Chapter XXI

The Order of the Worlds

Seven are these worlds in which move the life-forces that are hidden within the secret heart as their dwelling-place seven by seven. 

*Mundaka Upanishad*.1

May the Peoples of the five Births accept my sacrifice, those who are born of the Light and worthy of worship; may Earth protect us from earthly evil and the Mid-Region from calamity from the gods. Follow the shining thread spun out across the mid-world, protect the luminous paths built by the thought; weave an inviolate work, become the human being, create the divine race. . . . Seers of truth are you, sharpen the shining spears with which you cut the way to that which is Immortal; knowers of the secret planes, form them, the steps by which the gods attained to immortality. 

*Rig Veda*.2

This is the eternal Tree with its root above and its branches downward; this is Brahman, this is the Immortal; in it are lodged all the worlds and none goes beyond it. This and That are one. 

*Katha Upanishad*.3

IF A spiritual evolution of consciousness in the material world and a constant or repeated rebirth of the individual into an earthly body are admitted, the next question that arises is whether this evolutionary movement is something separate and complete in itself or part of a larger universal totality of which the material world is only one province. This question has already its answer implied in the gradations of the involution which precede the evolution and make it possible; for, if that precedence is a fact, there must be worlds or at least planes

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1 II. 1. 8. 2 X. 53. 5, 6, 10. 3 II. 3. 1.
of higher being and they must have some connection with the
evolution which has been made possible by their existence. It
may be that all they do for us is by their effective presence
or pressure on the earth-consciousness to liberate the involved
principles of life and mind and spirit and enable them to manifest
and assert their reign in material Nature. But it would be in the
highest degree improbable that the connection and intervention
should cease there; there is likely to be a sustained, if veiled,
commerce between material life and the life of the other planes
of existence. It is necessary now to look more closely into this
problem, regard it in itself and determine the nature and limits
of this connection and intercommunication, in so far as it affects
the theory of evolution and rebirth in material Nature.

The descent of the Soul into the Ignorance can be thought of
as an abrupt precipitation or immediate lapse of a pure spiritual
being out of the superconscient spiritual Reality into the first
inconscience and the subsequent evolving phenomenal life of
material Nature. If that were so, there might be the Absolute
above and the Inconscient below, with the material world cre-
ated out of it, and the issue, the return back would then be a
similar abrupt or precipitous transit from a material embodied
world-being into the transcendent Silence. There would be no
intermediate powers or realities other than Matter and Spirit,
no other planes than the material, no other worlds than the
world of Matter. But this idea is too trenchant and simple a
construction and cannot outlive a wider view of the complex
nature of existence.

There are, no doubt, several possible originations of cosmic
existence by which such an extreme and rigid world-balance-
ment could have conceivably come into being. There could have
been a conception of this kind and a fiat in an All-Will, or an
idea, a movement of the soul towards an egoistic material life
of the Ignorance. The eternal individual soul urged by some
inexplicable desire arising within it can be supposed to have
sought the adventure of the darkness and taken a plunge from
its native Light into the depths of a Nescience out of which
arose this world of Ignorance; or a collectivity of souls may
have been so moved, the Many: for an individual being cannot constitute a cosmos; a cosmos must be either impersonal or multipersonal or the creation or self-expression of a universal or infinite Being. This desire may have drawn down an All-Soul with it to build a world based upon the power of the Inconscient. If not that, then the eternally omniscient All-Soul itself may have abruptly plunged its self-knowledge into this darkness of the Inconscience, carrying the individual souls within it to begin their upward evolution through an ascending scale of life and consciousness. Or, if the individual is not pre-existent, if we are only a creation of the All-consciousness or a fiction of the phenomenal Ignorance, either creatrix may have conceived all these myriads of individual beings by the evolution of names and forms out of an original indiscriminate Prakriti; the soul would be a temporary product of the indiscriminate stuff of inconscient force-substance which is the first appearance of things in the material universe.

On that supposition, or on any of them, there could be only two planes of existence: on one side there is the material universe created out of the Inconscient by the blind nescience of Force or Nature obedient perhaps to some inner unfelt Self which governs its somnambulist activities; on the other side there is the superconscient One to which we return out of the Inconscience and Ignorance. Or else we may imagine that there is one plane only, the material existence; there is no superconscient apart from the Soul of the material universe. If we find that there are other planes of conscious being and that there already exist other worlds than the material universe, these ideas might become difficult to substantiate; but we can escape from that annulment if we suppose that these worlds have been subsequently created by or for the evolving Soul in the course of its ascent out of the Inconscience. In any of these views the whole cosmos would be an evolution out of the Inconscient, either with the material universe as its sole and sufficient stage and scene or else with an ascending scale of worlds, one evolving out of the other, helping to grade our return to the original Reality. Our own view has been that the cosmos is a self-graded devolution
out of the superconscient Sachchidananda; but in this idea it would be nothing but an evolution of the Inconscience towards some kind of knowledge sufficient to allow, by the annihilation of some primal ignorance or some originating desire, the extinction of a misbegotten soul or an escape out of a mistaken world-adventure.

But such theories either imply a premier importance and originating power of mind or a premier importance of the individual being; both have indeed a great place, but the one eternal Spirit is the original power and the original existence. Idea, conceptively creative, — not the Real-Idea which is Being aware of what is in itself and automatically self-creative by the force of that Truth-awareness, — is a movement of the mind; desire is a movement of life in mind; life and mind then must be pre-existent powers and must have been the determinants of the creation of the material world, and in that case they can equally create worlds of their own supraphysical nature. Or else we must suppose that what acted was not desire in an individual or a universal Mind or Life, but a will in the Spirit, — a will of Being deploying something of itself or of its Consciousness, realising a creative idea or a self-knowledge or an urge of its self-active Force or a turn to a certain formulation of its delight of existence. But if the world has been created, not by the universal Delight of existence, but for the desire of the individual soul, its caprice of an ignorant egoistic enjoyment, then the mental Individual and not the Cosmic Being or a Transcendent Divinity should be the creator and witness of the universe. In the past trend of human thought the individual being has always loomed enormously large in the front plan of things and in the premier dimensions of importance; if these proportions could still be maintained, this origination might conceivably be admitted: for a will towards the life of the Ignorance or an assent to it in the individual Purusha must indeed be part of the operative movement of Consciousness in the involutionary descent of the Spirit into material Nature. But the world cannot be a creation of the individual mind or a theatre erected by it for its own play of consciousness; nor can it have been created solely for
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The play and the satisfaction or frustration of the ego. As we awake to a sense of the premier importance of the universal and the dependence of the individual upon it, a theory of this kind becomes an impossibility to our intelligence. The world is too vast in its movement for such an account of its working to be credible; only a cosmic Power or a cosmic Being can be the creator and the upholder of the cosmos and it must have too a cosmic and not only an individual reality, significance or purpose.

Accordingly, this world-creating or participating Individual and its desire or assent to the Ignorance must have been awake before the world at all existed; it must have been there as an element in some supracosmic Superconscient from which it comes and to which it returns out of the life of the ego: we must suppose an original immanence of the Many in the One. It becomes then conceivable that a will or an impetus or a spiritual necessity may have stirred, in some transmundane Infinite, in some of the Many which precipitated them downward and compelled the creation of this world of the Ignorance. But since the One is the premier fact of existence, since the Many depend upon the One, are souls of the One, beings of the Being, this truth must determine also the fundamental principle of the cosmic existence. There we see that the universal precedes the individual, gives it its field, is that in which it exists cosmically even though its origin is in the Transcendence. The individual soul lives here by the All-Soul and depends upon it; the All-Soul very evidently does not exist by the individual or depend upon it: it is not a sum of individual beings, a pluralistic totality created by the conscious life of individuals; if an All-Soul exists, it must be the one Cosmic Spirit supporting the one cosmic Force in its works, and it repeats here, modified in the terms of cosmic existence, the primary relation of the dependence of the Many on the One. It is inconceivable that the Many should have independently or by a departure from the One Will desired cosmic existence and forced by their desire the supreme Sachchidananda to descend unwillingly or tolerantly into the Nescience; that would be to reverse altogether the true dependence of things. If the world was directly originated by the
will or the spiritual impetus of the Many, which is possible and even probable in a certain sense, there must still have been first a Will in Sachchidananda to that end; otherwise the impetus — translating here the All-Will into desire, for what becomes desire in the ego is Will in the Spirit, — could not have arisen anywhere. The One, the All-Soul, by whom alone the consciousness of the Individual is determined, must first accept the veil of inconscient Nature before the Individual too can put on the veil of the Ignorance in the material universe.

But once we admit this Will of the supreme and cosmic Being as the indispensable condition of the existence of the material universe, it is no longer possible to accept Desire as the creative principle; for desire has no place in the Supreme or in the All-being. It can have nothing to desire; desire is the result of incompleteness, of insufficiency, of something that is not possessed or enjoyed and which the being seeks for possession or enjoyment. A supreme and universal Being can have the delight of its all-existence, but to that delight desire must be foreign, — it can only be the appanage of the incomplete evolutionary ego which is a product of the cosmic action. Moreover, if the All-consciousness of the Spirit has willed to plunge into the inconscience of Matter, it must be because that was a possibility of its self-creation or manifestation. But a sole material universe and an evolution there out of inconscience into spiritual consciousness cannot be the one solitary and limited possibility of manifestation of the All-being. That could only be if Matter were the original power and form of manifested being and the spirit had no other choice, could not manifest except through Inconscience into Matter as a basis. This would bring us to a materialistic evolutionary Pantheism; we would have to regard the beings who people the universe as souls of the One, souls born here in It and evolving upward through inanimate, animate and mentally developed forms till the recovery of their complete and undivided life in the superconscient Pantheos and its cosmic Oneness would intervene as the end and goal of their evolution. In that case, everything has evolved here; life, mind, soul have arisen out of the One in the material universe by the force of its
hidden being, and everything will fulfil itself here in the material universe. There is then no separate plane of the Superconscience, for the Superconscient is here only, not elsewhere; there are no supraphysical worlds; there is no action of supraphysical principles exterior to Matter, no pressure of an already existent Mind and Life upon the material plane.

It has then to be asked what are mind and life, and it may be answered that they are products of Matter or of the Energy in Matter. Or else they are forms of consciousness that arise as results of an evolution from Inconscience to Superconscience: consciousness itself is only a bridge of transition; it is spirit becoming partially aware of itself before plunging into its normal trance of luminous superconscience. Even if there proved to be planes of larger life and mind, they would only be subjective constructions of this intermediary consciousness erected on the way to that spiritual culmination. But the difficulty here is that mind and life are too different from Matter to be products of Matter; Matter itself is a product of Energy, and mind and life must be regarded as superior products of the same Energy. If we admit the existence of a cosmic Spirit, the Energy must be spiritual; life and mind must be independent products of a spiritual energy and themselves powers of manifestation of the Spirit. It then becomes irrational to suppose that Spirit and Matter alone exist, that they are the two confronting realities and that Matter is the sole possible basis of the manifestation of spirit; the idea of a sole material world becomes immediately untenable. Spirit must be capable of basing its manifestation on the Mind principle or on the Life principle and not only on the principle of Matter; there can then be and logically there should be worlds of Mind and worlds of Life; there may even be worlds founded on a subtler and more plastic, more conscious principle of Matter.

Three questions then arise, interrelated or interdependent: — whether there is any evidence or any true intimation of the existence of such other worlds; whether, if they exist, they are of the nature we have indicated, arising or descending in the order and within the rationale of a hierarchical series between Matter
and Spirit; if that is their scale of being, are they otherwise quite independent and unconnected, or is there a relation and interaction of the higher worlds on the world of Matter? It is a fact that mankind almost from the beginning of its existence or so far back as history or tradition can go, has believed in the existence of other worlds and in the possibility of communication between their powers and beings and the human race. In the last rationalistic period of human thought from which we are emerging, this belief has been swept aside as an age-long superstition; all evidence or intimations of its truth have been rejected a priori as fundamentally false and undeserving of inquiry because incompatible with the axiomatic truth that only Matter and the material world and its experiences are real; all other experience purporting to be real must be either a hallucination or an imposture or a subjective result of superstitious credulity and imagination or else, if a fact, then other than what it purported to be and explicable by a physical cause: no evidence could be accepted of such a fact unless it is objective and physical in its character; even if the fact be very apparently supraphysical, it cannot be accepted as such unless it is totally unexplainable by any other imaginable hypothesis or conceivable conjecture.

It should be evident that this demand for physically valid proof of a supraphysical fact is irrational and illogical; it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective. A supraphysical fact may impinge on the physical world and produce physical results; it may even produce an effect on our physical senses and become manifest to them, but that cannot be its invariable action and most normal character or process. Ordinarily, it must produce a direct effect or a tangible impression on our mind and our life-being, which are the parts of us that are of the same order as itself, and can only indirectly and through them, if at all, influence the physical world and physical life. If it objectivises itself, it must be to a subtler sense in us and only derivatively to the outward physical sense. This derivative objectivisation is certainly
possible; if there is an association of the action of the subtle body and its sense-organisation with the action of the material body and its physical organs, then the supraphysical can become outwardly sensible to us. This is what happens, for example, with the faculty called second sight; it is the process of all those psychic phenomena which seem to be seen and heard by the outer senses and are not sensed inwardly through representative or interpretative or symbolic images which bear the stamp of an inner experience or have an evident character of formations in a subtle substance. There can, then, be various kinds of evidence of the existence of other planes of being and communication with them; objectivisation to the outer sense, subtle-sense contacts, mind contacts, life contacts, contacts through the subliminal in special states of consciousness exceeding our ordinary range. Our physical mind is not the whole of us nor, even though it dominates almost the whole of our surface consciousness, the best or greatest part of us; reality cannot be restricted to a sole field of this narrowness or to the dimensions known within its rigid circle.

If it be said that subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognised method or standard of verification and a too great tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supernatural at its face value, this may be admitted: but error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective or subliminal parts of us, it is also an appanage of the physical mind and its objective methods and standards, and such liability to error cannot be a reason for shutting out a large and important domain of experience; it is a reason rather for scrutinising it and finding out in it its own true standards and its characteristic, appropriate and valid means of verification. Our subjective being is the basis of our objective experience, and it is not probable that only its physical objectivisations are true and the rest unreliable. The subliminal consciousness, when rightly interrogated, is a witness to truth and its testimony is confirmed again and again even in the physical and the objective field; that testimony cannot, then, be disregarded when it calls our attention to things within us or to things that belong to planes
or worlds of a supraphysical experience. At the same time belief by itself is not evidence of reality; it must base itself on something more valid before one can accept it. It is evident that the beliefs of the past are not a sufficient basis for knowledge, even though they cannot be entirely neglected: for a belief is a mental construction and may be a wrong building; it may often answer to some inner intimation and then it has a value, but, as often as not, it disfigures the intimation, usually by a translation into terms familiar to our physical and objective experience, such as that which converted the hierarchy of the planes into a physical hierarchy or geographical space-extension, turned the rarer heights of subtle substance into material heights and placed the abodes of the gods on the summits of physical mountains. All truth supraphysical or physical must be founded not on mental belief alone, but on experience, — but in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain or by a consciousness which is capable only of truths of another order; so alone can we be sure of our steps and enlarge firmly our sphere of knowledge.

If we scrutinise the intimations of supraphysical world-realities which we receive in our inner experience and compare with it the account of such intimations that has continued to come down to us from the beginnings of human knowledge, and if we attempt an interpretation and a summarised order, we shall find that what this inner experience most intimately conveys to us is the existence and action upon us of larger planes of being and consciousness than the purely material plane, with its restricted existence and action, of which we are aware in our narrow terrestrial formula. These domains of larger being are not altogether remote and separate from our own being and consciousness; for, though they subsist in themselves and have their own play and process and formulations of existence and experience, yet at the same time they penetrate and envelop the
physical plane with their invisible presence and influences, and
their powers seem to be here in the material world itself behind
its action and objects. There are two main orders of experience
in our contact with them; one is purely subjective, though in
its subjectivity sufficiently vivid and palpable, the other is more
objective. In the subjective order, we find that what shapes it-
self to us as a life-intention, life-impulse, life-formulation here,
already exists in a larger, more subtle, more plastic range of
possibilities, and these pre-existent forces and formations are
pressing upon us to realise themselves in the physical world
also; but only a part succeeds in getting through and even that
emerges partially in a form and circumstance more proper to
the system of terrestrial law and sequence. This precipitation
takes place, normally, without our knowledge; we are not aware
of the action of these Powers, Forces and Influences upon us,
but take them as formations of our own life and mind, even
when our reason or will repudiates them and strives not to be
mastered: but when we go inwards away from the restricted
surface consciousness and develop a subtler sense and deeper
awareness, we begin to get an intimation of the origin of these
movements and are able to watch their action and process, to
accept or reject or modify, to allow them passage and use of
our mind and will and our life and members or refuse it. In the
same way we become aware of larger domains of mind, a play,
experience, formation of a greater plasticity, a teeming profusion
of all possible mental formulations, and we feel their contacts
with us and their powers and influences acting upon our parts
of mind in the same occult manner as those others that act
upon our parts of life. This kind of experience is, primarily, of
a purely subjective character, a pressure of ideas, suggestions,
emotional formations, impulsions to sensation, action, dynamic
experience. However large a part of this pressure may be traced
to our own subliminal self or to the siege of universal Mind-
forces or Life-forces belonging to our own world, there is an
element which bears the stamp of another origin, an insistent
supraterrrestrial character.

But the contacts do not stop here: for there is also an
opening of our mind and life parts to a great range of subjective-objective experiences in which these planes present themselves no longer as extensions of subjective being and consciousness, but as worlds; for the experiences there are organised as they are in our own world, but on a different plan, with a different process and law of action and in a substance which belongs to a supraphysical Nature. This organisation includes, as on our earth, the existence of beings who have or take forms, manifest themselves or are naturally manifested in an embodying substance, but a substance other than ours, a subtle substance tangible only to subtle sense, a supraphysical form-matter. These worlds and beings may have nothing to do with ourselves and our life, they may exercise no action upon us; but often also they enter into secret communication with earth-existence, obey or embody and are the intermediaries and instruments of the cosmic powers and influences of which we have a subjective experience, or themselves act by their own initiation upon the terrestrial world’s life and motives and happenings. It is possible to receive help or guidance or harm or misguidance from these beings; it is possible even to become subject to their influence, to be possessed by their invasion or domination, to be instrumentalised by them for their good or evil purpose. At times the progress of earthly life seems to be a vast field of battle between supraphysical Forces of either character, those that strive to uplift, encourage and illumine and those that strive to deflect, depress or prevent or even shatter our upward evolution or the soul’s self-expression in the material universe. Some of these Beings, Powers or Forces are such that we think of them as divine; they are luminous, benignant or powerfully helpful; there are others that are Titaniac, gigantic or demoniac, inordinate Influences, instigators or creators often of vast and formidable inner upheavals or of actions that overpass the normal human measure. There may also be an awareness of influences, presences, beings that do not seem to belong to other worlds beyond us but are here as a hidden element behind the veil in terrestrial nature. As contact with the supraphysical is possible, a contact can also take place subjective or objective — or at least objectivised —
between our own consciousness and the consciousness of other once embodied beings who have passed into a supraphysical status in these other regions of existence. It is possible also to pass beyond a subjective contact or a subtle-sense perception and, in certain subliminal states of consciousness, to enter actually into other worlds and know something of their secrets. It is the more objective order of other-worldly experience that seized most the imagination of mankind in the past, but it was put by popular belief into a gross-objective statement which unduly assimilated these phenomena to those of the physical world with which we are familiar; for it is the normal tendency of our mind to turn everything into forms or symbols proper to its own kind and terms of experience.

This has always been, put into its most generalised terms, the normal range and character of other-worldly belief and experience in all periods of the past of the race; names and forms differ, but the general features have been strikingly similar in all countries and ages. What exact value are we to put upon these persistent beliefs or upon this mass of supernormal experience? It is not possible for anyone who has had these contacts with any intimacy and not only by scattered abnormal accidents, to put them aside as mere superstition or hallucination; for they are too insistent, real, effective, organic in their pressure, too constantly confirmed by their action and results to be so flung aside: an appreciation, an interpretation, a mental organisation of this side of our capacity of experience is indispensable.

One explanation which can be put forward is that man himself creates the supraphysical worlds which he inhabits or thinks he inhabits after death, creates the gods, as ran the ancient phrase,—it is claimed even that God himself was created by man, was a myth of his consciousness, and has now been abolished by man! All these things then may be a sort of myth of the developing consciousness in which it is able to dwell, a captive in its own buildings, and by a kind of realising dynamisation maintain itself in its own imaginations. But pure imaginations they are not, they can only be so treated by us so long as the things they represent, however incorrectly, are not
part of our own experience. Yet there may conceivably be myths and imaginations that are used by the power of the creative Consciousness-Force to materialise its own idea-forces; these potent images may take form and body, endure in some subtly materialised world of thought and react on their creator: if so, we might suppose that the other worlds are buildings of this character. But if that were so, if a subjective consciousness can thus create worlds and beings, it might well be that the objective world also is a myth of Consciousness or even of our consciousness, or that Consciousness itself is a myth of the original Nescience. Thus, on this line of thinking, we swing back towards a view of the universe in which all things assume a certain hue of unreality except the all-productive Inconscience out of which they are created, the Ignorance which creates them and, it may be, a superconscious or inconscient impersonal Being into whose indifference all finally disappears or goes back and ceases there.

But we have no proof and there is no likelihood that man’s mind can create in this way a world where none was before, create in vacuo without a substance to build in or build on, though it may well be that it can add something to a world already made. Mind is indeed a potent agency, more potent than we readily imagine; it can make formations which effectuate themselves in our own or others’ consciousness and lives and even have an effect on inconscient Matter; but an entirely original creation in the void is beyond its possibilities. What we can rather hazard is that as it grows, man’s mind enters into relation with new ranges of being and consciousness not at all created by him, new to him, already pre-existent in the All-Existence. In his increasing inner experience he opens up new planes of being in himself; as the secret centres of his consciousness dissolve their knots, he becomes able through them to conceive of those larger realms, to receive direct influences from them, to enter into them, to image them in his terrestrial mind and inner sense. He does create images, symbol-forms, reflective shapes of them with which his mind can deal; in this sense only he creates the Divine Image that he worships, creates the forms of the gods, creates new planes and worlds within him, and through these images the real worlds and
powers that overtop our existence are able to take possession of the consciousness in the physical world, to pour into it their potencies, to transform it with the light of their higher being. But all this is not a creation of the higher worlds of being; it is a revelation of them to the consciousness of the soul on the material plane as it develops out of the Nescience. It is a creation of their forms here by a reception of their powers; there is an enlargement of our subjective life on this plane by the discovery of its true relation with higher planes of its own being from which it was separated by the veil of the material Nescience. This veil exists because the soul in the body has put behind it these greater possibilities in order that it might concentrate exclusively its consciousness and force upon its primary work in this physical world of being; but that primary work can have a sequel only by the veil being at least partially lifted or else made penetrable so that the higher planes of mind, life and spirit may pour their significances into human existence.

It is possible to suppose that these higher planes and worlds have been created subsequently to the manifestation of the material cosmos, to aid the evolution or in some sense as a result of it. This is a notion which the physical mind, starting in all its ideas from the material universe as the one thing which it knows, has analysed and can deal with in a beginning of mastery, might easily tend to accept, if obliged to admit a supraphysical existence; it could then keep the material, the Inconscience, as the starting-point and support of all being, as it is undoubtedly the starting-point for us of the evolutionary movement of which the material world is the scene. Our mind could still keep matter and material force as the first existence,—so accepted and cherished by it because it is the first thing that it knows, the one thing that is always securely present and knowable,—and maintain the spiritual and the supraphysical in a dependence upon the assured foundation in Matter. But how then were these

There are certain expressions in the Rig Veda which seem to embody this view. Earth (the material principle) is spoken of as the foundation of all the worlds or the seven worlds are described as the seven planes of Earth.
other worlds created, by what force, by what instrumentality? It might be the Life and Mind developing out of the Inconscient which have at the same time developed these other worlds or planes in the subliminal consciousness of the living beings who appear in it. To the subliminal being in life and after death, — for it is the inner being that survives the death of the body, — these worlds might be real because sensible to its wider range of consciousness; it would move in them with that sense of reality, derivative perhaps but convincing, and it would send up its experience of them as belief and imagination to the surface being. This is a possible account, if we accept Consciousness as the real creative Power or agent and all things as formations of consciousness; but it would not give to the supraphysical planes of being the unsubstantiality or less palpable reality which the physical mind would like to attach to them; they would have the same reality in themselves as the physical world or plane of physical experience has in its own order.

If in this or some other way the higher worlds were developed subsequently to the creation of the material world, the primary creation, by a larger secret evolution out of the Inconscient, it must have been done by some All-Soul in its emergence, by a process of which we can have no knowledge and for the purpose of the evolution here, as adjuncts to it or as its larger consequences, so that life and mind and spirit might be able to move in fields of a freer scope with a repercussion of these greater powers and experiences on the material self-expression. But against this hypothesis there stands the fact that we find these higher worlds in our vision and experience of them to be in no way based upon the material universe, in no way its results, but rather greater terms of being, larger and freer ranges of consciousness, and all the action of the material plane looks more like the result and not the origin of these greater terms, derivatory from them, even partly dependent on them in its evolutionary endeavour. Immense ranges of powers, influences, phenomena descend covertly upon us from the overmind and the higher mental and vital ranges, but of these only a part, a selection, as it were, or restricted number can stage and realise
themselves in the order of the physical world; the rest await their time and proper circumstance for revelation in physical term and form, for their part in the terrestrial\textsuperscript{5} evolution which is at the same time an evolution of all the powers of the spirit.

This character of the other worlds defeats all our attempts to give the premier importance to our own plane of being and to our own part in the mundane manifestation. We do not create God as a myth of our consciousness, but are instruments for a progressive manifestation of the Divine in the material being. We do not create the gods, his powers, but rather such divinity as we manifest is the partial reflection and the shaping here of eternal godheads. We do not create the higher planes, but are intermediaries by which they reveal their light, power, beauty in whatever form and scope can be given to them by Nature-force on the material plane. It is the pressure of the life-world which enables life to evolve and develop here in the forms we already know; it is that increasing pressure which drives it to aspire in us to a greater revelation of itself and will one day deliver the mortal from his subjection to the narrow limitations of his present incompetent and restricting physicality. It is the pressure of the mind-world which evolves and develops mind here and helps us to find a leverage for our mental self-uplifting and expansion, so that we may hope to enlarge continually our self of intelligence and even to break the prison walls of our matter-bound physical mentality. It is the pressure of the supramental and spiritual worlds which is preparing to develop here the manifest power of the spirit and by it open our being on the physical plane into the freedom and infinity of the super-conscious Divine; that contact, that pressure can alone liberate from the apparent Inconscience, which was our starting-point, the all-conscious Godhead concealed in us. In this order of things our human consciousness is the instrument, the intermediary; it is the point in the development of light and power out of the

\textsuperscript{5} Necessarily, by terrestrial we do not mean this one earth and its period of duration, but use earth in the wider root-sense of the Vedantic Prthivi, the earth-principle creating habitations of physical form for the soul.
Inconscience at which liberation becomes possible: a greater role than this we cannot attribute to it, but this is great enough, for it makes our humanity all-important for the supreme purpose of evolutionary Nature.

At the same time there are some elements in our subliminal experience which raise a point of question against any invariable priority of the other worlds to the material existence. One such indication is that in the vision of after-death experience there is a persistent tradition of residence in conditions which seem to be a supraphysical prolongation of earth-conditions, earth-nature, earth-experience. Another is that, in the life-worlds especially, we find formulations which seem to resemble the inferior movements of earth-existence; here are already embodied the principles of darkness, falsehood, incapacity and evil which we have supposed to be consequent upon the evolution out of the material Inconscience. It seems even to be the fact that the vital worlds are the natural home of the Powers that most disturb human life; this is indeed logical, for it is through our vital being that they sway us and they must therefore be powers of a larger and more powerful life-existence. The descent of Mind and Life into evolution need not have created any such untoward developments of the limitation of being and consciousness: for this descent is in its nature a limitation of knowledge; existence and cognition and delight of being confine themselves in a lesser truth and good and beauty and its inferior harmony, and move according to that law of a narrower light, but in such a movement darkness and suffering and evil are not obligatory phenomena. If we find them existing in these worlds of other mind and other life, even though not pervading it but only occupying their separate province, we must either conclude that they have come into existence by a projection out of the inferior evolution, upward from below, by something in the subliminal parts of Nature bursting there into a larger formation of the evil created here, or that they were already created as part of a parallel gradation to the involutionary descent, a gradation forming a stair for evolutionary ascension towards Spirit just as the involutionary was a stair of the descent of the
Spirit. In the latter hypothesis the ascending gradation might have a double purpose. For it would contain pre-formations of the good and evil that must evolve in the earth as part of the struggle necessary for the evolutionary growth of the Soul in Nature; these would be formations existing for themselves, for their own independent satisfaction, formations that would present the full type of these things, each in its separate nature, and at the same time they would exercise on evolutionary beings their characteristic influence.

These worlds of a larger life would then hold in themselves both the more luminous and the darker formations of our world’s life in a medium in which they could arrive freely at their independent expression, their own type’s full freedom and natural completeness and harmony for good or for evil,—if indeed that distinction applies in these ranges,—a completeness and independence impossible here in our existence where all is mingled in the complex interaction necessary to the field of a many-sided evolution leading towards a final integration. For we find what we call false, dark or evil seems there to have a truth of its own and to be entirely content with its own type because it possesses that in a full expression which creates in it a sense of a satisfied power of its own being, an accord, a complete adaptation of all its circumstances to its principle of existence; it enjoys there its own consciousness, its own self-power, its own delight of being, obnoxious to our minds but to itself full of the joy of satisfied desire. Those life impulses which are to earth-nature inordinate and out of measure and appear here as perverse and abnormal, find in their own province of being an independent fulfilment and an unrestricted play of their type and principle. What is to us divine or titanic, Rakshasic, demoniac and therefore supernatural, is, each in its own domain, normal to itself and gives to the beings that embody these things the feeling of self-nature and the harmony of their own principle. Discord itself, struggle, incapacity, suffering enter into a certain kind of life-satisfaction which would feel itself baulked or deficient without them. When these powers are seen in their isolated working, building their own life-edifices, as they do in those secret worlds
where they dominate, we perceive more clearly their origin and reason of existence and the reason also for the hold they have on human life and the attachment of man to his own imperfections, to his life-drama of victory and failure, happiness and suffering, laughter and tears, sin and virtue. Here on earth these things exist in an unsatisfied and therefore unsatisfactory and obscure state of struggle and mixture, but there reveal their secret and their motive of being because they are there established in their native power and full form of nature in their own world and their own exclusive atmosphere. Man’s heavens and hells or worlds of light and worlds of darkness, however imaginative in their building, proceed from a perception of these powers existing in their own principle and throwing their influences on him in life from a beyond-life which provides the elements of his evolutionary existence.

In the same way as the powers of Life are self-founded, perfect and full in a greater Life beyond us, so too the powers of Mind, its ideas and principles that influence our earth-being, are found to have in the greater Mind-world their own field of fullness of self-nature, while here in human existence they throw out only partial formations which have much difficulty in establishing themselves because of their meeting and mixture with other powers and principles; this meeting, this mixture curbs their completeness, alloys their purity, disputes and defeats their influence. These other worlds, then, are not evolutionary, but typal; but it is one though not the sole reason of their existence that they provide things that must arise in the involutionary manifestation as well as things thrown up in the evolution with a field of satisfaction of their own significance where they can exist in their own right; this established condition is a base from which their functions and workings can be cast as elements into the complex process of evolutionary Nature.

If we look from this point of view at man’s traditional accounts of other-worldly existence, we shall find that mostly they point to worlds of a larger life liberated from the restrictions and imperfections or incompletenesses of life in earth-nature. These accounts are evidently built largely by imagination, but
there is an element also of intuition and divination, a feeling of what life can be and surely is in some domain of its manifested or its realisable nature; there is also an element of true subliminal contact and experience. But the mind of man translates what he sees or receives or contacts from other-nature into figures proper to his own consciousness; they are his translations of supraphysical realities into his own significant forms and images and through these forms and images he enters into communication with the realities and can make them to a certain degree present and effective. The experience of an after-death continuance of a modified earth-life may be explained as due to this kind of translation; but it is also explainable partly as the creation of a subjective post-mortalt state in which he still lives in figures of habitual experience before he enters into other-worldly realities, partly as a passage through life-worlds where the type of things expresses itself in formations originative of those to which he was attached in his earthly body or akin to them and therefore exercises a natural attraction on the vital being after its exit from the body. But, apart from these subtler life-states, the traditional accounts of other-worldly existence contain, though as a rarer more elevated element not included in the popular notion of these things, a higher grade of states of existence which are clearly of a mental and not a vital character and others founded on some spiritual-mental principle; these higher principles are formulated in states of being into which our inner experience can rise or the soul enter. The principle of gradation we have accepted is therefore justified provided we recognise that it is one way of organising our experience and that other ways proceeding from other view-points are possible. For a classification can always be valid from the principle and view-point adopted by it while from other principles and view-points another classification of the same things can be equally valid. But for our purpose the system we have chosen is of the greatest value because it is fundamental and answers to a truth of the manifestation which is of the utmost practical importance; it helps us to understand our own constituted existence and the course of the involution and the evolutionary motion of Nature.
At the same time we see that the other worlds are not things quite apart from the material universe and earth-nature, but penetrate and envelop it with their influences and have on it a secret incidence of formative and directive force which is not easily calculable. This organisation of our other-worldly knowledge and experience supplies us with the clue to the nature and lines of action of this incidence.

The existence and influence of other worlds are a fact of primary importance for the possibilities and for the scope of our evolution in terrestrial Nature. For if the physical universe were the only field of manifestation of the infinite Reality and at the same time the field of its whole manifestation, we should have to suppose that, since all the principles of its being from Matter to Spirit are entirely involved in the apparently inconscient Force which is the basis of the first workings of this universe, they are being evolved by it here completely and here solely, without any other aid or pressure except that of the secret Superconscience within it. There would then be a system of things in which the principle of Matter must always remain the first principle, the essential and original determining condition of manifested existence. Spirit might indeed in the end arrive to a limited extent at its natural domination; it might make its basis of physical matter a more elastic instrument not altogether prohibitive of the action of its own highest law and nature or opposed to that action, as it now is in its inelastic resistance. But Spirit would always be dependent upon Matter for its field and its manifestation; it could have no other field; it could not get outside it to another kind of manifestation; and within it also it could not very well liberate any other principle of its being into sovereignty over the material foundation; Matter would remain the one persistent determinant of its manifestation. Life could not become dominant and determinative, Mind could not become the master and creator; their boundaries of capacity would be fixed by the capacities of Matter, which they might enlarge or modify but would not be able to transform radically or liberate. There would be no place for any free and full manifestation of any power of the being, all would be limited
for ever by the conditions of an obscuring material formation. Spirit, Mind, Life would have no native field or complete scope of their own characteristic power and principle. It is not easy to believe in the inevitability of this self-limitation if Spirit is the creator and these principles have an independent existence and are not products, results or phenomena of the energy of Matter.

But, given the fact that the infinite Reality is free in the play of its consciousness, it is not bound to involve itself in the nescience of Matter before it can at all manifest. It is possible for it to create just the contrary order of things, a world in which the unity of spiritual being is the matrix and first condition of any formation or action, the Energy at work is a self-aware spiritual existence in movement, and all its names and forms are a self-conscious play of the spiritual unity. Or it might be an order in which the Spirit’s innate power of conscious Force or Will would realise freely and directly its own possibilities in itself and not, as here, through the restricting medium of the Life-Force in matter; that realisation would be at once the first principle of the manifestation and the object of all its free and blissful action. It might be an order, again, in which the free play of an infinite mutual self-delight in a multiplicity of beings conscious not only of their concealed or underlying eternal unity but of their present joy of oneness would be the object; in such a system the action of the principle of self-existent Bliss would be the first principle and the universal condition. Again, it might be a world-order in which the Supermind would be the dominant principle from the beginning; the nature of the manifestation would then be a multiplicity of beings finding through the free and luminous play of their divine individuality all the manifold joy of their difference in oneness.

Nor need the series stop here: for we observe that with us Mind is hampered by Life in Matter and finds all the difficulty possible in dominating the resistance of these two different powers and that Life itself is similarly restricted by the mortality, the inertia and the instability of Matter; but evidently there can be a world-order in which neither of these two disabilities forms part of the first conditions of existence. There is the possibility
of a world in which Mind would be from the first dominant, free to work upon its own substance or matter as a quite plastic material, or where Matter would be quite evidently the result of the universal Mind-Force working itself out in life. It is that even here in reality; but here the Mind-Force is involved from the beginning, for a long time subconscient, and, even when it has emerged, never in free possession of itself, but subject to its encasing material, while there it would be in possession of itself and master of its material, which would be much more subtle and elastic than in a predominantly physical universe. So too Life might have its own world-order where it would be sovereign, able to deploy its own more elastic and freely variable desires and tendencies, not menaced at every moment by disintegrating forces and therefore occupied chiefly with the care of self-preservation and restricted in its play by this state of precarious tension which limits its instincts of free formation, free self-gratification and free adventure. The separate dominance of each principle of being is an eternal possibility in the manifestation of being,—given always that they are principles distinct in their dynamic power and mode of working, even though one in original substance.

That could make no difference if all this were only a philosophical possibility or a potentiality in the being of Sachchidananda which it never realises or has not yet realised, or, if realised, has not brought within the scope of the consciousness of beings living in the physical universe. But all our spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness, brings us always a constant and, in its main principles, an invariable evidence of the existence of higher worlds, freer planes of existence. Not having bound ourselves down, like so much of modern thought, to the dogma that only physical experience or experience based upon the physical sense is true, the analysis of physical experience by the reason alone verifiable, and all else only result of physical experience and physical existence and anything beyond this an error, self-delusion and hallucination, we are free to accept this evidence and to admit the reality of these planes. We see that they are, practically, different harmonies from the harmony of the
physical universe; they occupy, as the word “plane” suggests, a different level in the scale of being and adopt a different system and ordering of its principles. We need not inquire, for our present purpose, whether they coincide in time and space with our own world or move in a different field of space and in another stream of time,—in either case it is in a more subtle substance and with other movements. All that directly concerns us is to know whether they are different universes, each complete in itself and in no way meeting, intercrossing or affecting the others, or are rather different scales of one graded and interwoven system of being, parts therefore of one complex universal system. The fact that they can enter into the field of our mental consciousness would naturally suggest the validity of the second alternative, but it would not by itself be altogether conclusive. But what we find is that these higher planes are actually at every moment acting upon and in communication with our own plane of being, although this action is naturally not present to our ordinary waking or outer consciousness, because that is for the most part limited to a reception and utilisation of the contacts of the physical world: but the moment we either go back into our subliminal being or enlarge our waking consciousness beyond the scope of the physical contacts, we become aware of something of this higher action. We find even that the human being can project himself partially into these higher planes under certain conditions, even while in the body; a fortiori must he be able to do it when out of the body, and to do it then completely, since there is no longer the disabling condition of the physical life bound down to the body. The consequences of this relation and this power of transference are of immense importance. On the one side they immediately justify, at any rate as an actual possibility, the ancient tradition of at least a temporary sojourn of the human conscious being in other worlds than the physical after the dissolution of the physical body. On the other side they open to us the possibility of an action of the higher planes on the material existence which can liberate the powers they represent, the powers of life, mind and spirit for the evolutionary intention
inherent within Nature by the very fact of their embodiment in Matter.

These worlds are not in their original creation subsequent in order to the physical universe but prior to it, — prior, if not in time, in their consequential sequence. For even if there is an ascending as well as a descending gradation, this ascending gradation must be in its first nature a provision for the evolutionary emergence in Matter, a formative power for its endeavour, contributing to it helpful and adverse elements, and not a mere consequence of the terrestrial evolution; for that is neither a rational probability nor has it a spiritual or dynamic and pragmatic sense. In other words, the higher worlds have not come into being by a pressure from the lower physical universe, — let us say, from Sachchidananda in the physical Inconscience, or else by the urge of his being as it emerges from the Inconscience into life and mind and spirit and experiences the necessity of creating worlds or planes in which those principles shall have a freer play and in which the human soul may strengthen its vital, mental or spiritual tendencies. Still less are they the creations of the human soul itself, whether its dreams or the result of the constant self-projections of mankind in its dynamic and creative being beyond the limits of the physical consciousness. The only thing that man clearly creates in this direction is the reflex images of these planes in his own embodied consciousness and the fitness of his own soul to respond to them, to become aware of them, to participate consciously in the interweaving of their influences with the action of the physical plane. He may indeed contribute the results or projections of his own higher vital and mental action to the action of these planes: but, if so, these projections are, after all, only a return of the higher planes upon themselves, a return from the earth of their powers which have come down from them to the earth-mind, since this higher vital and mental action is itself the result of influences transmitted from above. It is possible also that he can create a certain kind of subjective annexe to these supraphysical planes, or at least to the lower of them, environments of a half-unreal character which are rather self-created envelopes of his conscious mind and life than true
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worlds; they are the reflections of his own being, an artificial environment corresponding to his attempt during life to image these other worlds, — heavens and hells projected by the image-creating faculty in his human power of conscious being. But neither of these two contributions at all means a total creation of a real plane of being founded and acting on its own separate principle.

These planes or systems are then at least coeval and coexistent with that which presents itself to us as the physical universe. We have been led to conclude that the development of life, mind and spirit in the physical being presupposes their existence; for these powers are developed here by two co-operating forces, an upward-tending force from below, an upward-drawing and downward-pressing force from above. For there is the necessity in the Inconscienct of bringing out what is latent within it, and there is the pressure of the superior principles in the higher planes which not only aids this general necessity to realise itself, but may very largely determine the special ways in which it is eventually realised. It is this upward-drawing action and this pressure, this insistence from above, which explain the constant influence of the spiritual, mental and vital worlds upon the physical plane. It is evident that, given a complex universe and seven principles interwoven in every part of its system and naturally therefore drawn to act upon and respond to each other wherever they can at all get at one another, such an action, such a constant pressure and influence, is an inevitable consequence, must be inherent in the very nature of the manifested universe.

A secret continuous action of the higher powers and principles from their own planes upon terrestrial being and nature through the subliminal self, which is itself a projection from those planes into the world born of the Inconscience, must have an effect and a significance. Its first effect has been the liberation of life and mind out of Matter; its last effect has been to assist the emergence of a spiritual consciousness, a spiritual will and spiritual sense of existence in the terrestrial being so that he is no longer solely preoccupied with his outermost life or with that and mental pursuits and interests, but has learned to look
within, to discover his inner being, his spiritual self, to aspire to
overpass earth and her limitations. As he grows more and more
inward, his boundaries mental, vital, spiritual begin to broaden,
the bonds that held life, mind, soul to their first limitations
loosen or snap, and man the mental being begins to have a
glimpse of a larger kingdom of self and world closed to the first
earth-life. No doubt, so long as he lives mainly on his surface,
he can only build a sort of superstructure ideal and imaginative
and ideative upon the ground of his normal narrow existence.
But if he makes the inward movement which his own highest
vision has held up before him as his greatest spiritual necessity,
then he will find there in his inner being a larger consciousness, a
larger life. An action from within and an action from above can
overcome the predominance of the material formula, diminish
and finally put an end to the power of the Inconscience, reverse
the order of the consciousness, substitute the spirit for Matter as
his conscious foundation of being and liberate its higher powers
to their complete and characteristic expression in the life of the
soul embodied in Nature.