

Chapter Four

The Self or Atman

The Self

It [*the self*] is being, not a being. By self is meant the conscious essential existence, one in all.

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The self is the Divine itself in an essential aspect; it is not a portion. There is no meaning in the phrase “not even a portion” or “only an aspect”. An aspect is not something inferior to a portion.

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Do you not know what “essential” means? There is a difference between the essence of a thing which is always the same and its formations and developments which vary. There is, for instance, the essence of gold and there are the many forms which gold can take.

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Essence can never be defined — it simply is.

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Everything acts in the self. The whole play of Nature takes place in the self, in the Divine. The self contains the universe.

The Cosmic Spirit or Self

The Cosmic Spirit or Self contains everything in the cosmos — it upholds cosmic Mind, universal Life, universal Matter as well as the Overmind. The Self is more than all these things which are its formulations in Nature.

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It [*the Cosmic Spirit*] uses Truth and Falsehood, Knowledge and Ignorance and all the other dualities as elements in the manifestation and works out what has to be worked out till all is ready for a higher working.

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The Cosmic Spirit contains the Supermind, but it keeps it above and works for the present between the Overmind and the physical. It is only when the Ignorance is removed that the Supramental becomes directly a dynamic part of the workings of cosmic Nature here. Till then there are only reflections of it.

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The Self is essentially universal; the individualised self is only the universal experienced from an individual centre. If what you have realised is not felt to be one in all, then it is not the “Atman”; possibly it is the central being not yet revealing its universal aspect as Atman.

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The Self is felt as either universal, one in all, or a universalised individual the same in essence as others, extended everywhere from each being but centred here. Of course centre is a way of speaking, because no physical centre is usually felt — only all the action takes place around the individual.

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All is in the self; when identified with the universal self, all is in you.

Also, the microcosm reproduces the macrocosm — so all is present in each, though all is not expressed (and cannot be) in the surface consciousness.

The Atman, the Soul and the Psychic Being

The Atman is one in all, is not born, does not evolve or change.

The soul is something that comes from the Divine into the evolution and as the psychic being it evolves and assumes

different personalities from life to life.

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To live in the consciousness of the Atman is to live in the calm, unity and peace that is above things and separate from the world even when pervading it. But for the psychic consciousness there are two things, the world and itself acting in the world. The Jivatman has not come down into the world, it stands above, always the same — supporting the different beings, mental etc. which act here. The psychic is what has come down here — its function is to offer all things to the Divine for transformation.

The Self and Nature or Prakriti

The Self or Atman is inactive, Nature (Prakriti) or Shakti acts. When the Self is realised it is first an infinite existence, wideness, silence, freedom, peace that is felt — that is called Atman or Self. When action takes place, it is according to the realisation either felt as forces of Nature working in that wideness, as the Divine Shakti working or as the cosmic Divine or various powers of him working. It is not felt that the Self is acting.

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One may be aware of the silent static self without relation to the play of the cosmos. Again, one may be aware of the universal static self omnipresent in everything without being supra-sensuously awake to the movement of the dynamic *viśva-prakṛti*. The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world.

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In the experience of Yoga the self or being is in essence one with the Divine or at the least it is a portion of the Divine and has all the divine potentialities. But in manifestation it takes two aspects, the Purusha and Prakriti, conscious being and Nature. In Nature here the Divine is veiled, and the individual being is subjected to Nature which acts here as the lower Prakriti, a force of Ignorance, Avidya. The Purusha in itself is divine, but exteriorised in the ignorance of Nature it is as the individual apparent being imperfect with her imperfection. Thus the soul or psychic essence, which is the Purusha entering into the evolution and supporting it, carries in itself all the divine potentialities, but the individual psychic being which it puts forth as its representative assumes the imperfection of Nature and evolves in it till it has recovered its full psychic essence and united itself with the Self above of which the soul is the individual projection in the evolution. This duality in the being on all its planes, for it is true in different ways not only of the Self and the psychic but of the mental, vital and physical Purushas, has to be grasped and accepted before the experiences of the Yoga can be fully understood.

The Being is one throughout, but on each plane of Nature, it is represented by a form of itself which is proper to that plane, the mental Purusha in the mental plane, the vital Purusha in the vital, the physical Purusha in the physical. The Taittiriya Upanishad speaks of two other planes of the being, the Knowledge or Truth plane and the Ananda plane, each with its Purusha, but although influences may come down from them these are superconscious to the human mind and their nature is not yet organised here.