I thought you meant that this was your own experience. So I put the question, as the experience of the quiet mind is one that can easily be broken by the invasions of the vital or the inertia of the physical being. The experience of the deeper freedom and calm which belongs to the self remains, but it can be covered up by the lower consciousness.

That [thoughts about others] can be only a temporary result of past activities. The endeavour should now be to make the ascent above into the silence of the Self in the higher universal consciousness above, for that was evidently what was trying
to come when the disturbance broke in. That would probably bring also the descent of the permanent spiritual peace into all the being as a basis for the higher activities.

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That you should be able to keep your consciousness uplifted is already something. As for the opening its coming and apparent closing is a normal experience — it needs several openings before the thing is settled by a permanent poise of the consciousness above and an increasing descent into the head and below. It is the pull from below that should get no indulgence — for that, though most do indulge in it, is a wrong crabby way of doing it. One must be safely stationed above before one can descend without a tumble. Not that the tumble if it comes precludes a going up again — it does not; but that is no reason for letting it happen.

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Even if the permanent opening does not come at once, you have only to wait and it is bound to come. It is certainly a pity that the restlessness of the vital should kick so much against vacancy of the consciousness; for if you could stand it this emptiness, now neutral, and therefore not interesting to the vital, would become positive and be the peaceful recipient of the pouring from above. The difficulty is that the vital has always been accustomed either to doing something or to something doing and when it is doing nothing or nothing is doing (or it seems like that on the surface), it gets bored and begins to feel and talk or to do nonsense. However even with this obstacle, the Descent can come down — it need not wait for the Supramental.

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Yes. To ascend is easier than to bring down; the higher consciousness gets entangled and impeded in the physical and the mind and vital.

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Rising higher and higher and bringing down is the method of
Ascent and Descent

the Yoga; but it is not possible to do it with full effect until one has so prepared oneself that one can rise above the head to the Self in the higher mind. It was the point you had reached but could not confirm before the difficulties came in from the physical consciousness.

Experiences of Ascent and Descent

The ascent of the consciousness in the lower centres into the higher and the descent of the higher powers and the white light indicates a farther preparation of the vital and physical being and its forces by spiritualisation of the centres.

All these are different actions of the Force on the adhar with the one intention of opening it up from above and below and horizontally also. The action from above opens it to the descent of forces from above the Mind and the ascent of consciousness above the lid of the ordinary human mind. The horizontal action opens it to the cosmic consciousness on all its levels. The action from below helps to connect the superconscient with the subconscious. Finally the consciousness instead of being limited in the body becomes infinite, rises infinitely above, plunges infinitely below, widens infinitely on every side. There is besides the opening of all the centres to the Light and Power and Ananda that has to descend from above. At present only the mind centres seem to receive fully the descent of Force, while the upper vital centres are being prepared with a minor action on other parts of the body. It is a matter of time and perseverance for the way to be entirely open.

The experience you feel is that of the Atman, the cosmic Self supporting the cosmic consciousness—not yet clear but in its first impression. When the consciousness goes down from that condition, it brings something of it into the vital and physical consciousness and the result is either that these parts or at least
the vital open and get into touch with what has been brought down. The inert tāmasikatā or the unease in the legs comes because the physical is not able to receive or assimilate. This will disappear when that part opens and receives and is able to assimilate.

It was there the occasional descent of the Force to establish a connection — here the descent is taking another form intended to establish the fundamental experiences of the Realisation.

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It is the beginning of a very decisive experience and realisation — first, the Ascent above the mind (head) into the spiritual plane. It is here that one releases and is released into the vastness, fullness, solace, freedom, peace and joy of the Infinite and becomes aware of the universal Self and the Divine. Its realisation is the foundation (when it is fixed and when one rises constantly above the body in the wideness of the infinite Being) of the spiritual state and the beginning of the spiritual transformation of the nature. What you have been having up to now is the psychic change; when the psychic and spiritual join together, then the transformation can be complete. For this the Descent is necessary and that is the second thing you are feeling, — the descent of the higher, spiritual or divine consciousness and energy into the whole system down to the bottom of the spine where is the Muladhara or centre of the physical consciousness. The Energy descends through all the levels and centres, mind centres, vital centres, physical centre and fills the whole body with the higher existence and consciousness. The ascent is the liberation (mukti) and when once this ascends, one is liberated from the body consciousness, one no longer feels the body as a form, no longer feels contained in the body, but widens out into the formless Vastness of the Divine. Or sometimes the body is felt as something very small in this vastness. In the Descent the body is felt but not as a confining form so much as an instrument and receptacle for this larger consciousness. Your description of the experience is unmistakable. All the elements are there. What has to happen is to get fixed in the wideness, freedom, stillness, peace
of the consciousness above and for the Descent to continue till it has fixed the higher power of being everywhere below — in the body and in the subconscience below it and also all round the body so that one lives enveloped in this new consciousness and being.

The experiences you relate mark a great progress — the passage from the perception of the ascending Force to that of the descending Shakti. For the spiral coils of Light you saw and whose effects you felt — the merging in silence and peace, the peace of the Atman or the Brahman consciousness — are usually a first effect, they are visual forms of the dynamic descent of the Divine Force from above; also the passage from the realisation of the static Brahman with the sense of the unreality of the world-existence to the realisation of the status of the dynamic one. This is a considerable step in the integral Yoga.

The Brahman consciousness is sometimes described as a static one, but it has two aspects, static and dynamic, and it is when both are united that it becomes integral. This is the greater consciousness I speak of in the sentence quoted by you, greater than either that which perceives the Brahmic silence and immobility alone or that which perceives the cosmic existence and action alone.