Chapter One

The Universal or Cosmic Consciousness

The Terms “Universal” and “Cosmic”

There is no difference between the terms “universal” and “cosmic” except that “universal” can be used in a freer way than “cosmic”. Universal may mean “of the universe”, cosmic in that general sense. But it may also mean “common to all”,—e.g., “This is a universal weakness” — but you cannot say, “This is a cosmic weakness.”

* Universal applies to everything in the universe — there are individual beings everywhere, but not physical in the terrestrial sense — the composition being different.

The Nature of the Cosmic Consciousness

Man is shut up at present in his surface individual consciousness and knows the world (or rather the surface of it) only through his outward mind and senses and by interpreting their contacts with the world. By Yoga there can open in him a consciousness which becomes one with that of the world; he becomes directly aware of a universal Being, universal states, universal Force and Power, universal mind, life, matter and lives in conscious relations with these things. He is then said to have the cosmic consciousness.

* Men are usually shut up in the sense of their separate existence and know of the world and of other beings only what they see, hear, feel by their senses and their mental images and inferences. By Yoga one can get free of this limitation and become directly
aware of the Cosmic Self, the self of other beings, of their movements, of the movements of the cosmic forces, etc. etc. That is the cosmic consciousness.

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Everyone has a universal consciousness standing concealed behind the individualised personality. When one becomes aware of it one feels in contact with the universal self and forces or one with them.

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When one has the cosmic consciousness, one can feel the cosmic self as one’s own self, one can feel one with other beings in the cosmos, one can feel all the forces of Nature as moving in oneself, all selves as one’s own self.

There is no why except that it is so, since all is the One.

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The ordinary consciousness of man is confined to his own individuality — he can enter into the consciousness of others and of the universe only by indirect means or a superficial and incomplete apprehension, by sense experience, contacts of emotional sympathy, mental concepts, analogy with his own movements, inference. In Yoga at a certain point this limitation breaks down, the consciousness enlarges itself, becomes directly aware of the Cosmic Self and knows the individual self to be one with it; of the Cosmic Energy and meets directly the action of the cosmic forces; of the cosmic mind, life, matter and feels first a contact of its individual mind, life, body with them, then a unity in which one’s own individual mentality, vitality, physicality is felt as only a part of the universal, a wave of the ocean, a dynamo receiving and formulating the universal forces. Finally, the individual melts into the cosmic consciousness, the whole world is felt in oneself and oneself suffused through the world — it is the cosmic Consciousness, Mind, Life, material Energy that works through the individual function. The separate ego either does not exist or is only a convenience for the universal Spirit.
The Universal or Cosmic Consciousness and its action. This is the complete consummation of the cosmic Consciousness, but in its fullness it is not common, belonging properly to what we may call the Overmind realisation; but a constant partial and growing experience of it or an increasing contact with the cosmic Consciousness is a normal part of Yoga.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Overmind

The cosmic consciousness does not belong to overmind in especial; it covers all the planes.

The overmind is the basis of the total cosmic consciousness, but the cosmic consciousness itself can be felt on any plane, not only above mind, but in mind, life, matter.

The Cosmic Consciousness and the Transcendent

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 was what was meant in the language of the old Yogas by having the brahmāṇḍa 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. Only 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 uni-
versal 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 lib-
eration 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 Visishtadwaita, 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.

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One has to get above the cosmic consciousness of the mind,
life and matter by entering into the spiritual levels above the
ordinary mind, into the higher consciousness. This does not cut
one off from the cosmic consciousness, but one sees it without
being involved in it.

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It [the correspondent's experience] is the release from the limita-
tions by the body consciousness and the opening into the wider
being which is universal although it has an individual centre.
As this develops one becomes aware of the true Self silent and
illimitable and the cosmic consciousness. The concentration at
the apex above the head is the station in the thousand-petalled
lotus. There one becomes aware of states of mind above the
ordinary human *buddhi*, the higher mind, the illumined mind,
the intuition, the overmind — finally when one has achieved the overmind one opens directly to the supramental consciousness.

* The cosmic consciousness has many levels — the cosmic physical, the cosmic vital, the cosmic Mind, and above the higher planes of cosmic Mind there is the Intuition and above that the Overmind and still above that the Supermind where the Transcendental begins. In order to live on the Intuitive plane (not merely to receive intuitions), one has to live in the cosmic consciousness because there the cosmic and individual run into each other as it were, and the mental separation between them is already broken down, so nobody can reach there who is still in the separative ego.

A reflected static realisation of Sachchidananda is possible on any of the cosmic planes, but the full entering into it, the entire union with the Supreme Divine dynamic as well as static, comes with the transcendence.

* It [realisation of the Cosmic Divine] is sufficient if only a static Consciousness is aimed at — but if transformation and the dynamic Divine is the aim, then the whole must be known. To realise the Cosmic Divine is after all impossible without entering into or opening to the cosmic consciousness — but one has to know the cosmic Prakriti as well as the cosmic Purusha.

**Spiritual, Cosmic and Ordinary Consciousness**

1. The spiritual consciousness is that in which we enter into the awareness of Self, the Spirit, the Divine and are able to see in all things their essential reality and the play of forces and phenomena as proceeding from that essential Reality.

2. The cosmic consciousness is that in which the limits of ego, personal mind and body disappear and one becomes aware of a cosmic vastness which is or is filled by a cosmic Spirit and aware also of the direct play of cosmic forces, universal
mind forces, universal life forces, universal energies of Matter, universal Overmind forces. But one does not become aware of all these together; the opening of the cosmic consciousness is usually progressive. It is not that the ego, the body, the personal mind disappear, but one feels them as only a small part of oneself. One begins to feel others too as part of oneself or varied repetitions of oneself, the same self modified by Nature in other bodies or, at the least, as living in the larger universal self which is henceforth one’s own greater reality. All things in fact begin to change their value and appearance; one’s whole experience of the world is radically different from that of those who are shut up in their personal selves. One begins to know things by a different kind of experience, more direct, not depending on the external mind and the senses. It is not that the possibility of error disappears, for that cannot be so long as mind of any kind is one’s instrument for transcribing knowledge, but there is a new vast and deep way of experiencing, seeing, knowing, contacting things, and the confines of knowledge can be rolled back to an almost immeasurable degree. The things one has to be on guard against in the cosmic consciousness are the play of a magnified ego, the vaster attacks of the hostile forces — for they too are part of the cosmic consciousness — and the attempt of the cosmic Illusion (Ignorance, Avidya) to prevent the growth of the soul into the cosmic Truth. These are things that one has to learn by experience; mental teaching or explanation is quite insufficient. To enter safely into the cosmic consciousness and to pass safely through it, it is necessary to have a strong central unegoistic sincerity and to have the psychic being, with its divination of truth and unaltering orientation towards the Divine, already in front in the nature.

3. The ordinary consciousness is that in which one knows things only or mainly by the intellect, the external mind and the senses and knows forces etc. only by their outward manifestations and results and the rest by inferences from these data. There may be some play of mental intuition, deeper psychic seeing or impulsions, spiritual intimations etc. — but in the ordinary
consciousness these are incidental only and do not modify its fundamental character.

The Widening of the Consciousness

It is very good. The widening of the consciousness so as to be in touch with the Universal Infinite is an important stage in the sadhana.

* The ordinary man lives in his own personal consciousness knowing things through his mind and senses as they are touched by a world which is outside him, outside his consciousness. When the consciousness subtilises, it begins to come into contact with things in a much more direct way, not only with their forms and outer impacts but with what is inside them, but still the range may be small. But the consciousness can also widen and begin to be first in direct contact with an immense range of things in the world, then to contain them as it were, — as it is said to see the world in oneself, — and to be in a way identified with it. To see all things in the self and the self in all things — to be aware of one being everywhere, aware directly of the different planes, their forces, their beings — that is universalisation.

* Opening is when it [the consciousness] receives the higher forces — widening is when it is no longer limited to the body but widens to meet the cosmic consciousness.

* The widening of the consciousness beyond the body means that there is a preparation to pass out of the limitation by the body consciousness and feel oneself either in the cosmic consciousness or in contact with it. If one has this feeling of enlargement or wideness above the head one is in contact with the universal Self; below it is according to the level with the cosmic Mind, the cosmic vital or the cosmic physical consciousness. When
one is entirely freed from the body limitation, then one feels the consciousness as infinite with the body only as something very small within it.

It [separation of the consciousness from the body] means the liberation from the body sense in which one can truly say, “I am not the body.” This liberation is part of the cosmic consciousness — as is also the realisation of the cosmic Will.

It is the liberation from the body sense only. That is quite different from the control of the body.

Yes, your experience was a very good one and your feeling about it was correct. When the consciousness is narrow and personal or shut in the body, it is difficult to receive from the Divine — the wider it expands, the more it can receive. A time comes when it feels as wide as the world and able to receive all the Divine into itself.

If you feel the barrier in which you lived broken down and an inner ocean of wideness, then a great thing has happened in you. For it is this wideness that comes when the consciousness opens to the Divine. Into this wideness the Divine’s peace, love, light and joy can pour and fix themselves there.

Go on calling the Mother and opening yourself to her. All the rest will come.

By a widening of all the parts of the being, a sense of largeness and liberation of the mind, vital and physical, an opening to the Divine everywhere and many other signs [— so the Divine’s wideness manifests itself].

Yes — it [wideness] is felt as if a great substantial vastness full
of power and giving the sense of oneness free and infinite and the same from top to bottom.

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The emptiness and wideness in the brain is a very good sign. It is a condition for the opening horizontally into the cosmic consciousness and upward into the Self and higher spiritual Mind above the head.

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The lightness, the feeling of the disappearance of the head and that all is open is a sign of the wideness of the mental consciousness which is no longer limited by the brain and its body sense — no longer imprisoned but wide and free. This is felt in the meditation only at first or with closed eyes, but at a later stage it becomes established and one feels always oneself a wide consciousness not limited by any feeling of the body. You felt something of this wideness of your being in the second experience when the Mother’s foot pressed down your physical mind (head) till it went below and left room for this sense of an infinite Self. This wide consciousness not dependent on the body or limited by it is what is called in Yoga the Atman or Self. You are only having the first glimpses of it, but later on it becomes normal and one feels that one was always this Atman infinite and immortal.

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It is an experience of the extension of consciousness. In Yoga experience the consciousness widens in every direction, around, below, above, in each direction stretching to infinity. When the consciousness of the Yogen becomes liberated, it is not in the body, but in this infinite height, depth and wideness that he lives always. Its basis is an infinite void or silence, but in that all can manifest — Peace, Freedom, Power, Light, Knowledge, Ananda. This consciousness is usually called the consciousness of the Self or Atman, for it is a pure existence or self that is the source of all things and contains all things.
You must dismiss the fear of the concentration. The emptiness you feel coming on you is the silence of the great peace in which you become aware of your self, not as the small ego shut up in the body, but as the spiritual self wide as the universe. Consciousness is not dissolved; it is the limits of the consciousness that are dissolved. In that silence thoughts may cease for a time, there may be nothing but a great limitless freedom and wideness, but into that silence, that empty wideness descends the vast peace from above, light, bliss, knowledge, the higher Consciousness in which you feel the oneness of the Divine. It is the beginning of the transformation and there is nothing in it to fear.

* If these were imaginations, you would be able to reproduce them exactly each time you thought of them. The idea that it is imagination comes from the physical mind which cannot believe in anything supraphysical.

This opening of the chest into the void (not really the void, but the infinite Akash of the Chit universal and illimitable) is always the sign of an opening of the emotional being into the wideness of the Universal Divine. The image of the Akash is often seen by sadhaks in Dhyana. When the consciousness is liberated, whether in the mind or other part, there is always this sense of the wide infinite emptiness. From the top of the head to the throat is the mental plane of the being—a similar opening and emptiness or wideness here is the sign of the mind being freed into the Universal. From the throat to the stomach is the higher vital or emotional region. Below is the lower vital plane.

* It is of course the inner wideness in which you were absorbed so that outward things went on of themselves without engaging the interest. In the meditation it was the same descent into the head—when it fills the head, there is often this feeling of there being no head, only that which is coming down or else a wideness in which that is acting. In the end one gets the feeling of being not something confined in the head and body, but a
wide consciousness with the body only as something comparatively small inside it. The vision was a figure of this wider consciousness with the Mother’s inner presence always there.

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Yes, what you see is right.¹ It is why the former Yogins preferred to remain in the wide consciousness aloof from the play of the energies — they regarded the latter as something belonging to the life of illusion which would fall away only by the rejection of the physical life through knowledge. It is when you oscillate from one consciousness to another that you seem to lose the higher one or feel as if it were lost. By keeping it within always, one is able to regard both sides and change the recalcitrant lower nature.

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The wideness comes when one exceeds or begins to exceed the individual consciousness and spread out towards the universal. But the psychic can be active even in the individual consciousness.

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At the beginning the experience of wideness like other experiences comes only from time to time. It is only afterwards that it becomes frequent and remains long, till finally it settles and the consciousness remains always wide.

**The Cosmic Consciousness and the Cosmic Self**

In the cosmic consciousness the personal I disappears into the one Self of all. The I which alone exists is not that of the person, the individualised I, but the universalised I identical with all and with the cosmic Self (Atman).

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¹ The correspondent said that when he lived in the wide consciousness above, he could remain undisturbed by the energies of the lower nature. But when he tried to change those energies, he became troubled and confused by their downward pull. — Ed.
It is what it represents itself to be — an experience of the universal consciousness aspiring to the Divine Truth and beginning to receive its light. It is not your own consciousness, although you feel it in yourself, but a symbolic experience of this universal Vishwa-Purusha. These things one sees when one opens to the Cosmic Consciousness. Observed, felt and taken rightly they help to liberate, universalise and impersonalise. But keep the ego out of it — everybody opening to the Cosmic Divine will have these or similar experiences. Observe and go forward.

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There is no doubt that you will succeed in your endeavour — all that is needed is firm persistence till the success is complete.

What you saw in the vision was the wide and luminous infinite of what is called the universal Self or spirit. It is that which is one of the fundamental things into which one enters when one reaches the higher consciousness and goes above. The personal being naturally feels itself as something very small and insignificant in that Infinite. But in that Infinite there are higher and higher levels and it is to these levels that the Mother was leading you when she took you by the hand. This often happens in meditation or trance when one has once gone upward into the spiritual infinity. The reason why you did not see the Mother’s form was not that the Mother hid herself, or anything in you came between, but that you were both moving in the formless Infinite as spiritual beings and so it was easier to feel the presence than to see any physical form. Not that the form cannot be there, but it is less insistent and therefore not so soon seen as on the physical plane.

The silence in the head and heart and the emptiness are both necessary and desirable. When they are there, the consciousness finds them natural and they give it the sense of lightness and release; that is why the thoughts or speech of the old kind are foreign to it and when they come give fatigue. This silence and emptiness must grow, so that the higher consciousness with its knowledge, light, Ananda, peace can come down in it and progressively replace the old things. They must indeed occupy
not only head and heart but the whole body.

The Cosmic Consciousness and Self-Realisation

Liberation is the first necessity — to live in the peace, silence, purity, freedom of the Self. Along with that or afterwards if one awakens to the cosmic consciousness, then one can be free, yet one with all things.

To have the cosmic consciousness without the liberation etc. is possible, but then there is no freedom anywhere in the being from the lower nature and one may become in one's extended consciousness the playground of all kinds of forces without being able to be either free and detached from the Prakriti or free and master.

On the other hand, if there has been self-realisation, there is one part of the being that remains untouched amid the play of the cosmic forces — while if the peace and purity of the self has been established in the whole inner consciousness, then the outer touches of the lower nature cannot come in or overpower. This is the advantage of self-realisation preceding the cosmic consciousness and supporting it.

* When there is the development of the Self-realisation or of the cosmic consciousness or if there is the emptiness which is the preliminary condition for these things, there comes an automatic tendency for a unity with all — their affections, mental, vital, physical may easily touch. One has to keep oneself free.

* Affections here [in the preceding letter] has not the ordinary sense — it means “ways in which they are affected by things”, e.g. joy, grief, pleasure, pain, illness etc.

* What you feel is the normal condition when the liberation takes place. The work of the senses etc. goes on as before, but the
consciousness is different, so that one feels not only the sense of liberation, separation etc., but that one is living in quite another world than that of the ordinary mind, life or senses. It is another consciousness with another knowledge and way of looking at things that begins. Afterwards as this consciousness takes possession of the instruments, there is a harmony of it with the sense and life; but these too become different, with a changed outlook, seeing the world no more as before but as if made of another substance with another significance.

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It is when you feel the universal or divine beauty or presence in things that the senses are open to the Divine.