Chapter One

Experiences of the Self, the One and the Infinite

Peace, Calm, Silence and the Self

That [state of vast peace and calm] is the basic experience of the higher consciousness — it is what is called the realisation of the Atman (the Self).

It is the Atman, the spiritual being above the mind — the first experience of it is a silence and calm (which one perceives afterwards to be infinite and eternal) untouched by the movements of mind and life and body. The higher consciousness lives always in touch with the Self — the lower is separated from it by the activities of the Ignorance.

When one becomes aware of the Self calm, silent, wide, universal, it is no longer covered over by the ignorance; when one identifies with the Self and not with the mind, life and body and their movements or with the small ego, that is the release of the Self.

And how is the outer nature to rise into the higher Prakriti before you realise the Self? The higher nature is that of the higher consciousness of which the first basis is the peace and wideness and realisation of the Self, the One that is all.

The gaining of peace makes it easier to get the experience of the pure and free Self.
If not aspiration, at least keep the idea of what is necessary —
(1) that the silence and peace shall become a wideness which you
can realise as the Self, (2) the extension of the silent consciousness upwards as well so that you may feel its source above you,
(3) the presence of peace etc. all the time. These things need not all come at once, but by realising what has to be in your mind, any falling towards a condition of inertia can be avoided.

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What one feels first [in the silence] is the pure existence of the self, without any idea, characteristic or movement — existence pure and simple, Sat Brahman — or else one feels that and a vast peace and wideness. Afterwards other things are felt such as Ananda, but always with this as the basis.

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A great wave (or sea) of calm and the constant consciousness of a vast and luminous Reality — this is precisely the character of the fundamental realisation of the Supreme Truth in its first touch on the mind and the soul. One could not ask for a better beginning or foundation — it is like a rock on which the rest can be built. It means certainly not only a Presence, but the Presence — and it would be a great mistake to weaken the experience by any non-acceptance or doubt of its character.

It is not necessary to define it and one ought not even to try to turn it into an image; for this Presence is in its nature infinite. Whatever it has to manifest of itself or out of itself, it will do inevitably by its own power, if there is a sustained acceptance.

It is quite true that it is a grace sent and the only return needed for such a grace is acceptance, gratitude and to allow the Power that has touched the consciousness to develop what has to be developed in the being — by keeping oneself open to it. The total transformation of the nature cannot be done in a moment; it must take long and proceed through stages; what is now experienced is only an initiation, a foundation for the new consciousness in which that transformation will become possible. The automatic spontaneity of the experience ought by
itself to show that it is nothing constructed by the mind, will or emotions; it comes from a Truth that is beyond them.

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The vastness, the overwhelming calm and silence in which you feel merged is what is called the Atman or the silent Brahman. It is the whole aim of many Yogas to get this realisation of Atman or silent Brahman and live in it. In our Yoga it is only the first stage of the realisation of the Divine and of that growing of the being into the higher or divine Consciousness which we call transformation.

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A sadhak of integral Yoga who stops short at the Impersonal is no longer a sadhak of integral Yoga. Impersonal realisation is the realisation of the silent Self, of the pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in itself without any perception of an Existent, Conscient, Blissful. It leads therefore to Nirvana. In the integral knowledge the realisation of the Self and of the impersonal Sachchidananda is only a step, though a very important step, or part of the integral knowledge. It is a beginning, not an end of the highest realisation.

The True Self Within

The experience described in your letter is a glimpse of the realisation of the true Self which is independent of the body. When this settles itself there is the liberation (mukti). Not only the body, but the vital and mind are felt to be only instruments and one’s self is felt to be calm, self-existent and free and wide or infinite. It is then possible for the psychic being to effect in that freedom the full transformation of the nature. All your former experiences were preparing for this, but the physical consciousness came across. Now that you have had the glimpse of the self separate from the body, this physical difficulty may soon be overcome.

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The experience you have is the experience of the true self. Untouched by grief and joy, desire, anxiety or trouble, vast and calm and full of peace, it observes the agitations of the outer being as one might the play of children. It is indeed the divine element in you. The more you can live in that, the firmer will be the foundation of the sadhana. In this self will come all the higher experiences, oneness with the Divine, light, knowledge, strength, Ananda, the play of the Mother’s higher forces. It does not always become stable from the first, though for some it does; but the experience comes more and more frequently and lasts till it is no longer covered by the ordinary nature.

The Self and the Sense of Individuality

Yes, the sense of individuality can disappear altogether when all is peace and wideness. One feels that the peace and wideness are oneself, but not in an individual sense — for it is the “Atman” of everybody else also. Afterwards there can come an experience of another kind of I, but it is a universalised I which contains everybody else and is in unison with everybody else and is itself contained in the Divine. This is what Yogins sometimes call the “large” as opposed to the small Aham. I have written of it as the true Person.

* The Self is essentially universal; the individualised self is only the universal experienced from an individual centre. If what you have realised is not felt to be one in all, then it is not the “Atman”; possibly it is the central being not yet revealing its universal aspect as Atman.

* The Self is felt as either universal, one in all, or a universalised individual the same in essence as others, extended everywhere from each being but centred here. Of course centre is a way of speaking, because no physical centre is usually felt — only all the action takes place around the individual.
All is in the self; when identified with the universal self, all is in you.

Also, the microcosm reproduces the macrocosm — so all is present in each, though all is not expressed (and cannot be) in the surface consciousness.

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There is the experience of the microcosm (the universe in oneself) in which all that is in the macrocosm (the larger universe) is present. All these things are for experience, for knowledge and must be taken as such. No merely personal turn should be given to them.

The Disappearance of the “I” Sense

The essential “I” sense disappears when there is the stable realisation of the one universal Self in all and that remains at all moments in all conditions under any circumstances. Usually this comes first in the Purusha consciousness and the extension to the Prakriti movements is not immediate. But even if there are “I” movements in the Prakriti reactions, the Purusha within observes them as the continued running of an old mechanism and does not feel them as his own. Most Vedantists stop there, because they think that those reactions will fall away from one at death and all will disappear into the One. But for a change of the nature it is necessary that the experience and seeing of the Purusha should spread to all the parts, mind, vital, physical, subconscient. Then the ego movements of Prakriti can also disappear gradually from one field after another till none is left. For this a perfect samata even in the cells of the body and in every vibration of the being is necessary — *samaḥ hi brahma*. One is then quite free from it in works also. The individual remains but that is not the small separative ego, but a form and power of the Universal which feels itself one with all beings, an acting centre and instrument of the Universal Transcendent, full of the Ananda of the presence and the action but not thinking or moving independently or acting for its own sake. That cannot be called egoism. The Divine can
be called an ego only if he is a separate Person limited as in the
Christian idea of God by his separateness (though even there
esoteric Christianity abolishes the limitation). An I which is not
separate in that way is no I at all.

The Self and the Cosmic Consciousness

One has first to become aware of the Self and its wide silence
and eternal peace and acquire the cosmic consciousness in which
one is aware of the whole universe as one with oneself and to
live in that. One has at the same time to be aware — it becomes
possible when one lives in the cosmic consciousness, cosmic Self
and cosmic Nature, — of the different beings in oneself, psychic,
mental, vital, physical, and then there appears also the central
being which stands above all of them and is the source of all
the surface personalities. It is only then that one can know the
aspect or bhava one is intended to manifest.

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The Cosmic Spirit or Self contains everything in the cosmos —
it upholds cosmic Mind, universal Life, universal Matter as well
as the Overmind. The Self is more than all these things which
are its formulations in Nature.

A Vision of the Universal Self

What you saw in the vision was the wide and luminous infinite of
what is called the universal Self or spirit. It is that which is one of
the fundamental things into which one enters when one reaches
the higher consciousness and goes above. The personal being
naturally feels itself as something very small and insignificant in
that Infinite. But in that Infinite there are higher and higher levels
and it is to these levels that the Mother was leading you when
she took you by the hand. This often happens in meditation or
trance when one has once gone upward into the spiritual infinity.
The reason why you did not see the Mother’s form was not that
the Mother hid herself or anything in you came between, but
that you were both moving in the formless Infinite as spiritual beings and so it was easier to feel the presence than to see any physical form. Not that the form cannot be there, but it is less insistent and therefore not so soon seen as on the physical plane.

The silence in the head and heart and the emptiness are both necessary and desirable. When they are there, the consciousness finds them natural and they give it the sense of lightness and release; that is why the thoughts or speech of the old kind are foreign to it and when they come give fatigue. This silence and emptiness must grow, so that the higher consciousness with its knowledge, light, Ananda, peace can come down in it and progressively replace the old things. They must indeed occupy not only head and heart but the whole body.

The Self Experienced on Various Planes

It is probably the true Cosmic Self or spirit with its cosmic consciousness and power that you feel on a plane above the ordinary mind or vital or physical — what plane is not as yet clear — for what you describe is common to this Self on whatever plane it manifests; it is felt like that as soon as the being or any part of the being detaches itself from the surface Ignorance.

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The Self is met first on the level of the Higher Mind, but it is not limited to one station — it is usually felt as something outspread in wideness, but one may also feel a centralising consciousness in the Sahasrara or above it.

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A complete silence makes realisation of the Self more possible — but that can be had on the Higher Mind level far below Overmind.

The Self and Time

In the self or pure existence there is no time or space — except
spiritual space or wideness.

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Yes — in the silence of the self there is no time — it is \textit{akāla}.

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Yes, that is correct. In the first realisation of silence in the higher consciousness there is no Time — there is only the sense of pure existence, consciousness, peace or a strong featureless Ananda. If anything else comes in it is a minor movement on the surface of this timeless self-existence. This and the sense of liberation that comes with it is the result of the mind’s quiescence. At a higher level this peace and liberation remain, but can be united with a greater and freer dynamic movement.

The Self and Life

It is always possible to have realisations of a kind on the mental-spiritual plane even if the vital is still impure. There is a sort of separation of the mental Purusha and Prakriti which results in a knowledge that has no transforming effect on the life. But the theory of these Yogis is that one has to know the Self; life and what one does in life do not matter. Have you not read of the Yogi who came with his concubine and Ramakrishna asked him, “Why do you live like that?” He answered, “All is Maya, so it does not matter what I do so long as I know the Brahman.” It is true Ramakrishna replied, “I spit on your Vedanta”, but logically the Yogi had a case. For if all life and action are Maya and only the silent Brahman is real — well!

Experiences of Infinity, Oneness, Unity

What you felt as a strong subtle air was the concrete expression of consciousness or conscious existence in itself independent of the body. As yet the experience is still limited by the body, but when it is felt without that limit then it is a sense of a wide ether filling all space, Akash Brahman. As this grows, the body sense
disappears and when the mind also is quite inactive, one feels oneself to be that spreading out to all Infinity.

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The feeling you have of all being one and not this a tree or that such and such an object, seems to be a first touch of the realisation of all being One. For it is so that one sees things then, — all seems to be One and not something separate like a tree or a house. The tree or house is only a form in the One; the tree is really that One.

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It is only by feeling all things as one spiritual substance that one can arrive at unity [of matter, energy and mind] — unity is in the spiritual consciousness. The material point is only one point among millions of millions — so that is not the base of unity. But once you get the unity in consciousness, you can feel through that the unity of mind substance, mind force, etc., the unity of life substance (mobile) and life force, the unity of material substance and energies. Being — consciousness of being — energy of consciousness — form of consciousness, all things are really that.

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The spiritual consciousness [mentioned in the preceding letter] is that which is in contact with Sachchidananda, that is, with the pure existence, consciousness and bliss of the Divine. Any contact with Sachchidananda must bring either peace or bliss.

Living in the Divine

There can be no mental rule or definition [of the kind of life possible after union with the Purushottama]. One has first to live in the Divine and attain to the Truth — the will and awareness of the Truth will organise the life.

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To be always merged in the Divine is not so easy. It can be done only by an absorption in one's own inner self or by a consciousness that sees all in the Divine and the Divine in all and is always in that condition. There is none [here] who has attained to that yet.