**Lights on Yoga**
elects from Sri Aurobindo's letters

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**Planes and Parts of the Being**

Men do not know themselves and have not learned to distinguish the different parts of their being; for these are usually lumped together by them as mind, because it is through a mentalised perception and understanding that they know or feel them; therefore they do not understand their own states and actions, or, if at all, then only on the surface. It is part of the foundation of Yoga to become conscious of the great complexity of our nature, see the different forces that move it and get over it a control of directing knowledge. We are composed of many parts each of which contributes something to the total movement of our consciousness, our thought, will, sensation, feeling, action, but we do not see the origination or the course of these impulses; we are aware only of their confused and pell-mell results on the surface upon which we can at best impose nothing better than a precarious shifting order.

The remedy can only come from the parts of the being that are already turned towards the Light. To call in the light of the Divine Consciousness from above, to bring the psychic being to the front and kindle a flame of aspiration which will awaken spiritually the outer mind and set on fire the vital being, is the way out.

*Yoga means union with the Divine – a union either transcendental (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 coiled up and asleep 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 acts in the vital or the physical in the same way, it is there 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.

In the process of our Yoga the centres have each a fixed psychological use and general function which base all their special powers and functionings. The **mūlādhāra** governs the physical down to the subconscious; the abdominal centre – **svādhiṣṭhāna** – governs the lower vital; the navel centre – **nābhipadma or manipura** – governs the larger vital; the heart centre – **hrdpadma or anāhata** – governs the emotional being; the throat centre – **viśuddha** – governs the expressive and externalising mind; the centre between the eye-brows – **ājnācakra** – governs the dynamic mind, will, vision, mental formation; the thousand-petalled lotus – **sahasradala** – above commands the higher thinking mind, houses the still higher illumined mind and at the highest opens to the intuition through which or else by an overflooding directness the overmind can have with the rest communication or an immediate contact.
In our Yoga we mean by the subconscient that quite submerged part of our being in which there is no wakingly conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling or organised reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, or persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature. For if these impressions rise up most in dream in an incoherent and disorganised manner, they can also and do rise up into our waking consciousness as a mechanical repetition of old thoughts, old mental, vital and physical habits or an obscure stimulus to sensations, actions, emotions which do not originate in or from our conscious thought or will and are even often opposed to its perceptions, choice or dictates. In the subconscient there is an obscure mind full of obstinate Sanskaras, impressions, associations, fixed notions, habitual reactions formed by our past, an obscure vital full of the seeds of habitual desires, sensations and nervous reactions, a most obscure material which governs much that has to do with the condition of the body. It is largely responsible for our illnesses; chronic or repeated illnesses are indeed mainly due to the subconscient and its obstinate memory and habit of repetition of whatever has impressed itself upon the body-consciousness. But this subconscient must be clearly distinguished from the subliminal parts of our being such as the inner or subtle physical consciousness, the inner vital or inner mental; for these are not at all obscure or incoherent or ill-organised, but only veiled from our surface consciousness. Our surface constantly receives something, inner touches, communications or influences, from these sources but does not know for the most part whence they come.

There is a vital plane (self-existent) above the material universe which we see; there is a mental plane (self-existent) above the vital and material. These three together, – mental, vital, physical, – are called the triple universe of the lower hemisphere. They have been established in the earth-consciousness by evolution – but they exist in themselves before the evolution, above the earth-consciousness and the material plane to which the earth belongs.

There is behind all the vital nature in man his true vital being concealed and immobile which is quite different from the surface vital nature. The surface vital is narrow, ignorant, limited, full of obscure desires, passions, cravings, revolts, pleasures and pains, transient joys and griefs, exultations and depressions. The true vital being, on the contrary, is wide, vast, calm, strong, without limitations, firm and immovable, capable of all power, all knowledge, all Ananda. It is moreover without ego, for it knows itself to be a projection and instrument of the Divine: it is the divine Warrior, pure and perfect; in it is an instrumental Force for all divine realisations. It is the true vital being that has become awake and come in front within you. In the same way there is too a true mental being, a true physical being. When these are manifest, then you are aware of a double existence in you: that behind is always calm and strong, that on the surface alone is troubled and obscure. But if the true being behind remains stable and you live in it, then the trouble and obscurity remain only on the surface; in this condition the exterior parts can be dealt with more potently and they are also made free and perfect.

The “Mind” in the ordinary use of the word covers indiscriminately the whole consciousness, for man is a mental being and mentalises everything; but in the language of this Yoga the words “mind” and “mental” are used to connote specially the part of the nature which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental or thought perceptions, the reactions of thought to things, with the truly mental movements and formations, mental vision and will, etc., that are part of his intelligence. The vital has to be carefully distinguished from mind, even though it has a mind element transfused into it; the vital is the Life-nature made up of desires, sensations, feelings, passions, energies of action, will of desire, reactions of the desire-soul in man and of all that play of possessive and other related instincts, anger, fear, greed, lust, etc., that belong to this field of the nature. Mind and vital are mixed up on the surface of the consciousness, but they are quite separate forces in themselves and as
soon as one gets behind the ordinary surface consciousness one sees them as separate, discovers their distinction and can with the aid of this knowledge analyse their surface mixtures. It is quite possible and even usual during a time shorter or longer, sometimes very long, for the mind to accept the Divine or the Yogic ideal while the vital is unconvinced and unsurrendered and goes obstinately on its way of desire, passion and attraction to the ordinary life. Their division or their conflict is the cause of most of the more acute difficulties of the Sadhana.

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The mental being within watches, observes and passes judgment on all that happens in you. The psychic does not watch and observe in this way like a witness, but it feels and knows spontaneously in a much more direct and luminous way, by the very purity of its own nature and the divine instinct within it, and so, whenever it comes to the front it reveals at once what are the right and what the wrong movements in your nature.

The being of man is composed of these elements – the psychic behind supporting all, the inner mental, vital and physical, and the outer, quite external nature of mind, life and body which is their instrument of expression. But above all is the central being (Jivatman) which uses them all for its manifestation: it is a portion of the Divine Self; but this reality of himself is hidden from the external man who replaces this inmost self and soul of him by the mental and vital ego. It is only those who have begun to know themselves that become aware of their true central being; but still it is always there standing behind the action of mind, life and body and is most directly represented by the psychic which is itself a spark of the Divine. It is by the growth of the psychic element in one’s nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one’s central being above. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature, it is then that one has a real, a spiritual as opposed to a partial and merely mental or moral self-mastery.

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The phrase “central being” in our Yoga is usually applied to the portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. This central being has two forms – above, it is Jivatman, our true being, of which we become aware when the higher self-knowledge comes, – below, it is the psychic being which stands behind mind, body and life. The Jivatman is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the psychic being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it.

The natural attitude of the psychic being is to feel itself as the Child, the Son of God, the Bhakta; it is a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but in the dynamics of the manifestation there is always even in identity a difference. The Jivatman, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine; but it too, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna.

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The Spirit is the Atman, Brahman, Essential Divine. When the One Divine manifests its ever inherent multiplicity, this essential Self or Atman becomes for that manifestation the central being who presides from above over the evolution of its personalities and terrestrial lives here, but is itself an eternal portion of the Divine and prior to the terrestrial manifestation – parā prakṛtir jīvabhūtā.

In this lower manifestation, aparā prakṛti, this eternal portion of the Divine appears as the soul, a spark of the Divine Fire, supporting the individual evolution, supporting the mental, vital and physical being. The psychic being is the spark growing into a Fire, evolving with the growth of the consciousness. The psychic being is therefore evolutionary, not like the Jivatman prior to the evolution.

But man is not aware of the self or Jivatman, he is aware only of his ego, or he is aware of the mental being which controls the life and the body. But more deeply he becomes aware of his soul or psychic being as his true centre, the Purusha in the heart; the psychic is the central being in the evolution, it proceeds from and represents the Jivatman. The eternal portion of the Divine. When there is the full consciousness, the Jivatman and the psychic being join together.
The ego is a formation of Nature; but it is not a formation of physical nature alone, therefore it does not cease with the body. There is a mental and vital ego also.

The base of the material consciousness here is not only the Ignorance, but the Inconscience – that is, the consciousness is involved in form of Matter and energy of Matter. It is not only the material consciousness but the vital and the mental too that are separated from the Truth by the Ignorance.

*The word Jiva has two meanings in the Sanskritic tongues – “living creatures”* and the spirit individualised and upholding the living being in its evolution from birth to birth. In the latter sense the full term is Jivatman – the Atman, spirit or eternal self of the living being. It is spoken of figuratively by the Gita as “an eternal portion of the Divine” – but the word fragmentation (used by you) is too strong, it could be applicable to the forms, but not to the spirit in them. Moreover, the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here. An elaborate description of the Jivatman would be: “the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being.” The Jivatman in its essence does not change or evolve, its essence stands above the personal evolution; within the evolution itself it is represented by the evolving psychic being which supports all the rest of the nature.

The Adwaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the Jiva has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another school attributes a real but not an independent existence to the Jiva – it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation, and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The dualistic schools affirm the Jiva as an independent category or stand on the triality of God, Soul and Nature.

*In Bengal when one is about to kill a small animal, people often protest saying “Don’t kill – it is Krishna’s Jiva (His living creature).”*

*The soul takes birth each time, and each time a mind, life and body are formed out of the materials of universal Nature according to the soul's past evolution and its need for the future.*

When the body is dissolved, the vital goes into the vital plane and remains there for a time, but after a time the vital sheath disappears. The last to dissolve is the mental sheath. Finally, the soul or psychic being retires into the psychic world to rest there till a new birth is close.

This is the general course for ordinarily developed human beings. There are variations according to the nature of the individual and his development. For example, if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic.

The soul gathers the essential elements of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its Karma as is useful to it in the new life for further experience.

It is really for the vital part of the being that Shraddha and rites are done – to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace.

The consciousness in the individual widens itself into the cosmic consciousness outside and can have any kind of dealing with it, penetrate, know its movements, act upon it or receive from it, even become commensurate with or contain it, which is what was meant in the language of the old Yogas by having the Brahmanda within you.

The cosmic consciousness is that of the universe, of the cosmic spirit and cosmic Nature with all the beings and forces within it. All that is as much conscious as a whole as the individual separately is, though in a different way. The consciousness of the individual is part of this, but a part feeling itself as a separate being. Yet all the time most of what he is comes into him from the cosmic consciousness. But there is a wall of separative ignorance between. Once it breaks down he becomes aware of the cosmic Self, of the consciousness of the cosmic Nature, of the forces playing in it, etc. He feels all that as he now feels physical things and impacts. He finds it all to be one with his larger or universal self.

There is the universal mental, the universal vital, the universal physical Nature and it is out of a selection of their forces and movements that the individual mind, vital and physical are made. The soul comes from beyond this nature of mind, life and body. It belongs to the transcendent and because of it
we can open to the higher Nature beyond.

The Divine is always One that is Many. The individual spirit is part of the “Many” side of the One, and the psychic being is what it puts forth to evolve here in the earth-nature. In liberation the individual self realises itself as the One (that is yet Many). It may plunge into the One and merge or hide itself in its bosom – that is the laya of the Adwaita; it may feel its oneness and yet as part of the Many that is One enjoy the Divine, that is the Dwaitadwaita liberation; it may lay stress on its Many aspect and be possessed by the Divine, the Vishistadwaita, or go on playing with Krishna in the eternal Vrindavan, the Dwaita liberation. Or it may, even being liberated, remain in the Lila or manifestation or descend into it as often as it likes. The Divine is not bound by human philosophies – it is free in its play and free in its essence.

What is meant by Prakriti or Nature is the outer or executive side of the Shakti or Conscious Force which forms and moves the worlds. This outer side appears here to be mechanical, a play of the forces, Gunas, etc. Behind it is the living Consciousness and Force of the Divine, the divine Shakti. The Prakriti itself is divided into the lower and higher, – the lower is the Prakriti of the Ignorance, the Prakriti of mind, life and Matter separated in consciousness from the Divine; the higher is the Divine Prakriti of Sachchidananda with its manifesting power of Supermind, always aware of the Divine and free from Ignorance and its consequences. Man so long as he is in the ignorance is subject to the lower Prakriti, but by spiritual evolution he becomes aware of the higher Nature and seeks to come into contact with it. He can ascend into it and it can descend into him – such an ascent and descent can transform the lower nature of mind, life and Matter.

The Overmind has to be reached and brought down before the supermind descent is at all possible – for the Overmind is the passage through which one passes from Mind to Supermind. It is from the Overmind that all these different arrangements of the creative Truth of things originate. Out of the Overmind they come down to the Intuition and are transmitted from it to the Illumined and Higher Mind to be arranged there for our intelligence. But they lose more and more of their power and certitude in the transmission as they come down to the lower levels. What energy of directly perceived Truth they have is lost in the human mind; for to the human intellect they present themselves only as speculative ideas, not as realised Truth, not as direct sight, a dynamic vision coupled with a concrete undeniable experience.

Supermind is between the Sachchidananda and the lower creation. It alone contains the self-determining Truth of the Divine Consciousness and is necessary for a Truth-creation. One can of course realise Sachchidananda in relation to the mind, life and body also – but then it is something stable, supporting by its presence the lower Prakriti, but not transforming it. The Supermind alone can transform the lower nature.

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 inconscient 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 inconscience 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.