Chapter IV

Reality Omnipresent

If one knows Him as Brahman the Non-Being, he becomes merely the non-existent. If one knows that Brahman Is, then is he known as the real in existence.  

Taittiriya Upanishad.¹

SINCE, then, we admit both the claim of the pure Spirit to manifest in us its absolute freedom and the claim of universal Matter to be the mould and condition of our manifestation, we have to find a truth that can entirely reconcile these antagonists and can give to both their due portion in Life and their due justification in Thought, amercing neither of its rights, denying in neither the sovereign truth from which even its errors, even the exclusiveness of its exaggerations draw so constant a strength. For wherever there is an extreme statement that makes such a powerful appeal to the human mind, we may be sure that we are standing in the presence of no mere error, superstition or hallucination, but of some sovereign fact disguised which demands our fealty and will avenge itself if denied or excluded. Herein lies the difficulty of a satisfying solution and the source of that lack of finality which pursues all mere compromises between Spirit and Matter. A compromise is a bargain, a transaction of interests between two conflicting powers; it is not a true reconciliation. True reconciliation proceeds always by a mutual comprehension leading to some sort of intimate oneness. It is therefore through the utmost possible unification of Spirit and Matter that we shall best arrive at their reconciling truth and so at some strongest foundation for a reconciling practice in the inner life of the individual and his outer existence.

We have found already in the cosmic consciousness a

¹ II. 6.
meeting-place where Matter becomes real to Spirit, Spirit be-
comes real to Matter. For in the cosmic consciousness Mind
and Life are intermediaries and no longer, as they seem in the
ordinary egoistic mentality, agents of separation, fomenters of
an artificial quarrel between the positive and negative principles
of the same unknowable Reality. Attaining to the cosmic con-
sciousness Mind, illuminated by a knowledge that perceives at
once the truth of Unity and the truth of Multiplicity and seize
on the formulae of their interaction, finds its own discords at
once explained and reconciled by the divine Harmony; satisfied,
it consents to become the agent of that supreme union between
God and Life towards which we tend. Matter reveals itself to
the realising thought and to the subtilised senses as the figure
and body of Spirit, — Spirit in its self-formative extension. Spirit
reveals itself through the same consenting agents as the soul, the
truth, the essence of Matter. Both admit and confess each other
as divine, real and essentially one. Mind and Life are disclosed
in that illumination as at once figures and instruments of the
supreme Conscious Being by which It extends and houses Itself
in material form and in that form unveils Itself to Its multiple
centres of consciousness. Mind attains its self-fulfilment when
it becomes a pure mirror of the Truth of Being which expresses
itself in the symbols of the universe; Life, when it consciously
lends its energies to the perfect self-figuration of the Divine in
ever-new forms and activities of the universal existence.

In the light of this conception we can perceive the possibility
of a divine life for man in the world which will at once justify
Science by disclosing a living sense and intelligible aim for the
cosmic and the terrestrial evolution and realise by the transfig-
uration of the human soul into the divine the great ideal dream
of all high religions.

But what then of that silent Self, inactive, pure, self-existent,
self-enjoying, which presented itself to us as the abiding justifi-
cation of the ascetic? Here also harmony and not irreconcilable
opposition must be the illuminative truth. The silent and the
active Brahman are not different, opposite and irreconcilable
entities, the one denying, the other affirming a cosmic illusion;
they are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative, and each is necessary to the other. It is out of this Silence that the Word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the Word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence. It is an eternal passivity which makes possible the perfect freedom and omnipotence of an eternal divine activity in innumerable cosmic systems. For the becomings of that activity derive their energies and their illimitable potency of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the immutable Being, its consent to this infinite fecundity of its own dynamic Nature.

Man, too, becomes perfect only when he has found within himself that absolute calm and passivity of the Brahman and supports by it with the same divine tolerance and the same divine bliss a free and inexhaustible activity. Those who have thus possessed the Calm within can perceive always welling out from its silence the perennial supply of the energies that work in the universe. It is not, therefore, the truth of the Silence to say that it is in its nature a rejection of the cosmic activity. The apparent incompatibility of the two states is an error of the limited Mind which, accustomed to trenchant oppositions of affirmation and denial and passing suddenly from one pole to the other, is unable to conceive of a comprehensive consciousness vast and strong enough to include both in a simultaneous embrace. The Silence does not reject the world; it sustains it. Or rather it supports with an equal impartiality the activity and the withdrawal from the activity and approves also the reconciliation by which the soul remains free and still even while it lends itself to all action.

But, still, there is the absolute withdrawal, there is the Non-Being. Out of the Non-Being, says the ancient Scripture, Being appeared. If the infinite indiscriminate Existence permits all possibilities of discrimination and multiple realisation, does not the Non-Being at least, as primal state and sole constant reality, negate and reject all possibility of a real universe? The Nihil of certain

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2 In the beginning all this was the Non-Being. It was thence that Being was born.  
— Taittiriya Upanishad, II. 7.
Buddhist schools would then be the true ascetic solution; the Self, like the ego, would be only an ideative formation by an illusory phenomenal consciousness.

But again we find that we are being misled by words, deceived by the trenchant oppositions of our limited mentality with its fond reliance on verbal distinctions as if they perfectly represented ultimate truths and its rendering of our supramental experiences in the sense of those intolerant distinctions. Non-Being is only a word. When we examine the fact it represents, we can no longer be sure that absolute non-existence has any better chance than the infinite Self of being more than an ideative formation of the mind. We really mean by this Nothing something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and our most abstract or subtle experience of actual being as we know or conceive it while in this universe. This Nothing then is merely a something beyond positive conception. We erect a fiction of nothingness in order to overpass, by the method of total exclusion, all that we can know and consciously are. Actually when we examine closely the Nihil of certain philosophies, we begin to perceive that it is a zero which is All or an indefinable Infinite which appears to the mind a blank, because mind grasps only finite constructions, but is in fact the only true Existence.³

And when we say that out of Non-Being Being appeared, we perceive that we are speaking in terms of Time about that which is beyond Time. For what was that portentous date in the history of eternal Nothing on which Being was born out of it or when will come that other date equally formidable on which an unreal all will relapse into the perpetual void? Sat and Asat, if they have both to be affirmed, must be conceived as if they

³ Another Upanishad rejects the birth of being out of Non-Being as an impossibility; Being, it says, can only be born from Being. But if we take Non-Being in the sense, not of an inexistent Nihil but of an x which exceeds our idea or experience of existence,— a sense applicable to the Absolute Brahman of the Adwaita as well as the Void or Zero of the Buddhists,— the impossibility disappears, for That may very well be the source of being, whether by a conceptual or formative Maya or a manifestation or creation out of itself.
obtained simultaneously. They permit each other even though they refuse to mingle. Both, since we must speak in terms of Time, are eternal. And who shall persuade eternal Being that it does not really exist and only eternal Non-Being is? In such a negation of all experience how shall we find the solution that explains all experience?

Pure Being is the affirmation by the Unknowable of Itself as the free base of all cosmic existence. We give the name of Non-Being to a contrary affirmation of Its freedom from all cosmic existence,—freedom, that is to say, from all positive terms of actual existence which consciousness in the universe can formulate to itself, even from the most abstract, even from the most transcendent. It does not deny them as a real expression of Itself, but It denies Its limitation by all expression or any expression whatsoever. The Non-Being permits the Being, even as the Silence permits the Activity. By this simultaneous negation and affirmation, not mutually destructive, but complementary to each other like all contraries, the simultaneous awareness of conscious Self-being as a reality and the Unknowable beyond as the same Reality becomes realisable to the awakened human soul. Thus was it possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act puissantly in the world, impersonal in his inner consciousness, in his action the most powerful personality that we know of as having lived and produced results upon earth.

When we ponder on these things, we begin to perceive how feeble in their self-assertive violence and how confusing in their misleading distinctness are the words that we use. We begin also to perceive that the limitations we impose on the Brahman arise from a narrowness of experience in the individual mind which concentrates itself on one aspect of the Unknowable and proceeds forthwith to deny or disparage all the rest. We tend always to translate too rigidly what we can conceive or know of the Absolute into the terms of our own particular relativity. We affirm the One and Identical by passionately discriminating and asserting the egoism of our own opinions and partial experiences against the opinions and partial experiences of others. It is wiser
to wait, to learn, to grow, and, since we are obliged for the sake of our self-perfection to speak of these things which no human speech can express, to search for the widest, the most flexible, the most catholic affirmation possible and found on it the largest and most comprehensive harmony.

We recognise, then, that it is possible for the consciousness in the individual to enter into a state in which relative existence appears to be dissolved and even Self seems to be an inadequate conception. It is possible to pass into a Silence beyond the Silence. But this is not the whole of our ultimate experience, nor the single and all-excluding truth. For we find that this Nirvana, this self-extinction, while it gives an absolute peace and freedom to the soul within is yet consistent in practice with a desireless but effective action without. This possibility of an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness, was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha’s teaching, — this superiority to ego and to the chain of personal workings and to the identification with mutable form and idea, not the petty ideal of an escape from the trouble and suffering of the physical birth. In any case, as the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and the activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the universe. It would thus reproduce in itself perpetually the eternal miracle of the divine Existence, in the universe, yet always beyond it and even, as it were, beyond itself. The opposite experience could only be a concentration of mentality in the individual upon Non-existence with the result of an oblivion and personal withdrawal from a cosmic activity still and always proceeding in the consciousness of the Eternal Being.

Thus, after reconciling Spirit and Matter in the cosmic consciousness, we perceive the reconciliation, in the transcendental consciousness, of the final assertion of all and its negation. We discover that all affirmations are assertions of status or activity in the Unknowable; all the corresponding negations are assertions of Its freedom both from and in that status or activity.
The Unknowable is Something to us supreme, wonderful and ineffable which continually formulates Itself to our consciousness and continually escapes from the formulation It has made. This it does not as some malicious spirit or freakish magician leading us from falsehood to greater falsehood and so to a final negation of all things, but as even here the Wise beyond our wisdom guiding us from reality to ever profounder and vaster reality until we find the profoundest and vastest of which we are capable. An omnipresent reality is the Brahman, not an omnipresent cause of persistent illusions.

If we thus accept a positive basis for our harmony — and on what other can harmony be founded? — the various conceptual formulations of the Unknowable, each of them representing a truth beyond conception, must be understood as far as possible in their relation to each other and in their effect upon life, not separately, not exclusively, not so affirmed as to destroy or unduly diminish all other affirmations. The real Monism, the true Adwaita, is that which admits all things as the one Brahman and does not seek to bisect Its existence into two incompatible entities, an eternal Truth and an eternal Falsehood, Brahman and not-Brahman, Self and not-Self, a real Self and an unreal, yet perpetual Maya. If it be true that the Self alone exists, it must be also true that all is the Self. And if this Self, God or Brahman is no helpless state, no bounded power, no limited personality, but the self-conscient All, there must be some good and inherent reason in it for the manifestation, to discover which we must proceed on the hypothesis of some potency, some wisdom, some truth of being in all that is manifested. The discord and apparent evil of the world must in their sphere be admitted, but not accepted as our conquerors. The deepest instinct of humanity seeks always and seeks wisely wisdom as the last word of the universal manifestation, not an eternal mockery and illusion, — a secret and finally triumphant good, not an all-creative and invincible evil, — an ultimate victory and fulfilment, not the disappointed recoil of the soul from its great adventure.

For we cannot suppose that the sole Entity is compelled by something outside or other than Itself, since no such thing exists.
Nor can we suppose that It submits unwillingly to something partial within Itself which is hostile to its whole Being, denied by It and yet too strong for It; for this would be only to erect in other language the same contradiction of an All and something other than the All. Even if we say that the universe exists merely because the Self in its absolute impartiality tolerates all things alike, viewing with indifference all actualities and all possibilities, yet is there something that wills the manifestation and supports it, and this cannot be something other than the All. Brahman is indivisible in all things and whatever is willed in the world has been ultimately willed by the Brahman. It is only our relative consciousness, alarmed or baffled by the phenomena of evil, ignorance and pain in the cosmos, that seeks to deliver the Brahman from responsibility for Itself and its workings by erecting some opposite principle, Maya or Mara, conscious Devil or self-existent principle of evil. There is one Lord and Self and the many are only His representations and becomings.

If then the world is a dream or an illusion or a mistake, it is a dream originated and willed by the Self in its totality and not only originated and willed, but supported and perpetually entertained. Moreover, it is a dream existing in a Reality and the stuff of which it is made is that Reality, for Brahman must be the material of the world as well as its base and continent. If the gold of which the vessel is made is real, how shall we suppose that the vessel itself is a mirage? We see that these words, dream, illusion, are tricks of speech, habits of our relative consciousness; they represent a certain truth, even a great truth, but they also misrepresent it. Just as Non-Being turns out to be other than mere nullity, so the cosmic Dream turns out to be other than mere phantasm and hallucination of the mind. Phenomenon is not phantasm; phenomenon is the substantial form of a Truth.

We start, then, with the conception of an omnipresent Reality of which neither the Non-Being at the one end nor the universe at the other are negations that annul; they are rather different states of the Reality, obverse and reverse affirmations. The highest experience of this Reality in the universe shows it to be not only a conscious Existence, but a supreme Intelligence and
Force and a self-existent Bliss; and beyond the universe it is still some other unknowable existence, some utter and ineffable Bliss. Therefore we are justified in supposing that even the dualities of the universe, when interpreted not as now by our sensational and partial conceptions, but by our liberated intelligence and experience, will be also resolved into those highest terms. While we still labour under the stress of the dualities, this perception must no doubt constantly support itself on an act of faith, but a faith which the highest Reason, the widest and most patient reflection do not deny, but rather affirm. This creed is given, indeed, to humanity to support it on its journey, until it arrives at a stage of development when faith will be turned into knowledge and perfect experience and Wisdom will be justified of her works.