

## Chapter Ten

# The Subconscious and the Inconscious

### The Subconscious in the Integral Yoga

In our Yoga we mean by the subconscious that quite submerged part of our being in which there is no wakenly conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling or organised reaction, but which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature. For if these impressions rise up most in dream in an incoherent and disorganised manner, they can also and do rise up into our waking consciousness as a mechanical repetition of old thoughts, old mental, vital and physical habits or an obscure stimulus to sensations, actions, emotions which do not originate in or from our conscious thought or will and are even often opposed to its perceptions, choice or dictates. In the subconscious there is an obscure mind full of obstinate sanskaras, impressions, associations, fixed notions, habitual reactions formed by our past, an obscure vital full of the seeds of habitual desires, sensations and nervous reactions, a most obscure material which governs much that has to do with the condition of the body. It is largely responsible for our illnesses; chronic or repeated illnesses are indeed mainly due to the subconscious and its obstinate memory and habit of repetition of whatever has impressed itself upon the body consciousness. But this subconscious must be clearly distinguished from the subliminal parts of our being such as the inner or subtle physical consciousness, the inner vital or inner mental; for these are not at all obscure or incoherent or ill-organised, but only veiled from our surface consciousness. Our surface constantly receives something, inner touches, communications

or influences, from these sources but does not know for the most part whence they come.

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The subconscious is below the waking physical consciousness — it is an automatic, obscure, incoherent, half-unconscious realm into which light and awareness can with difficulty come. The inner vital and physical are quite different — they have a larger, plastic, subtler, freer and richer consciousness than the surface vital and physical, much more open to the Truth and in direct touch with the universal.

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The subconscious is not the whole foundation of our nature; it is only the lower basis of the Ignorance and governs mostly the lower vital and physical exterior consciousness and these again affect the higher parts of the nature. While it is necessary to see what it is and how it acts, one must not be too preoccupied with this dark side or this apparent aspect of the instrumental being. One should rather regard it as something not oneself, a mask of false nature imposed on the true being by the Ignorance. The true being is the inner with all its vast possibilities of reaching and expressing the Divine and especially the inmost, the soul, the psychic Purusha which is always in its essence pure, divine, turned to all that is good and true and beautiful. The exterior being has to be taken hold of by the inner being and turned into an instrument no longer of the upsurgings of the ignorant subconscious Nature, but of the Divine. It is by remembering always that and opening the nature upwards that the Divine Consciousness can be reached and descend from above into the whole inner and outer existence, mental, vital, physical, the subconscious, the subliminal, all that we overtly or secretly are. This should be the main preoccupation. To dwell solely on the subconscious and the aspect of imperfection creates depression and should be avoided. One has to keep a right balance and stress on the positive side most, recognising the other but only to reject and change it. This and a constant faith and reliance on

the Mother are what is needed for the transformation to come.

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The Subconscious is the basis of much of the lower activities — that is now generally admitted.

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The subconscious is the evolutionary basis in us, it is not the whole of our hidden nature, nor is it the whole origin of what we are. But things can rise from the subconscious and take shape in the conscious part and much of our smaller vital and physical instincts, movements, habits, character-forms has this source.

There are three occult sources of our action — the superconscious, the subliminal, the subconscious, but of none of them are we in control or even aware. What we are aware of is the surface being which is only an instrumental arrangement. The source of all is the general Nature, — universal Nature individualising itself in each person; for this general Nature deposits certain habits of movement, personality, character, faculties, dispositions, tendencies in us, and that, whether formed now or before our birth, is what we usually call ourselves. A good deal of this is in habitual movement and use in our known conscious part on the surface, a great deal more is concealed in the other unknown three which are below or behind the surface.

But what we are on the surface is being constantly set in motion, changed, developed or repeated by the waves of the general Nature coming in on us either directly or else indirectly through others, through circumstances, through various agencies or channels. Some of this flows straight into the conscious part and acts there, but our mind ignores its source, appropriates it and regards all that as its own; a part comes secretly into the subconscious or sinks into it and waits for an opportunity of rising up into the conscious surface; a good deal goes into the subliminal and may at any time come out — or may not, may rather rest there as unused matter. Part passes through and is rejected, thrown back or thrown out or spilt into the universal sea. Our nature is a constant activity of forces supplied to us out

of which (or rather out of a small amount of it) we make what we will or can. What we make seems fixed and formed for good, but in reality it is all a play of forces, a flux, nothing fixed or stable; the appearance of stability is given by constant repetition and recurrence of the same vibrations and formations. That is why our nature can be changed in spite of Vivekananda's saying and Horace's adage and in spite of the conservative resistance of the subconscious, but it is a difficult job because the master mode of Nature is this obstinate repetition and recurrence.

As for the things in our nature that are thrown away from us by rejection but come back, it depends on where you throw them. Very often there is a sort of procedure about it. The mind rejects its mentalities, the vital its vitalities, the physical its physicalities — these usually go back into the corresponding domain of general Nature. It all stays at first, when that happens, in the environmental consciousness which we carry about with us, by which we communicate with the outside Nature, and often it persistently rushes back from there — until it is so absolutely rejected, or thrown far away as it were, that it cannot return upon us any more. But when what the thinking and willing mind rejects is strongly supported by the vital, it leaves the mind indeed but sinks down into the vital, rages there and tries to rush up again and reoccupy the mind and compel or capture our mental acceptance. When the higher vital too — the heart or the larger vital dynamis rejects it, it sinks from there and takes refuge in the lower vital with its mass of small current movements that make up our daily littleness. When the lower vital too rejects it, it sinks into the physical consciousness and tries to stick by inertia or mechanical repetition. Rejected even from there it goes into the subconscious and comes up in dreams, in passivity, in extreme *tamas*. The Inconscious is the last resort of the Ignorance.

As for the waves that recur from the general Nature, it is the natural tendency of the inferior forces there to try and perpetuate their action in the individual, to rebuild what he has unbuilt of their deposits in him, so they return on him, often with an increased force, even with a stupendous violence, when they

find their influence rejected. But they cannot last long once the environmental consciousness is cleared — unless the “Hostiles” take a hand. Even then they can indeed attack, but if the sadhak has established his position in the inner self, they can only attack and retire.

It is true that we bring most of ourselves — or rather most of our predispositions, tendencies of reaction to the universal Nature — from past lives. Heredity only affects strongly the external being; besides, all the effects of heredity are not accepted even there, only those that are in consonance with what we are to be or not preventive of it at least.

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The subconscious is a concealed and unexpressed inarticulate consciousness which works below all our conscious physical activities. Just as what we call the superconscious is really a higher consciousness above from which things descend into the being, so the subconscious is below the body consciousness and things come up into the physical, the vital and the mind-nature from there.

Just as the higher consciousness is superconscious to us and supports all our spiritual possibilities and nature, so the subconscious is the basis of our material being and supports all that comes up in the physical nature.

Men are not ordinarily conscious of either of these planes of their own being, but by sadhana they can become aware.

The subconscious retains the impressions of all our past experiences of life and they can come up from there in dream forms. Most dreams in ordinary sleep are formations made from subconscious impressions.

The habit of strong recurrence of the same things in our physical consciousness, so that it is difficult to get rid of its habits, is largely due to a subconscious support. The subconscious is full of irrational habits.

When things are rejected from all other parts of the nature, they go either into the environmental consciousness around us through which we communicate with others and with universal

Nature and try to return from there or they sink into the subconscious and can come up from there even after lying long quiescent so that we think they are gone.

When the physical consciousness is being changed, the chief resistance comes from the subconscious. It is constantly maintaining or bringing back the inertia, weakness, obscurity, lack of intelligence which afflict the physical mind and vital or the obscure fears, desires, angers, lusts of the physical vital, or the illnesses, dullnesses, pains, incapacities to which the body-nature is prone.

If light, strength, the Mother's consciousness is brought down into the body it can penetrate the subconscious also and convert its obscurity and resistance.

When something is erased from the subconscious so completely that it leaves no seed and thrown out of the circumconscient so completely that it can return no more, then only can we be sure that we have finished with it for ever.

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About the subconscious — it is the submaterial base of the being and is made up of impressions, instincts, habitual movements that are stored there. Whatever movement is impressed on it, it keeps. If one impresses the right movement on it, it will keep and send up that. That is why it has to be cleared of old movements before there can be a permanent and total change in the nature. When the higher consciousness is once established in the waking parts, it goes down into the subconscious and changes that also, makes a bedrock of itself there also. Then no farther trouble from the subconscious will be possible. But even before that one can minimise the trouble by putting the right will and the right habit of reaction on the subconscious parts.

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All that one does and thinks leaves its trace in the subconscious.

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Yes, the subconscious is a cosmic as well as an individual plane.

### The Subconscious in Traditional Indian Terminology

I don't know that there is any [*term corresponding to the subconscious in Patanjali or the Sankhya*] — this plane was spoken of more as unconscious than subconscious — it is practically the indiscriminate or *jaḍa prakṛti*, perhaps — or the seed state. In the Veda it is symbolised by the cave of the Panis. Perhaps by looking through books like the Yogavasishtha one could find something about the subconscious in fact though not in express terms.

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You had asked the other day about the subconscious, what it was. In the vision you describe you were shown the universal subconscious in the figure of Patala, a place without light of consciousness and, because universal, therefore without bounds or end — the dark unconscious infinite out of which this material universe has arisen — it is walled with darkness on all sides, it seems also to have no bottom. The Light comes from above from the higher consciousness and coming down through the mind and heart and vital and physical has to pour down into this subconscious and make it luminous.

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“Patala” [*in an experience described by the correspondent*] is a name for the subconscious — the beings there had no heads, that is to say, there is there no mental consciousness; men have all of them such a subconscious plane in their own being and from there rise all sorts of irrational and ignorant (headless) instincts, impulses, memories etc. which have an effect upon their acts and feelings without their detecting the real source. At night many incoherent dreams come from this world or plane. The world above is the superconscious plane of being — above the human consciousness — there are many worlds of that kind; they are divine worlds.

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### The Subconscious and the Superconscious

Below the feet is the subconscious, just as above the head is the superconscious.

### The Subconscious and the Subliminal

Subliminal is a general term used for all the parts of the being which are not on the waking surface. Subconscious is very often used in the same sense by European psychologists because they do not know the difference. But when I use the word, I mean always what is *below* the ordinary physical consciousness, not what is behind it. The inner mental, vital, physical, the psychic are not subconscious in this sense, but they can be spoken of as subliminal.

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What he [*a correspondent*] has written about the subconscious and the outer nature is true. But the role of subliminal forces cannot be said to be small, since from there come all the greater aspirations, ideals, strivings towards a better self and better humanity without which man would be only a thinking animal — as also most of the art, poetry, philosophy, thirst for knowledge which relieve if they do not yet dispel the ignorance.

The role of the superconscious has been to evolve slowly the spiritual man out of the mental half-animal. That also cannot be called an insignificant role.

### The Subconscious Memory and Conscious Memory

Exact images are retained by the subliminal memory. All that is subliminal is described by ordinary psychology as subconscious; but in our psychology that cannot be done, for the consciousness that holds them is as precise and far wider and fuller than our waking or surface consciousness, so how can it be called subconscious? Conscious memory is that which can bring up at

any moment we like the memory of a thing, it is under our control. Subliminal memory can hold all things, even those which the mind cannot understand, e.g. if you hear somebody talking Hebrew, the subliminal memory can hold that and bring it up accurately in some abnormal state, e.g. the hypnotic. Subconscious memory is a memory of impressions; when they come up as in dream, either the result is something incoherent or fancifully rearranged or it is only the essence of the thing, its psychological deposit that comes up, e.g. sex, fear, some particular libido as the psychoanalysts call it, but the expression given to the latter need not be the same as memory would give; it may repeat the same forms if it gets hold of the mechanical mind in the physical to help its expression, but also it may be quite different from anything in real life.

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The clear memory of words, images and thoughts is an action of the conscious mind, not the unconscious. Of course the memory goes behind, so to speak, in the back part of the mind, but it can be brought out. Also the memory can be lost or defaced, so that one remembers wrongly or forgets altogether, but that is still an imperfect action of the conscious mind, not an action of the subconscious. What the subconscious keeps is a mass of impressions, not of clear or exact images and these can come up as in dreams in an incoherent jumble distorted altogether or else in the waking state as a mechanical recurrence or repetition of the same suggestions, impulses (subconscious vital) or sensations. There is a recognisable difference between the two functionings.

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It [*the memory of things*] is not in the mind alone; it is stored in the subconscious (mind, vital and physical) as impressions — also in the inner being all is present but held back as a store of past experience.

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All that our consciousness meets in day-to-day experience is

registered in subconscious memory and from there can be brought up to the mind or come of itself. But what we call memory is when the thing registered is kept in the conscious mind at its back and brought forward at will — that is conscious memory.

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No — that [*the record of Chitragupta*] is quite different [*from the cosmic subconscious*], since it belongs to something where the records are precise and accurate. The subconscious is a suppressed and obscure seed state where things are emerging out of the indeterminate inconscience of original Nature but are yet fluent and imprecise, having all the potentiality of determination in them, but not yet determinate. The past things fall back into it not as memories, but as impressions which is a quite different thing. When they come up from there it is in all sorts of queer forms with variations and mixtures.

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There is very often a complaint of this kind [*weakening of memory*] made during the course of the sadhana. I suppose that the usual action of memory is for a time suspended by the mental silence or else by the physical *tamas*.

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By the change of consciousness there can be a more conscious and perfect functioning of the memory replacing the old mechanism.

### **The Subconscious and the Inconscient**

The subconscious is universal as well as individual like all the other main parts of the nature. But there are different parts or planes of the subconscious. All upon earth is based on the Inconscient as it is called, though it is not really inconscient at all, but rather a complete “sub”-conscience, a suppressed or involved consciousness, in which there is everything but nothing

is formulated or expressed. The subconscious lies in between this Inconscient and the conscious mind, life and body. It contains the potentiality of all the primitive reactions to life which struggle out to the surface from the dull and inert obscurity of Matter and form by a constant development a slowly evolving and self-formulating consciousness; it contains them not as ideas or perceptions or conscious reactions but as the fluid substance of these things. But also all that is consciously experienced sinks down into the subconscious, not as precise though submerged memories but as obscure yet obstinate impressions of experience, and these can come up at any time as dreams, as mechanical repetitions of past thought, feelings, action etc., as “complexes” exploding into action and event etc. etc. The subconscious is the main cause why all things repeat themselves and nothing ever gets changed except in appearances. It is the cause why people say character cannot be changed, the cause also of the constant return of things one hoped to have got rid of for ever. All seeds are there and all the *sanskaras* of the mind and vital and body, — it is the main support of death and disease and the last fortress (seemingly impregnable) of the Ignorance. All too that is suppressed without being wholly got rid of sinks down there and remains in seed ready to surge up or sprout up at any moment.