Chapter VII

The Knowledge and the Ignorance

Let the Knower distinguish the Knowledge and the Ignorance.

Rig Veda.\(^1\)

Two are there, hidden in the secrecy of the Infinite, the Knowledge and the Ignorance; but perishable is the Ignorance, immortal is the Knowledge; another than they is He who rules over both the Knowledge and the Ignorance.

Swetaswara Upanishad.\(^2\)

Two Unborn, the Knower and one who knows not, the Lord and one who has not mastery: one Unborn and in her are the object of enjoyment and the enjoyer.

Swetaswara Upanishad.\(^3\)

Two are joined together, powers of Truth, powers of Maya,—they have built the Child and given him birth and they nourish his growth.

Rig Veda.\(^4\)

In our scrutiny of the seven principles of existence it was found that they are one in their essential and fundamental reality: for if even the matter of the most material universe is nothing but a status of being of Spirit made an object of sense, envisaged by the Spirit’s own consciousness as the stuff of its forms, much more must the life-force that constitutes itself into form of Matter, and the mind-consciousness that throws itself out as Life, and the Supermind that develops Mind as one of its powers, be nothing but Spirit itself modified in apparent substance and in dynamism of action, not modified in real essence. All are powers of one Power of being and not other

\(^{1}\) IV. 2. 11. \(^{2}\) V. 1. \(^{3}\) I. 9. \(^{4}\) X. 5. 3.
than that All-Existence, All-Consciousness, All-Will, All-Delight which is the true truth behind every appearance. And they are not only one in their reality, but also inseparable in the sevenfold variety of their action. They are the seven colours of the light of the divine consciousness, the seven rays of the Infinite, and by them the Spirit has filled in on the canvas of his self-existence conceptually extended, woven of the objective warp of Space and the subjective woof of Time, the myriad wonders of his self-creation great, simple, symmetrical in its primal laws and vast framings, infinitely curious and intricate in its variety of forms and actions and the complexities of relation and mutual effect of all upon each and each upon all. These are the seven Words of the ancient sages; by them have been created and in the light of their meaning are worked out and have to be interpreted the developed and developing harmonies of the world we know and the worlds behind of which we have only an indirect knowledge. The Light, the Sound is one; their action is sevenfold.

But here there is a world based upon an original Inconscience; here consciousness has formulated itself in the figure of an ignorance labouring towards knowledge. We have seen that there is no essential reason either in the nature of Being itself or in the original character and fundamental relations of its seven principles for this intrusion of Ignorance, of discord into the harmony, of darkness into the light, of division and limitation into the self-conscious infinity of the divine creation. For we can conceive, and since we can, the Divine can still more conceive — and since there is the conception, there must somewhere be the execution, the creation actual or intended, — a universal harmony into which these contrary elements do not enter. The Vedic seers were conscious of such a divine self-manifestation and looked on it as the greater world beyond this lesser, a freer and wider plane of consciousness and being, the truth-creation of the Creator which they described as the seat or own home of the Truth, as the vast Truth, or the Truth, the Right, the Vast, or again as a Truth hidden by a Truth where the Sun of Knowledge

\[\text{sadānam tasya, sve dame tasya, tasya brhate, tām satyam brhate.}\]
finishes his journey and unyokes his horses, where the thousand rays of consciousness stand together so that there is That One, the supreme form of the Divine Being. But this world in which we live seemed to them to be a mingled weft in which truth is disfigured by an abundant falsehood, anṛtya bhūrel;⁶ here the one light has to be born by its own vast force out of an initial darkness or sea of Inconscience;⁷ immortality and godhead have to be built up out of an existence which is under the yoke of death, ignorance, weakness, suffering and limitation. This self-building they figured as the creation by man in himself of that other world or high ordered harmony of infinite being which already exists perfect and eternal in the Divine Infinite. The lower is for us the first condition of the higher; the darkness is the dense body of the light, the Inconscient guards in itself all the concealed Superconscient, the powers of the division and falsehood hold from us but also for us and to be conquered from them the riches and substance of the unity and the truth in their cave of subconscience. This was in their view, expressed in the highly figured enigmatic language of the early mystics, the sense and justification of man’s actual existence and his conscious or unconscious Godward effort, his conception so paradoxical at first sight in a world which seems its very opposite, his aspiration so impossible to a superficial view in a creature so ephemeral, weak, ignorant, limited, towards a plenitude of immortality, knowledge, power, bliss, a divine and imperishable existence.

For, as a matter of fact, while the very keyword of the ideal creation is a plenary self-consciousness and self-possession in the infinite Soul and a perfect oneness, the keyword of the creation of which we have present experience is the very opposite; it is an original inconscience developing in life into a limited and divided self-consciousness, an original inert subjection to the drive of a blind self-existent Force developing in life into a struggle of the self-conscious being to possess himself and all things and

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⁶ Rg Veda, VII. 60. 5.
⁷ apraketaṃ sañjālam.
to establish in the kingdom of this unseeing mechanic Force the reign of an enlightened Will and Knowledge. And because the blind mechanic Force—we know now really that it is no such thing—confronts us everywhere, initial, omnipresent, the fundamental law, the great total energy, and because the only enlightened will we know, our own, appears as a subsequent phenomenon, a result, a partial, subordinate, circumscribed, sporadic energy, the struggle seems to us at the best a very precarious and doubtful venture. The Inconscient to our perceptions is the beginning and the end; the self-conscious soul seems hardly more than a temporary accident, a fragile blossom upon this great, dark and monstrous Ashwattha-tree of the universe. Or if we suppose the soul to be eternal, it appears at least as a foreigner, an alien and not well-treated guest in the reign of this vast Inconscience. If not an accident in the inconscient Darkness, it is perhaps a mistake, a stumble downwards of the superconscient Light.

If this view of things had a complete validity, then only the absolute idealist, sent perhaps out of some higher existence, unable to forget his mission, stung into indomitable enthusiasm by a divine oestrus or sustained in a calm and infinite fortitude by the light and force and voice of the unseen Godhead, could persist under such circumstances in holding up before himself, much more before an incredulous or doubting world, the hope of a full success for the human endeavour. Actually, for the most part, men either reject it from the beginning or turn away from it eventually, after some early enthusiasm, as a proved impossibility. The consistent materialist seeks a partial and short-lived power, knowledge, happiness, so much only as the dominant inconscient order of Nature will allow to the struggling self-consciousness of man if he accepts his limitations, obeys her laws and makes as good a use of them by his enlightened will as their inexorable mechanism will tolerate. The religionist seeks his reign of enlightened will, love or divine being, his kingdom of God, in that other world where they are unalloyed and eternal. The philosophic mystic rejects all as a mental illusion and aspires to self-extinction in some Nirvana or else an immersion in the
featureless Absolute; if the soul or mind of the illusion-driven individual has dreamed of a divine realisation in this ephemeral world of the Ignorance, it must in the end recognise its mistake and renounce its vain endeavour. But still, since there are these two sides of existence, the ignorance of Nature and the light of the Spirit, and since there is behind them the One Reality, the reconciliation or at any rate the bridging of the gulf forecast in the mystic parables of the Veda ought to be possible. It is a keen sense of this possibility which has taken different shapes and persisted through the centuries,— the perfectibility of man, the perfectibility of society, the Alwar’s vision of the descent of Vishnu and the Gods upon earth, the reign of the saints, sādhūnāṁ rājyam, the city of God, the millennium, the new heaven and earth of the Apocalypse. But these intuitions have lacked a basis of assured knowledge and the mind of man has remained swinging between a bright future hope and a grey present certitude. But the grey certitude is not so certain as it looks and a divine life evolving or preparing in earth Nature need not be a chimera. All acceptations of our defeat or our limitation start from the implied or explicit recognition, first, of an essential dualism and, then, of an irreconcilable opposition between the dual principles, between the Conscient and the Inconscient, between Heaven and Earth, between God and the World, between the limitless One and the limited Many, between the Knowledge and the Ignorance. We have arrived by the train of our reasoning at the conclusion that this need be no more than an error of the sense-mind and the logical intellect founded upon a partial experience. We have seen that there can be and is a perfectly rational basis for the hope of our victory; for the lower term of being in which we now live contains in itself the principle and intention of that which exceeds it and it is by its own self-exceeding and transformation into that that it can find and develop into a complete form its own real essence.

But there is one point in the reasoning which till now we have left somewhat obscure, and it is precisely in this matter of the coexistence of the Knowledge and the Ignorance. Admittedly, we start here from conditions which are the opposite of
the ideal divine Truth and all the circumstances of that opposition are founded upon the being’s ignorance of himself and of the Self of all, outcome of an original cosmic Ignorance whose result is self-limitation and the founding of life on division in being, division in consciousness, division in will and force, division in delight, division and limitation in knowledge, power, love with, as consequence, the positive opposite phenomena of egoism, obscuration, incapacity, misuse of knowledge and will, disharmony, weakness and suffering. We have found that this Ignorance, although shared by Matter and Life, has its roots in the nature of Mind whose very office it is to measure off, limit, particularise and thereby divide. But Mind also is a universal principle, is One, is Brahman, and therefore it has a tendency to a unifying and universalising knowledge as well as to that which marks off and particularises. The particularising faculty of Mind only becomes Ignorance when it separates itself from the higher principles of which it is a power and acts not only with its characteristic tendency, but also with a tendency to exclude the rest of knowledge, to particularise first and foremost and always and to leave unity as a vague concept to be approached only afterwards, when particularisation is complete, and through the sum of particulars. This exclusiveness is the very soul of Ignorance.

We must then seize hold on this strange power of Consciousness which is the root of our ills, examine the principle of its operation and detect not only its essential nature and origin, but its power and process of operation and its last end and means of removal. How is it that the Ignorance exists? How has any principle or power in the infinite self-awareness been able to put self-knowledge behind it and exclude all but its own characteristic limited action? Certain thinkers have

\(^8\) Buddha refused to consider the metaphysical problem; the process by which our unreal individuality is constructed and a world of suffering maintained in existence and the method of escape from it is all that is of importance. Karma is a fact; the construction of objects, of an individuality not truly existent is the cause of suffering; to get rid of Karma, individuality and suffering must be our one objective; by that elimination we shall pass into whatever may be free from these things, permanent, real: the way of liberation alone matters.
declared that the problem is insoluble, it is an original mystery and is intrinsically incapable of explanation; only the fact and the process can be stated: or else the question of the nature of the supreme original Existence or Non-existence is put aside as either unanswerable or unnecessary to answer. One can say that Maya with its fundamental principle of ignorance or illusion simply is, and this power of Brahma has the double force of Knowledge and Ignorance inherently potential in it; all we have to do is to recognise the fact and find a means of escape out of the Ignorance — through the Knowledge, but into what is beyond both Knowledge and Ignorance — by renunciation of life, by recognition of the universal impermanency of things and the vanity of cosmic existence.

But our mind cannot remain satisfied — the mind of Buddhism itself did not remain satisfied — with this evasion at the very root of the whole matter. In the first place, these philosophies, while thus putting aside the root question, do actually make far-reaching assertions that assume, not only a certain operation and symptoms, but a certain fundamental nature of the Ignorance from which their prescription of remedies proceeds; and it is obvious that without such a radical diagnosis no prescription of remedies can be anything but an empiric dealing. But if we are to evade the root-question, we have no means of judging whether the assertions advanced are correct or the remedies prescribed the right ones, or whether there are not others which without being so violent, destructively radical or of the nature of a surgical mutilation or extinction of the patient may yet bring a more integral and natural cure. Secondly, it is always the business of man the thinker to know. He may not be able by mental means to know the essentiality of the Ignorance or of anything in the universe in the sense of defining it, because the mind can only know things in that sense by their signs, characters, forms, properties, functionings, relations to other things, not in their occult self-being and essence. But we can pursue farther and farther, clarify more and more accurately our observation of the phenomenal character and operation of the Ignorance until we get the right revealing word, the right
indicating sense of the thing and so come to know it, not by intellect but by vision and experience of the truth, by realising the truth in our own being. The whole process of man’s highest intellectual knowledge is through this mental manipulation and discrimination to the point where the veil is broken and he can see; at the end spiritual knowledge comes in to help us to become what we see, to enter into the Light in which there is no Ignorance.

It is true that the first origin of the Ignorance is beyond us as mental beings because our intelligence lives and moves within the Ignorance itself and does not reach up to the point or ascend on to the plane where that separation took place of which the individual mind is the result. But this is true of the first origin and fundamental truth of all things, and on this principle we should have to rest satisfied with a general agnosticism. Man has to work in the Ignorance, to learn under its conditions, to know it up to its farthest point so that he may arrive at its borders where it meets the Truth, touch its final lid of luminous obscurcation and develop the faculties which enable him to overstep that powerful but really unsubstantial barrier.

We have then to scrutinise more closely than we have yet done the character and operation of this principle or this power of Ignorance and arrive at a clearer conception of its nature and origin. And first we must fix firmly in our minds what we mean by the word itself. The distinction between the Knowledge and the Ignorance begins with the hymns of the Rig Veda. Here knowledge appears to signify a consciousness of the Truth, the Right, satyam rtam, and of all that is of the order of the Truth and Right; ignorance is an unconsciousness, acitti, of the Truth and Right, an opposition to its workings and a creation of false or adverse workings. Ignorance is the absence of the divine eye of perception which gives us the sight of the supramental Truth; it is the non-perceiving principle in our consciousness as opposed to the truth-perceiving conscious vision and knowledge. In its actual operation this non-perceiving is not an entire inconscience,

\[9\] acitti and citti.
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The inconscient sea from which this world has arisen,\(^{10}\) but either
a limited or a false knowledge, a knowledge based on the division
of undivided being, founded upon the fragmentary, the little, op-
posed to the opulent, vast and luminous completeness of things;
it is a cognition which by the opportunity of its limitations is
turned into falsehood and supported in that aspect by the Sons
of Darkness and Division, enemies of the divine endeavour in
man, the assailants, robbers, coverers of his light of knowledge.
It was therefore regarded as an undivine Maya,\(^{11}\) that which cre-
ates false mental forms and appearances, — and hence the later
significance of this word which seems to have meant originally
a formative power of knowledge, the true magic of the supreme
Mage, the divine Magician, but was also used for the adverse
formative power of a lower knowledge, the deceit, illusion and
deluding magic of the Rakshasa. The divine Maya is the knowl-
edge of the Truth of things, its essence, law, operation, which
the gods possess and on which they found their own eternal
action and creation\(^{12}\) and their building of their powers in the
human being. This idea of the Vedic mystics can in a more meta-
physical thought and language be translated into the conception
that the Ignorance is in its origin a dividing mental knowledge
which does not grasp the unity, essence, self-law of things in
their one origin and in their universality, but works rather upon
divided particulars, separate phenomena, partial relations, as if
they were the truth we had to seize or as if they could really be
understood at all without going back behind the division to the
unity, behind the dispersion to the universality. The Knowledge
is that which tends towards unification and, attaining to the
supramental faculty, seizes the oneness, the essence, the self-law
of existence and views and deals with the multiplicity of things
out of that light and plenitude, in some sort as does the Divine
Himself from the highest height whence He embraces the world.
It must be noted however that the Ignorance in this conception
of it is still a kind of knowledge, but, because it is limited, it is

\(^{10}\) \textit{aprekétam salilam.}

\(^{11}\) \textit{adevi mayā.}

\(^{12}\) \textit{devānām adabdhā vratāṁ.}
open at any point to the intrusion of falsehood and error; it turns into a wrong conception of things which stands in opposition to the true Knowledge.

In the Vedantic thought of the Upanishad we find the original Vedic terms replaced by the familiar antinomy of Vidya and Avidya, and with the change of terms there has come a certain development of significance: for since the nature of the Knowledge is to find the Truth and the fundamental Truth is the One, — the Veda speaks repeatedly of it as “That Truth” and “That One”, — Vidya, Knowledge in its highest spiritual sense, came to mean purely and trenchantly the knowledge of the One, Avidya, Ignorance, purely and trenchantly the knowledge of the divided Many divorced, as in our world it is divorced, from the unifying consciousness of the One Reality. The complex associations, the rich contents, the luminous penumbra of varied and corollary ideas and significant figures which belonged to the conception of the Vedic words, were largely lost in a language more precise and metaphysical, less psychological and flexible. Still the later exaggerated idea of absolute separation from the true truth of Self and Spirit, of an original illusion, of a consciousness that can be equated with dream or with hallucination, did not at first enter into the Vedantic conception of the Ignorance. If in the Upanishads it is declared that the man who lives and moves within the Ignorance, wanders about stumbling like a blind man led by the blind and returns ever to the net of Death which is spread wide for him, it is also affirmed elsewhere in the Upanishads that he who follows after the Knowledge only, enters as if into a blinder darkness than he who follows after the Ignorance and that the man who knows Brahman as both the Ignorance and the Knowledge, as both the One and the Many, as both the Becoming and the Non-Becoming, crosses by the Ignorance, by the experience of the Multiplicity, beyond death and by the Knowledge takes possession of Immortality. For the Self-existent has really become these many existences; the Upanishad can say to the Divine Being, in all solemnity and with no thought to mislead, “Thou art this old man walking with his staff, yonder boy and girl, this blue-winged bird, that red of eye”, not “Thou
seemest to be these things” to the self-deluding mind of the Ignorance. The status of becoming is inferior to the status of Being, but still it is the Being that becomes all that is in the universe.

But the development of the separative distinction could not stop here; it had to go to its logical extreme. Since the knowledge of the One is Knowledge and the knowledge of the Many is Ignorance, there can be, in a rigidly analytic and dialectical view, nothing but pure opposition between the things denoted by the two terms; there is no essential unity between them, no reconciliation possible. Therefore Vidya alone is Knowledge, Avidya is pure Ignorance; and, if pure Ignorance takes a positive form, it is because it is not merely a not-knowing of Truth, but a creation of illusions and delusions, of seemingly real unrealities, of temporarily valid falsehoods. Obviously then, the object matter of Avidya can have no true and abiding existence; the Many are an illusion, the world has no real being. Undoubtedly it has a sort of existence while it lasts, as a dream has or the long-continued hallucination of a delirious or a demented brain, but no more. The One has not become and can never become Many; the Self has not and cannot become all these existences; Brahman has not manifested and cannot manifest a real world in itself: it is only the Mind or some principle of which Mind is a result that thrusts names and forms upon the featureless unity which is alone real and, being essentially featureless, cannot manifest real feature and variation; or else, if it manifests these things, then that is a temporal and temporary reality which vanishes and is convicted of unreality by the illumination of true knowledge.

Our view of the ultimate Reality and of the true nature of Maya has compelled us to depart from these later fine excesses of the dialectical intellect and return to the original Vedantic conception. While giving every tribute to the magnificent fearlessness of these extreme conclusions, to the uncompromising logical force and acuity of these speculations, inexpugnable so long as the premisses are granted, admitting the truth of two of the main contentions, the sole Reality of the Brahman and the fact that our normal conceptions about ourselves and
world-existence are stamped with ignorance, are imperfect, are misleading, we are obliged to withdraw from the hold so powerfully laid by this conception of Maya on the intelligence. But the obsession of this long-established view of things cannot be removed altogether so long as we do not fathom the true nature of the Ignorance and the true and total nature of the Knowledge. For if these two are independent, equal and original powers of the Consciousness, then the possibility of a cosmic Illusion pursues us. If Ignorance is the very character of cosmic existence, then our experience of the universe, if not the universe itself, becomes illusory. Or, if Ignorance is not the very grain of our natural being, but still an original and eternal power of Consciousness, then, while there can be a truth of cosmos, it may be impossible for a being in the universe, while he is in it, to know its truth: he can only arrive at real knowledge by passing beyond mind and thought, beyond this world-formation, and viewing all things from above in some supracosmic or super-cosmic consciousness like those who have become of one nature with the Eternal and dwell in Him, unborn in the creation and unafflicted by the cataclysmic destruction of the worlds below them.13 But the solution of this problem cannot be satisfactorily pursued and reached on the basis of an examination of words and ideas or a dialectical discussion; it must be the result of a total observation and penetration of the relevant facts of consciousness — both those of the surface and those below or above our surface level or behind our frontal surface — and a successful fathoming of their significance.

For the dialectical intellect is not a sufficient judge of essential or spiritual truths; moreover, very often, by its propensity to deal with words and abstract ideas as if they were binding realities, it wears them as chains and does not look freely beyond them to the essential and total facts of our existence. Intellectual statement is an account to our intelligence and a justification by reasoning of a seeing of things which pre-exists in our turn of mind or temperament or in some tendency of our nature and

13 Gita.
secretly predetermines the very reasoning that claims to lead to
it. That reasoning itself can be conclusive only if the perception
of things on which it rests is both a true and a whole seeing. Here
what we have to see truly and integrally is the nature and validity
of our consciousness, the origin and scope of our mentality; for
then alone can we know the truth of our being and nature and of
world-being and world-nature. Our principle in such an inquiry
must be to see and know; the dialectical intellect is to be used
only so far as it helps to clarify our arrangement and justify our
expression of the vision and the knowledge, but it cannot be
allowed to govern our conceptions and exclude truth that does
not fall within the rigid frame of its logic. Illusion, knowledge
and ignorance are terms or results of our consciousness, and
it is only by looking deeply into our consciousness that we
can discover and determine the character and relations of the
Knowledge and the Ignorance or of the Illusion, if it exists,
and the Reality. Being is no doubt the fundamental object of
inquiry, things in themselves and things in their nature; but it
is only through consciousness that we can approach Being. Or
if it be maintained that we can only reach Being, enter into
the Real, because it is superconscient, through extinction or
transcendence of consciousness or through its self-transcendence
and self-transformation, it is still through consciousness that we
must arrive at the knowledge of this necessity and the process or
power of execution of this extinction or this self-transcendence,
this transformation: then, through consciousness, to know of the
Superconscient Truth becomes the supreme need and to discover
the power and process of consciousness by which it can pass into
superconscience, the supreme discovery.

But in ourselves consciousness seems to be identical with
Mind; in any case Mind is so dominant a factor of our being
that to examine its fundamental movements is the first necessity.
In fact, however, Mind is not the whole of us; there is also in us
a life and a body, a subconscience and an inconscience; there is a
spiritual entity whose origin and secret truth carry us into an oc-
cult inward consciousness and a superconscience. If Mind were
all or if the nature of the original Consciousness in things were
of the nature of Mind, Illusion or Ignorance might conceivably be regarded as the source of our natural existence: for limitation of knowledge and obscuration of knowledge by Mind-nature create error and illusion, illusions created by Mind-action are among the first facts of our consciousness. It might therefore be conceivably held that Mind is the matrix of an Ignorance which makes us create or represent to ourselves a false world, a world that is nothing more than a subjective construction of the consciousness. Or else Mind might be the matrix in which some original Illusion or Ignorance, Maya or Avidya, cast the seed of a false impermanent universe; Mind would still be the mother,—a “barren mother” since the child would be unreal,—and Maya or Avidya could be looked at as a sort of grandmother of the universe; for Mind itself would be a production or reproduction of Maya. But it is difficult to discern the physiognomy of this obscure and enigmatic ancestress; for we have then to impose a cosmic imagination or an illusion-consciousness on the eternal Reality; Brahman the Reality must itself either be or have or support a constructing Mind or some constructive consciousness greater than Mind but of an analogous nature, must be by its activity or its sanction the creator and even perhaps in some sort by participation a victim, like Mind, of its own illusion and error. It would not be less perplexing if Mind were simply a medium or mirror in which there falls the reflection of an original illusion or a false image or shadow of the Reality. For the origin of this medium of reflection would be inexplicable and the origin also of the false image cast upon it would be inexplicable. An indeterminable Brahman could only be reflected as something indeterminable, not as a manifold universe. Or if it be the inequality of the reflecting medium, its nature as of rippling and restless water that creates broken images of the Reality, still it would be broken and distorted reflections of the Truth that would appear there, not a pullulation of false names and images of things that had no source or basis of existence in the Reality. There must be some manifold truth of the one Reality which is reflected, however falsely or imperfectly, in the manifold images of the mind’s universe. It could then very well be that the
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The world might be a reality and only the mind’s construction of it or picture of it erroneous or imperfect. But this would imply that there is a Knowledge, other than our mental thought and perception which is only an attempt at knowing, a true cognition which is aware of the Reality and aware also in it of the truth of a real universe.

For if we found that the highest Reality and an ignorant Mind alone exist, we might have no choice but to admit the Ignorance as an original power of the Brahman and to accept as the source of all things Avidya or Maya. Maya would be an eternal power of the self-aware Brahman to delude itself or rather to delude something that seems to be itself, something created by Maya; Mind would be the ignorant consciousness of a soul that exists only as a part of Maya. Maya would be the Brahman’s power to foist name and form upon itself, Mind its power to receive them and take them for realities. Or Maya would be Brahman’s power to create illusions knowing them to be illusions, Mind its power to receive illusions forgetting that they are illusions. But if Brahman is essentially and always one in self-awareness, this trick would not be possible. If Brahman can divide itself in that fashion, at once knowing and not knowing or one part knowing and the other not knowing, or even if it can put something of itself into Maya, then Brahman must be capable of a double — or a manifold — action of consciousness, one a consciousness of Reality, the other a consciousness of illusion, or one an ignorant consciousness and the other a superconscience. This duality or manifoldness seems at first sight logically impossible, yet it must be on this hypothesis the crucial fact of existence, a spiritual mystery, a suprarational paradox. But once we admit the origin of things as a suprarational mystery, we can equally or preferably accept this other crucial fact of the One becoming or being always many and the Many being or becoming the One; this too is at first view dialectically impossible, a suprarational paradox, yet it presents itself to us as an eternal fact and law of existence. But if that is accepted, there is then no longer any need for the intervention of an illusive Maya. Or, equally, we can accept, as we have accepted, the conception of
an Infinite and Eternal which is capable, by the infinite power of
its consciousness, of manifesting the fathomless and illimitable
Truth of its being in many aspects and processes, in innumer-
able expressive forms and movements; these aspects, processes,
forms, movements could be regarded as real expressions, real
consequences of its infinite Reality; even the Inconscience and
Ignorance could then be accepted among them as reverse aspects,
as powers of an involved consciousness and a self-limited knowl-
dge brought forward because necessary to a certain movement
in Time, a movement of involution and evolution of the Reality.
If suprarational in its basis, this total conception is not altogether
a paradox; it only demands a change, an enlargement in our
conceptions of the Infinite.

But the real world cannot be known and none of these pos-
sibilities can be put to the test if we consider Mind alone or only
Mind’s power for ignorance. Mind has a power also for truth; it
opens its thought-chamber to Vidya as well as to Avidya, and if
its starting-point is Ignorance, if its passage is through crooked
ways of error, still its goal is always Knowledge: there is in it an
impulse of truth-seeking, a power — even though secondary and
limited — of truth-finding and truth-creation. Even if it is only
images or representations or abstract expressions of truth that it
can show us, still these are in their own manner truth-reflections
or truth-formations, and the realities of which they are forms
are present in their more concrete truth in some deeper depth
or on some higher level of power of our consciousness. Matter
and life may be the form of realities of which Mind touches
only an incomplete figure; Spirit may have secret and supernal
realities of which Mind is only a partial and rudimentary re-
ceiver, transcriber or transmitter. It would then be only by an
examination of other supramental and inframetal as well as
higher and deeper mental powers of consciousness that we can
arrive at the whole reality. And in the end all depends on the
truth of the supreme Consciousness — or the superconscience
— that belongs to the highest Reality and the relation to it of
Mind, Supermind, Infra-Mind and the Inconscience.

All indeed changes when we penetrate the lower and the
higher depths of consciousness and unite them in the one omnipresent Reality. If we take the facts of our and the world's being, we find existence to be one always,—a unity governs even its utmost multiplicity; but the multiplicity is also on the face of things undeniable. We have found unity pursuing us everywhere: even, when we go below the surface, we find that there is no binding dualism; the contradictories and oppositions which the intellect creates exist only as aspects of the original Truth; oneness and multiplicity are poles of the same Reality; the dualities that trouble our consciousness are contrasted truths of one and the same Truth of being. All multiplicity resolves itself into a manifoldness of the one Being, the one Consciousness of Being, the one Delight of Being. Thus in the duality of pleasure and pain, we have seen that pain is a contrary effect of the one delight of existence resulting from the weakness of the recipient, his inability to assimilate the force that meets him, his incapacity to bear the touch of delight that would otherwise be felt in it; it is a perverse reaction of Consciousness to Ananda, not itself a fundamental opposite of Ananda: this is shown by the significant fact that pain can pass into pleasure and pleasure into pain and both resolve into the original Ananda. So too every form of weakness is really a particular working of the one divine Will-Force or the one Cosmic Energy; weakness in that Force means its power to hold back, measure, relate in a particular way its action of Force; incapacity or weakness is the Self's withholding of its force-completeness or an insufficient reaction of Force, not its fundamental opposite. If this is so, then also it may be, and should be in the nature of things, that what we call Ignorance is not really anything else than a power of the one divine Knowledge-Will or Maya; it is the capacity of the One Consciousness similarly to regulate, to hold back, measure, relate in a particular way the action of its Knowledge. Knowledge and Ignorance will then be, not two irreconcilable principles, one creative of world-existence, the other intolerant and destructive of it, but two coexistent powers both present in the universe itself, diversely operating in the conduct of its processes but one in their essence and able to pass by a natural
transmutation into each other. But in their fundamental relation Ignorance would not be an equal coexistent, it would be dependent on Knowledge, a limitation or a contrary action of Knowledge.

To know, we have always to dissolve the rigid constructions of the ignorant and self-willed intellect and look freely and flexibly at the facts of existence. Its fundamental fact is consciousness which is power, and we actually see that this power has three ways of operating. First, we find that there is a consciousness behind all, embracing all, within all, which is eternally, universally, absolutely aware of itself whether in unity or multiplicity or in both simultaneously or beyond both in its sheer absolute. This is the plenitude of the supreme divine self-knowledge; it is also the plenitude of the divine all-knowledge. Next, at the other pole of things, we see this consciousness dwelling upon apparent oppositions in itself, and the most extreme antimony of all reaches its acme in what seems to us to be a complete nescience of itself, an effective, dynamic, creative Inconscience, though we know that this is merely a surface appearance and that the divine Knowledge works with a sovereign security and sureness within the operations of the Inconscient. Between these two oppositions and as a mediary term we see Consciousness working with a partial, limited self-awareness which is equally superficial, for behind it and acting through it is the divine All-Knowledge. Here in its intermediate status, it seems to be a standing compromise between the two opposites, between the supreme Consciousness and the Nescience, but may prove rather in a larger view of our data to be an incomplete emergence of the Knowledge to the surface. This compromise or imperfect emergence we call the Ignorance, from our own point of view, because ignorance is our own characteristic way of the soul’s self-withholding of complete self-knowledge. The origin of these three poises of the power of consciousness and their exact relation is what we have, if possible, to discover.

If we discovered that Ignorance and Knowledge were two independent powers of Consciousness, it might then be that we would have to pursue their difference up to the highest point
of Consciousness where they would cease only in an Absolute from which both of them had issued together. It might then be concluded that the only real knowledge is the truth of the superconscient Absolute and that truth of consciousness, truth of cosmos, truth of ourselves in cosmos is at best a partial figure burdened always with a concomitant presence, an encircling penumbra, a pursuing shadow of Ignorance. It might even be that an absolute Knowledge establishing truth, harmony, order and an absolute Inconscience basing a play of fantasy, disharmony and disorder, supporting inexorably its extreme of falsehood, wrong and suffering, a Manichean double principle of conflicting and intermingling light and darkness, good and evil, stand at the root of cosmic existence. The idea of certain thinkers that there is an absolute good but also an absolute evil, both of them an approach to the Absolute, might assume consistence. But if we find that Knowledge and Ignorance are light and shadow of the same consciousness, that the beginning of Ignorance is a limitation of Knowledge, that it is the limitation that opens the door to a subordinate possibility of partial illusion and error, that this possibility takes full body after a purposeful plunge of Knowledge into a material Inconscience but that Knowledge too emerges along with an emerging Consciousness out of the Inconscience, then we can be sure that this fullness of Ignorance is by its own evolution changing back into a limited Knowledge and can feel the assurance that the limitation itself will be removed and the full truth of things become apparent, the cosmic Truth free itself from the cosmic Ignorance. In fact, what is happening is that the Ignorance is seeking and preparing to transform itself by a progressive illumination of its darknesses into the Knowledge that is already concealed within it; the cosmic truth manifested in its real essence and figure would by that transformation reveal itself as essence and figure of the

14 In the Upanishads Vidya and Avidya are spoken of as eternal in the supreme Brahman; but this can be accepted in the sense of the consciousness of the multiplicity and the consciousness of the Oneness which by coexistence in the supreme self-awareness became the basis of the Manifestation; they would there be two sides of an eternal self-knowledge.
supreme omnipresent Reality. It is from this interpretation of existence that we have started, but to verify it we must observe the structure of our surface consciousness and its relation to what is within it and above and below it; for so best we can distinguish the nature and scope of the Ignorance. In that process there will appear the nature and scope also of that of which the Ignorance is a limitation and deformation, the Knowledge,—in its totality the spiritual being’s abiding self-knowledge and world-knowledge.