Chapter XV

The Cosmic Consciousness

To realise and unite oneself with the active Brahman is to exchange, perfectly or imperfectly according as the union is partial or complete, the individual for the cosmic consciousness. The ordinary existence of man is not only an individual but an egoistic consciousness; it is, that is to say, the individual soul or Jivatman identifying himself with the nodus of his mental, vital, physical experiences in the movement of universal Nature, that is to say, with his mind-created ego, and, less intimately, with the mind, life, body which receive the experiences. Less intimately, because of these he can say "my mind, life, body," he can regard them as himself, yet partly as not himself and something rather which he possesses and uses, but of the ego he says, "It is I." By detaching himself from all identification with mind, life and body, he can get back from his ego to the consciousness of the true Individual, the Jivatman, who is the real possessor of mind, life and body. Looking back from this Individual to that of which it is the representative and conscious figure, he can get back to the transcendent consciousness of pure Self, absolute Existence or absolute Non-being, three poises of the same eternal Reality. But between the movement of universal Nature and this transcendent Existence, possessor of the one and cosmic self of the other, is the cosmic consciousness, the universal Purusha of whom all Nature is the Prakriti or active conscious Force. We can arrive at that, become that whether by breaking the walls of the ego laterally, as it were, and identifying oneself with all existences in the One, or else from above by realising the pure Self or absolute Existence in its outgoing, immanent, all-embracing, all-constituting self-knowledge and self-creative power.

The immanent, silent Self in all is the foundation of this cosmic consciousness for the experience of the mental being. It
is the Witness pure and omnipresent who as the silent Conscious Soul of the cosmos regards all the activity of the universe; it is Sachchidananda for whose delight universal Nature displays the eternal procession of her works. We are aware of an unwounded Delight, a pure and perfect Presence, an infinite and self-contained Power present in ourselves and all things, not divided by their divisions, not affected by the stress and struggle of the cosmic manifestation; it is within it all, but it is superior to it all. Because of that all this exists, but that does not exist because of all this; it is too great to be limited by the movement in Time and Space which it inhabits and supports. This foundation enables us to possess in the security of the divine existence the whole universe within our own being. We are no longer limited and shut in by what we inhabit, but like the Divine contain in ourselves all that for the purpose of the movement of Nature we consent to inhabit. We are not mind or life or body, but the informing and sustaining Soul, silent, peaceful, eternal, which possesses them; and since we find this Soul everywhere sustaining and informing and possessing all lives and minds and bodies, we cease to regard it as a separate and individual being in our own. In it all this moves and acts; within all this it is stable and immutable. Having this, we possess our eternal self-existence at rest in its eternal consciousness and bliss.

Next we have to realise this silent Self as the Lord of all the action of universal Nature; we have to see that it is this same Self-existent who is displayed in the creative force of His eternal consciousness. All this action is only His power and knowledge and self-delight going abroad in His infinite being to do the works of His eternal wisdom and will. We shall realise the Divine, the eternal Self of all, first, as the source of all action and inaction, of all knowledge and ignorance, of all delight and suffering, of all good and evil, perfection and imperfection, of all force and form, of all the outgoing of Nature from the eternal divine Principle and of all the return of Nature towards the Divine. We shall realise it next as itself going abroad in its Power and Knowledge, — for the Power and Knowledge are itself, — not only the source of their works, but the creator and
doer of their works, one in all existences; for the many souls of
the universal manifestation are only faces of the one Divine, the
many minds, lives, bodies are only His masks and disguises. We
perceive each being to be the universal Narayana presenting to
us many faces; we lose ourselves in that universality and perceive
our own mind, life and body as only one presentation of the Self,
while all whom we formerly conceived of as others, are now to
our consciousness our self in other minds, lives and bodies. All
force and idea and event and figure of things in the universe are
only manifest degrees of this Self, values of the Divine in His
eternal self-configuration. Thus viewing things and beings we may
see them first as if they were parts and parcels of His divided
being;1 but the realisation and the knowledge are not complete
unless we go beyond this idea of quality and space and division
by which there comes the experience of less and more, large and
small, part and whole, and see the whole Infinite everywhere;
we must see the universe and each thing in the universe as in
its existence and secret consciousness and power and delight
the indivisible Divine in its entirety, however much the figure it
makes to our minds may appear only as a partial manifestation.
When we possess thus the Divine as at once the silent and sur-
passing Witness and the active Lord and all-constituting Being
without making any division between these aspects, we possess
the whole cosmic Divine, embrace all of the universal Self and
Reality, are awake to the cosmic consciousness.

What will be the relation of our individual existence to this
cosmic consciousness to which we have attained? For since we
have still a mind and body and human life, our individual exist-
ence persists even though our separate individual consciousness
has been transcended. It is quite possible to realise the cosmic
consciousness without becoming that; we can see it, that is to
say, with the soul, feel it and dwell in it; we can even be united
with it without becoming wholly one with it; in a word, we may
preserve the individual consciousness of the Jivatman within the
cosmic consciousness of the universal Self. We may preserve a

1 The Gita speaks of the Jiva as a portion of the Lord.
yet greater distinctness between the two and enjoy the relations between them; we may remain, in a way, entirely the individual self while participating in the bliss and infinity of the universal Self. Or we may possess them both as a greater and lesser self, one we feel pouring itself out in the universal play of the divine consciousness and force, the other in the action of the same universal Being through our individual soul-centre or soul-form for the purposes of an individual play of mind, life and body. But the summit of this cosmic realisation by knowledge is always the power to dissolve the personality in universal being, to merge the individual in the cosmic consciousness, to liberate even the soul-form into the unity and universality of the Spirit. This is the laya, dissolution, or mokṣa, liberation, at which the Yoga of Knowledge aims. This may extend itself, as in the traditional Yoga, to the dissolution of mind, life and body itself into the silent Self or absolute Existence; but the essence of the liberation is the merging of the individual in the Infinite. When the Yogin no longer feels himself to be a consciousness situated in the body or limited by the mind, but has lost the sense of division in the boundlessness of an infinite consciousness, that which he set out to do is accomplished. Afterwards the retaining or non-retaining of the human life is a circumstance of no essential importance, for it is always the formless One who acts through its many forms of the mind and life and body and each soul is only one of the stations from which it chooses to watch and receive and actuate its own play.

That into which we merge ourselves in the cosmic consciousness is Sachchidananda. It is one eternal Existence that we then are, one eternal Consciousness which sees its own works in us and others, one eternal Will or Force of that Consciousness which displays itself in infinite workings, one eternal Delight which has the joy of itself and all its workings. It is itself stable, immutable, timeless, spaceless, supreme and it is still itself in the infinity of its workings, not changed by their variations, not broken up by their multiplicity, not increased or diminished by their ebbings and flowings in the seas of Time and Space, not confused by their apparent contrarieties or limited by their divinely-willed
limitations. Sachchidananda is the unity of the many-sidedness of manifested things, Sachchidananda is the eternal harmony of all their variations and oppositions, Sachchidananda is the infinite perfection which justifies their limitations and is the goal of their imperfections.

So much for the essential relation; but we have to see also the practical results of this internal transformation. It is evident that by dwelling in this cosmic consciousness our whole experience and valuation of everything in the universe will be radically changed. As individual egos we dwell in the Ignorance and judge everything by a broken, partial and personal standard of knowledge; we experience everything according to the capacity of a limited consciousness and force and are therefore unable to give a divine response or set the true value upon any part of cosmic experience. We experience limitation, weakness, incapacity, grief, pain, struggle and its contradictory emotions and we accept these things and their opposites as opposites in an eternal duality and cannot reconcile them in the eternity of an absolute good and happiness. We live by fragments of experience and judge by our fragmentary values each thing and the whole. When we try to arrive at absolute values we only promote some partial view of things to do duty for a totality in the divine workings; we then make believe that our fractions are integers and try to thrust our one-sided viewpoints into the catholicity of the all-vision of the Divine.

But by entering into the cosmic consciousness we begin to participate in that all-vision and see everything in the values of the Infinite and the One. Limitation itself, ignorance itself change their meaning for us. Ignorance changes into a particularising action of divine knowledge; strength and weakness and incapacity change into a free putting forth and holding back various measures of divine Force; joy and grief, pleasure and pain change into a mastering and a suffering of divine delight; struggle, losing its discords, becomes a balancing of forces and values in the divine harmony. We do not then suffer by the limitations of our mind, life and body; for we no longer live in these, even when we record and accept them, but in the infinity of the Spirit, and
these we view in their right value and place and purpose in the manifestation, as degrees of the supreme being, conscious-force and delight of Sachchidananda veiling and manifesting Himself in the cosmos. We cease also to judge other men and things by their outward appearances and are delivered from hostile and contradictory ideas and emotions; for it is the soul that we see, the Divine that we seek and find in every thing and creature, and the rest has only a secondary value to us in a scheme of relations which exist now for us only as self-expressions of the Divine and not as having any absolute value in themselves. So too no event can disturb us, since the distinction of happy and unhappy, beneficent and maleficent happenings loses its force, and all is seen in its divine value and its divine purpose. Thus we arrive at a perfect liberation and an infinite equality. It is this consummation of which the Upanishad speaks when it says “He in whom the self has become all existences, how shall he have delusion, whence shall he have grief who knows entirely\(^2\) and sees in all things oneness.”

But this can be only when there is perfection in the cosmic consciousness, and that is difficult for the mental being. The mentality when it arrives at the idea or the realisation of the Spirit, the Divine, tends to break existence into two opposite halves, the lower and the higher existence. It sees on one side the Infinite, the Formless, the One, the Peace and Bliss, the Calm and Silence, the Absolute, the Vast and Pure; on the other it sees the finite, the world of forms, the jarring multiplicity, the strife and suffering and imperfect, unreal good, the tormented activity and futile success, the relative, the limited and vain and vile. To those who make this division and this opposition, complete liberation is only attainable in the peace of the One, in the featurelessness of the Infinite, in the non-becoming of the Absolute which is to them the only real being; to be free all values must be destroyed, all limitations not only transcended but abolished.

\(^2\) Vijñānatah. Vijñana is the knowledge of the One and the Many, by which the Many are seen in the terms of the One, in the infinite unifying Truth, Right, Vast of the divine existence.
They have the liberation of the divine rest, but not the liberty of the divine action; they enjoy the peace of the Transcendent, but not the cosmic bliss of the Transcendent. Their liberty depends upon abstention from the cosmic movement, it cannot dominate and possess cosmic existence itself. But it is also possible for them to realise and participate in the immanent as well as the transcendent peace. Still the division is not cured. The liberty they enjoy is that of the silent unacting Witness, not the liberty of the divine Master-consciousness which possesses all things, delights in all, casts itself into all forms of existence without fear of fall or loss or bondage or stain. All the rights of the Spirit are not yet possessed; there is still a denial, a limitation, a holding back from the entire oneness of all existence. The workings of Mind, Life, Body are viewed from the calm and peace of the spiritual planes of the mental being and are filled with that calm and peace; they are not possessed by and subjected to the law of the all-mastering Spirit.

All this is when the mental being takes its station in its own spiritual planes, in the mental planes of Sat, Chit, Ananda, and casts down their light and delight upon the lower existence. But there is possible the attempt at a kind of cosmic consciousness by dwelling on the lower planes themselves after breaking their limitations laterally, as we have said, and then calling down into them the light and largeness of the higher existence. Not only Spirit is one, but Mind, Life, Matter are one. There is one cosmic Mind, one cosmic Life, one cosmic Body. All the attempt of man to arrive at universal sympathy, universal love and the understanding and knowledge of the inner soul of other existences is an attempt to beat thin, breach and eventually break down by the power of the enlarging mind and heart the walls of the ego and arrive nearer to a cosmic oneness. And if we can by the mind and heart get at the touch of the Spirit, receive the powerful inrush of the Divine into this lower humanity and change our nature into a reflection of the divine nature by love, by universal joy, by oneness of mind with all Nature and all beings, we can break down the walls. Even our bodies are not really separate entities and therefore our very physical consciousness is capable
of oneness with the physical consciousness of others and of the cosmos. The Yogin is able to feel his body one with all bodies, to be aware of and even to participate in their affections; he can feel constantly the unity of all Matter and be aware of his physical being as only a movement in its movement. Still more is it possible for him to feel constantly and normally the whole sea of the infinite life as his true vital existence and his own life as only a wave of that boundless surge. And more easily yet is it possible for him to unite himself in mind and heart with all existences, be aware of their desires, struggles, joys, sorrows, thoughts, impulses, in a sense as if they were his own, at least as occurring in his larger self hardly less intimately or quite as intimately as the movements of his own heart and mind. This too is a realisation of cosmic consciousness.

It may even seem as if it were the greatest oneness, since it accepts all that we can be sensible of in the mind-created world as our own. Sometimes one sees it spoken of as the highest achievement. Certainly, it is a great realisation and the path to a greater. It is that which the Gita speaks of as the accepting of all existences as if oneself whether in grief or in joy; it is the way of sympathetic oneness and infinite compassion which helps the Buddhist to arrive at his Nirvana. Still there are gradations and degrees. In the first stage the soul is still subject to the reactions of the duality, still subject therefore to the lower Prakriti; it is depressed or hurt by the cosmic suffering, elated by the cosmic joy. We suffer the joys of others, suffer their griefs; and this oneness can be carried even into the body, as in the story of the Indian saint who, seeing a bullock tortured in the field by its cruel owner, cried out with the creature’s pain and the weal of the lash was found reproduced on his own flesh. But there must be a oneness with Sachchidananda in his freedom as well as with the subjection of the lower being to the reactions of Prakriti. This is achieved when the soul is free and superior to the cosmic reactions which are then felt only in the life, mind and body and as an inferior movement; the soul understands, accepts the

3 *jagatyāṁ jagat* Isha Upanishad.
experience, sympathises, but is not overpowered or affected, so that at last even the mind and body learn also to accept without being overpowered or even affected except on their surface. And the consummation of this movement is when the two spheres of existence are no longer divided and the mind, life and body obeying utterly the higher law grow into the spirit’s freedom; free from the lower or ignorant response to the cosmic touches, their struggle and their subjection to the duality ceases. This does not mean insensibility to the subjection and struggles and sufferings of others, but it does mean a spiritual supremacy and freedom which enables one to understand perfectly, put the right values on things and heal from above instead of struggling from below. It does not inhibit the divine compassion and helpfulness, but it does inhibit the human and animal sorrow and suffering.

The link between the spiritual and the lower planes of the being is that which is called in the old Vedantic phraseology the vijnana and which we may describe in our modern turn of language as the Truth-plane or the ideal mind or supermind. There the One and the Many meet and our being is freely open to the revealing light of the divine Truth and the inspiration of the divine Will and Knowledge. If we can break down the veil of the intellectual, emotional, sensational mind which our ordinary existence has built between us and the Divine, we can then take up through the Truth-mind all our mental, vital and physical experience and offer it up to the spiritual — this was the secret or mystic sense of the old Vedic “sacrifice” — to be converted into the terms of the infinite truth of Sachchidananda, and we can receive the powers and illuminations of the infinite Existence in forms of a divine knowledge, will and delight to be imposed on our mentality, vitality, physical existence till the lower members are transformed into the perfect vessel of the higher nature. This was the double Vedic movement of the descent and birth of the gods in the human creature and the ascent of the human powers that struggle towards the divine knowledge, power and delight and climb into the godheads, the result of which was the possession of the One, the infinite, the beatific existence, the union with God, the Immortality. By possession of this ideal plane we
break down entirely the opposition of the lower and the higher existence, the false gulf created by the Ignorance between the finite and the Infinite, God and Nature, the One and the Many, open the gates of the Divine, fulfil the individual in the complete harmony of the cosmic consciousness and realise in the cosmic being the epiphany of the transcendent Sachchidananda. And these results, which obtained on the supramental plane itself or beyond, would be the highest perfection of the human being, we can attain to partially, in a very modified way, in a sort of mental figure by awakening into activity on the corresponding plane of the mental nature. We can get a luminous shadow of that perfect harmony and light. But this belongs to another part of our subject; it is the knowledge on which we must found our Yoga of self-perfection.