Chapter XXVI

Samadhi

INTIMATELY connected with the aim of the Yoga of Knowledge which must always be the growth, the ascent or the withdrawal into a higher or a divine consciousness not now normal to us, is the importance attached to the phenomenon of Yogic trance, to Samadhi. It is supposed that there are states of being which can only be gained in trance; that especially is to be desired in which all action of awareness is abolished and there is no consciousness at all except the pure supramental immersion in immobile, timeless and infinite being. By passing away in this trance the soul departs into the silence of the highest Nirvana without possibility of return into any illusory or inferior state of existence. Samadhi is not so all-important in the Yoga of devotion, but it still has its place there as the swoon of being into which the ecstasy of divine love casts the soul. To enter into it is the supreme step of the ladder of Yogic practice in Rajayoga and Hathayoga. What then is the nature of Samadhi or the utility of its trance in an integral Yoga? It is evident that where our objective includes the possession of the Divine in life, a state of cessation of life cannot be the last consummating step or the highest desirable condition: Yogic trance cannot be an aim, as in so many Yogic systems, but only a means, and a means not of escape from the waking existence, but to enlarge and raise the whole seeing, living and active consciousness.

The importance of Samadhi rests upon the truth which modern knowledge is rediscovering, but which has never been lost in Indian psychology, that only a small part whether of world-being or of our own being comes into our ken or into our action. The rest is hidden behind in subliminal reaches of being which descend into the profoundest depths of the subconscious and rise to highest peaks of superconscience, or which surround the little field of our waking self with a wide circumconscient existence.
of which our mind and sense catch only a few indications. The old Indian psychology expressed this fact by dividing consciousness into three provinces, waking state, dream-state, sleep-state, jāgrat, svāpna, suṣupti; and it supposed in the human being a waking self, a dream-self, a sleep-self, with the supreme or absolute self of being, the fourth or Turiya, beyond, of which all these are derivations for the enjoyment of relative experience in the world.

If we examine the phraseology of the old books, we shall find that the waking state is the consciousness of the material universe which we normally possess in this embodied existence dominated by the physical mind. The dream-state is a consciousness corresponding to the subtler life-plane and mind-plane behind, which to us, even when we get intimations of them, have not the same concrete reality as the things of the physical existence. The sleep-state is a consciousness corresponding to the supramental plane proper to the gnosis, which is beyond our experience because our causal body or envelope of gnosis is not developed in us, its faculties not active, and therefore we are in relation to that plane in a condition of dreamless sleep. The Turiya beyond is the consciousness of our pure self-existence or our absolute being with which we have no direct relations at all, whatever mental reflections we may receive in our dream or our waking or even, irrecoverably, in our sleep consciousness. This fourfold scale corresponds to the degrees of the ladder of being by which we climb back towards the absolute Divine. Normally therefore we cannot get back from the physical mind to the higher planes or degrees of consciousness without receding from the waking state, without going in and away from it and losing touch with the material world. Hence to those who desire to have the experience of these higher degrees, trance becomes a desirable thing, a means of escape from the limitations of the physical mind and nature.

Samadhi or Yogic trance retires to increasing depths according as it draws farther and farther away from the normal or waking state and enters into degrees of consciousness less and less communicable to the waking mind, less and less ready to
receive a summons from the waking world. Beyond a certain point the trance becomes complete and it is then almost or quite impossible to awaken or call back the soul that has receded into them; it can only come back by its own will or at most by a violent shock of physical appeal dangerous to the system owing to the abrupt upheaval of return. There are said to be supreme states of trance in which the soul persisting for too long a time cannot return; for it loses its hold on the cord which binds it to the consciousness of life, and the body is left, maintained indeed in its set position, not dead by dissolution, but incapable of recovering the ensouled life which had inhabited it. Finally, the Yogin acquires at a certain stage of development the power of abandoning his body definitively without the ordinary phenomena of death, by an act of will, or by a process of withdrawing the pranic life-force through the gate of the upward life-current (udāna), opening for it a way through the mystic brahmarandhra in the head. By departure from life in the state of Samadhi he attains directly to that higher status of being to which he aspires.

In the dream-state itself there are an infinite series of depths; from the lighter recall is easy and the world of the physical senses is at the doors, though for the moment shut out; in the deeper it becomes remote and less able to break in upon the inner absorption, the mind has entered into secure depths of trance. There is a complete difference between Samadhi and normal sleep, between the dream-state of Yoga and the physical state of dream. The latter belongs to the physical mind; in the former the mind proper and subtle is at work liberated from the immixture of the physical mentality. The dreams of the physical mind are an incoherent jumble made up partly of responses to vague touches from the physical world round which the lower mind-faculties disconnected from the will and reason, the buddhi, weave a web of wandering phantasy, partly of disordered associations from the brain-memory, partly of reflections from the soul travelling on the mental plane, reflections which are, ordinarily, received.

1 icchā-mṛtyu.
without intelligence or coordination, wildly distorted in the re-
ception and mixed up confusedly with the other dream elements,
with brain-memories and fantastic responses to any sensory
touch from the physical world. In the Yogic dream-state, on the
other hand, the mind is in clear possession of itself, though not
of the physical world, works coherently and is able to use either
its ordinary will and intelligence with a concentrated power or
else the higher will and intelligence of the more exalted planes
of mind. It withdraws from experience of the outer world, it
puts its seals upon the physical senses and their doors of com-
nunication with material things; but everything that is proper
to itself, thought, reasoning, reflection, vision, it can continue
to execute with an increased purity and power of sovereign
concentration free from the distractions and unsteadiness of the
waking mind. It can use too its will and produce upon itself or
upon its environment mental, moral and even physical effects
which may continue and have their after consequences on the
waking state subsequent to the cessation of the trance.

To arrive at full possession of the powers of the dream-state,
it is necessary first to exclude the attack of the sights, sounds etc.
of the outer world upon the physical organs. It is quite possible
indeed to be aware in the dream-trance of the outer physical
world through the subtle senses which belong to the subtle body;
one may be aware of them just so far as one chooses and on a
much wider scale than in the waking condition: for the subtle
senses have a far more powerful range than the gross physical
organs, a range which may be made practically unlimited. But
this awareness of the physical world through the subtle senses
is something quite different from our normal awareness of it
through the physical organs; the latter is incompatible with the
settled state of trance, for the pressure of the physical senses
breaks the Samadhi and calls back the mind to live in their
normal field where alone they have power. But the subtle senses
have power both upon their own planes and upon the physical
world, though this is to them more remote than their own world
of being. In Yoga various devices are used to seal up the doors of
the physical sense, some of them physical devices; but the one al-
sufficient means is a force of concentration by which the mind is
drawn inward to depths where the call of physical things can no
longer easily attain to it. A second necessity is to get rid of the
intervention of physical sleep. The ordinary habit of the mind
when it goes in away from contact with physical things is to fall
into the torpor of sleep or its dreams, and therefore when called
in for the purposes of Samadhi, it gives or tends to give, at the
first chance, by sheer force of habit, not the response demanded,
but its usual response of physical slumber. This habit of the mind
has to be got rid of; the mind has to learn to be awake in the
dream-state, in possession of itself, not with the outgoing, but
with an ingathered wakefulness in which, though immersed in
itself, it exercises all its powers.

The experiences of the dream-state are infinitely various. For
not only has it sovereign possession of the usual mental powers,
reasoning, discrimination, will, imagination, and can use them
in whatever way, on whatever subject, for whatever purpose it
pleases, but it is able to establish connection with all the worlds
to which it has natural access or to which it chooses to acquire
access, from the physical to the higher mental worlds. This it
does by various means open to the subtlety, flexibility and com-
prehensive movement of this internalised mind liberated from
the narrow limitations of the physical outward-going senses. It is
able first to take cognizance of all things whether in the material
world or upon other planes by aid of perceptible images, not only
images of things visible, but of sounds, touch, smell, taste, move-
ment, action, of all that makes itself sensible to the mind and its
organs. For the mind in Samadhi has access to the inner space
called sometimes the cidâkâśa, to depths of more and more sub-
tle ether which are heavily curtained from the physical sense by
the grosser ether of the material universe, and all things sensible,
whether in the material world or any other, create reconstituting
vibrations, sensible echoes, reproductions, recurrent images of
themselves which that subtler ether receives and retains.

It is this which explains many of the phenomena of clair-
voyance, clairaudience, etc.; for these phenomena are only the
exceptional admission of the waking mentality into a limited
sensitiveness to what might be called the image memory of the subtle ether, by which not only the signs of all things past and present, but even those of things future can be seized; for things future are already accomplished to knowledge and vision on higher planes of mind and their images can be reflected upon mind in the present. But these things which are exceptional to the waking mentality, difficult and to be perceived only by the possession of a special power or else after assiduous training, are natural to the dream-state of trance consciousness in which the subliminal mind is free. And that mind can also take cognizance of things on various planes not only by these sensible images, but by a species of thought perception or of thought reception and impression analogous to that phenomenon of consciousness which in modern psychical science has been given the name of telepathy. But the powers of the dream-state do not end here. It can by a sort of projection of ourselves, in a subtle form of the mental body, actually enter into other planes and worlds or into distant places and scenes of this world, move among them with a sort of bodily presence and bring back the direct experience of their scenes and truths and occurrences. It may even project actually the mental or vital body for the same purpose and travel in it, leaving the physical body in a profoundest trance without sign of life until its return.

The greatest value of the dream-state of Samadhi lies, however, not in these more outward things, but in its power to open up easily higher ranges and powers of thought, emotion, will by which the soul grows in height, range and self-mastery. Especially, withdrawing from the distraction of sensible things, it can, in a perfect power of concentrated self-seclusion, prepare itself by a free reasoning, thought, discrimination, or more intimately, more finally, by an ever deeper vision and identification, for access to the Divine, the supreme Self, the transcendent Truth, both in its principles and powers and manifestations and in its highest original Being. Or it can by an absorbed inner joy and emotion, as in a sealed and secluded chamber of the soul, prepare itself for the delight of union with the divine Beloved, the Master of all bliss, rapture and Ananda.
For the integral Yoga this method of Samadhi may seem to have the disadvantage that when it ceases, the thread is broken and the soul returns into the distraction and imperfection of the outward life, with only such an elevating effect upon that outer life as the general memory of these deeper experiences may produce. But this gulf, this break is not inevitable. In the first place, it is only in the untrained psychic being that the experiences of the trance are a blank to the waking mind; as it becomes the master of its Samadhi, it is able to pass without any gulf of oblivion from the inner to the outer waking. Secondly, when this has been once done, what is attained in the inner state, becomes easier to acquire by the waking consciousness and to turn into the normal experience, powers, mental status of the waking life. The subtle mind which is normally eclipsed by the insistence of the physical being, becomes powerful even in the waking state, until even there the enlarging man is able to live in his several subtle bodies as well as in his physical body, to be aware of them and in them, to use their senses, faculties, powers, to dwell in possession of supraphysical truth, consciousness and experience.

The sleep-state ascends to a higher power of being, beyond thought into pure consciousness, beyond emotion into pure bliss, beyond will into pure mastery; it is the gate of union with the supreme state of Sachchidananda out of which all the activities of the world are born. But here we must take care to avoid the pitfalls of symbolic language. The use of the words dream and sleep for these higher states is nothing but an image drawn from the experience of the normal physical mind with regard to planes in which it is not at home. It is not the truth that the Self in the third status called perfect sleep, susupti, is in a state of slumber. The sleep self is on the contrary described as Prajna, the Master of Wisdom and Knowledge, Self of the Gnosis, and as Ishwara, the Lord of being. To the physical mind a sleep, it is to our wider and subtler consciousness a greater waking. To the normal mind all that exceeds its normal experience but still comes into its scope, seems a dream; but at the point where it borders on things quite beyond its scope, it can no longer see truth even as
in a dream, but passes into the blank incomprehension and non-reception of slumber. This border-line varies with the power of the individual consciousness, with the degree and height of its enlightenment and awakening. The line may be pushed up higher and higher until it may pass even beyond the mind. Normally indeed the human mind cannot be awake, even with the inner waking of trance, on the supramental levels; but this disability can be overcome. Awake on these levels the soul becomes master of the ranges of gnostic thought, gnostic will, gnostic delight, and if it can do this in Samadhi, it may carry its memory of experience and its power of experience over into the waking state. Even on the yet higher level open to us, that of the Ananda, the awakened soul may become similarly possessed of the Bliss-Self both in its concentration and in its cosmic comprehension. But still there may be ranges above from which it can bring back no memory except that which says, "somehow, indescribably, I was in bliss," the bliss of an unconditioned existence beyond all potentiality of expression by thought or description by image or feature. Even the sense of being may disappear in an experience in which the word existence loses its sense and the Buddhistic symbol of Nirvana seems alone and sovereignly justified. However high the power of awakening goes, there seems to be a beyond in which the image of sleep, of suṣupti, will still find its application.

Such is the principle of the Yogic trance, Samadhi, — into its complex phenomena we need not now enter. It is sufficient to note its double utility in the integral Yoga. It is true that up to a point difficult to define or delimit almost all that Samadhi can give, can be acquired without recourse to Samadhi. But still there are certain heights of spiritual and psychic experience of which the direct as opposed to a reflecting experience can only be acquired deeply and in its fullness by means of the Yogic trance. And even for that which can be otherwise acquired, it offers a ready means, a facility which becomes more helpful, if not indispensable, the higher and more difficult of access become the planes on which the heightened spiritual experience is sought. Once attained there, it has to be brought as much as possible into the waking consciousness. For in a Yoga which embraces
all life completely and without reserve, the full use of Samadhi comes only when its gains can be made the normal possession and experience for an integral waking of the embodied soul in the human being.