The Realisation of January 1908

General Remarks

It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every sadhaka entering this Way has to get over similar impedi-
ments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real Way, even though the Divine help was with me all the time, and even then it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten more years of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to find the Way — and that was because I had my past and the world’s Past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future.

I think you have made too much play with my phrase “an accident” [in the preceding letter], ignoring the important qual-
ification, “it seemed to come by an accident”. After four years of prānāyāma and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a bhakta with a limited mind but some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously pow-
erful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he never intended — for they were Adwaitic and Vedantic and he was against Adwaita Vedanta — and which were quite con-
trary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms.
in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will, a principle or rather a seed-force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or system or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase “it seemed to come by an accident”? But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like that of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we do. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be avyabhicārīṇī bhakti (one-pointed adoration).

7 May 1932

I am rather astonished at your finding Wordsworth’s realisation, however mental and incomplete, to be abstract and vague or dictated by emotional effervescence. Wordsworth was hardly an emotional or effervescent character. As for an abstract realisation, it sounds like a round square; I have never had one myself and find it difficult to believe in it. But certainly a realisation in its beginning can be vague and nebulous or it can be less or more vivid. Still, Wordsworth’s did not make that impression on me and to him it certainly came as something positive, powerful and determinative. He stayed there and went no farther, did not get to the source, because more was hardly possible in his time and surroundings, at least to a man of his mainly moral and intellectual temper.

In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic,
intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a sadhana or in the first years or for many years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years after my first pre-Yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost — though there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements. But to expect and demand it so soon and get fed up because it does not come and declare Yoga impossible except for two or three in the ages would betoken in the eyes of any experienced Yogi or sadhaka a rather rash and abnormal impatience. Most would say that a slow development is the best one can hope for in the first years and only when the nature is ready and fully concentrated towards the Divine can the definitive experience come. To some rapid preparatory experiences can come at a comparatively early stage, but even they cannot escape the labour of the consciousness which will make these experiences culminate in the realisation that is enduring and complete. It is not a question of my liking or disliking your demand or attitude. It is a matter of fact and truth and experience, not of liking or disliking, two things which do not usually sway me. It is the fact that people who are grateful and cheerful and ready to go step by step, even by slow steps, if need be, do actually march faster and more surely than those who are impatient and in haste and at each step despair or murmur. It is what I have always seen — there may be instances to the contrary and I have no objection to your being one, — none at all. I only say that if you could maintain “hope and fervour and faith”, there would be a much bigger chance — that is all.

This is just a personal explanation — a long explanation but which seemed to be called for by your enhancement of my glory — and is dictated by a hope that after all in the long run an accumulation of explanations may persuade you to prefer the sunny path to the grey one. My faith again perhaps? But, sunny path or grey one, the one thing wanted is that you should push through and arrive.

June 1934
Meeting with Vishnu Bhaskar Lele

It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him, and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source and the rest will grow up in the sadhak of itself by the grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it. It is this that Krishnaprem appears to have done perhaps from the first; but in most nowadays this attitude seems to come with difficulty, after much hesitation and delay and trouble. In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law. 23 March 1932

To reject doubts means control of one’s thoughts — very cer-
tainly so. But the control of one’s thoughts is as necessary as the control of one’s vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one’s body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, manomaya puruṣa, sākṣī, anumantā, iśvara. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body, at least a certain part of its movements; it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, svārājya.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to
thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the environing Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. “Sit in meditation,” he said, “but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts coming into it; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence.” I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility; I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for of course the later fullest development of this new untrammelled mental Power took time, many years); but a progressive freedom and mastery over one’s mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and will to undertake it. 5 August 1932

* * *

Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being—the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele’s answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work,
The Realisation of January 1908

for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, “It should be easy for you as you are a poet.” 18 November 1936

I don’t understand why Lele told you that because you are a poet, sadhana will be easy for you through poetry, or why you quote it either. Poetry is itself such a hard job and sadhana through poetry — well, the less said the better! Or perhaps he saw within your soul the Sri Aurobindo of future Supramental glory?

Because I told him I wanted to do Yoga in order to get a new inner Yogic consciousness for life and action, not for leaving life. So he said that. A poet writes from an inner source, not from the external mind, he is moved by inspiration to write, i.e. he writes what a greater Power writes through him. So the Yogi Karma-chari has to act from an inner source, to derive his thoughts and movements from that, to be inspired and impelled by a greater Power which acts through him. He never said that sadhana will be easy for me through poetry. Where is the “through poetry” phrase? Poetry can be done as a part of sadhana and help the sadhana — but sadhana “through” poetry is a quite different matter. 23 May 1938

Mental Silence

To get rid of the random thoughts of the surface physical mind is not easy. It is sometimes done by a sudden miracle as in my own case, but that is rare. Some get it done by a slow process of concentration, but that may take a very long time. It is easier to have a quiet mind with things that come in passing on the surface, as people pass in the street, and one is free to attend to them or not — that is to say, there develops a sort of double mind, one inner silent and concentrated when it pleases to be so, a quiet witness when it chooses to see thoughts and things, — the other meant for surface dynamism. It is probable in your case
that this will come as soon as these descents of peace, intensity or Ananda get strong enough to occupy the whole system.

16 November 1932

* 

I find nothing either to add or to object to in Prof. Sorley’s comment on the still, bright and clear mind; it adequately indicates the process by which the mind makes itself ready for the reflection of the higher Truth in its undisturbed surface or substance. But one thing perhaps needs to be kept in view — that this pure stillness of the mind is indeed always the required condition, the desideratum, but for bringing it about there are more ways than one. It is not, for instance, only by an effort of the mind itself to get clear of all intrusive emotion or passion, to quiet its own characteristic vibrations, to resist the obscuring fumes of a physical inertia which brings about a sleep or a torpor of the mind instead of its wakeful silence, that the thing can be done. This is indeed an ordinary process of the Yogic path of knowledge; but the same end can be brought about or automatically happen by other processes — for instance, by the descent from above of a great spiritual stillness imposing silence on the mind and heart, on the life stimuli, on the physical reflexes. A sudden descent of this kind or a series of descents accumulative in force and efficacy is a well-known phenomenon of spiritual experience. Or again one may start a mental process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and yet may pull down or be seized midway, or even at the outset, by an overmind influx, a rapid intervention or manifestation of the higher Silence, with an effect sudden, instantaneous, out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning. One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, by a response from That to which one aspires or by an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind’s absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had the actual experience.

circa 1934
I have never said that things (in life) are harmonious now — on the contrary, with the human consciousness as it is harmony is impossible. It is always what I have told you, that the human consciousness is defective and simply impossible — and that is why I strive for a higher consciousness to come and set right the disturbed balance. I am glad you are getting converted to silence, and even Nirvana is not without its uses — in my case it was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the sadhana; but as to the positive way to get these things, I don’t know if your mind is quite ready to proceed with it. There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. “Sit down,” I was told, “look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.” I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don’t know how many people can do. One (not a disciple — I had no disciples in those days) asked me how to do Yoga. I said: “Make your mind quiet first.” He did and his mind became quite silent and empty. Then he rushed to me saying: “My brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think. I am becoming an idiot.” He did not pause to look and see where these thoughts he uttered were coming from! Nor did he realise that one who is already an idiot cannot become one. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and I dropped him and let him lose his miraculously achieved silence.

The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to call down the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body.
About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work — mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual — logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, “Well, but it is there.”

Of course, it is there. But the question is, first, “What is it? is it really an illusionary Power and nothing else, or is the Mayavadin’s idea of it a mistaken first view, a mental imperfect reading, even perhaps itself an illusion?” And next, “Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Superconsciousness possesses?” The Absolute is an absolute Truth free from Maya, otherwise liberation would not be possible. Has then the supreme and absolute Truth no other active Power than a power of falsehood and with it, no doubt, for the two go together, a power of dissolving or disowning the falsehood, — which is yet there for ever? I suggested that this sounded a little queer. But queer or not, if it is so, it is so — for as you point out, the Ineffable cannot be subjected to the laws of logic.

But who is to decide whether it is so? You will say, those who get there. But get where? To the Perfect and the Highest, *purṇam param*. Is the Mayavadin’s featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete — is it the very Highest? Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *paramētpram*? That is not a question of logic, it is a question of spiritual fact, of a supreme and complete experience. The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic, but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience — an experience which must
of course include or have passed through that of Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world — only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above, — no abstraction — it was positive, the only positive reality — although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me, — the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards, — but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion\(^1\) is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was

\(^1\) In fact it is not an illusion in the sense of an imposition of something baseless and unreal on the consciousness, but a misinterpretation by the conscious mind and sense and a falsifying misuse of manifested existence.
no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and do my work in it, yet it came — without even a “May I come in” or a “By your leave”. It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self! How then could I accept Mayavada or persuade myself to pit against the Truth imposed on me from above the logic of Shankara?

But I do not insist on everybody passing through my experience or following the Truth that is its consequence. I have no objection to anybody accepting Mayavada as his soul’s truth or his mind’s truth or their way out of the cosmic difficulty. I object to it only if somebody tries to push it down my throat or the world’s throat as the sole possible, satisfying and all-comprehensive explanation of things. For it is not that at all. There are many other possible explanations; it is not at all satisfactory, for in the end it explains nothing; and it is — and must be unless it departs from its own logic — all-exclusive, not in the least all-comprehensive. But that does not matter. A theory may be wrong or at least one-sided and imperfect and yet extremely practical and useful. That has been amply shown by the history of science. In fact a theory whether philosophical or scientific is nothing else than a support for the mind, a practical device to help it to deal with its object, a staff to uphold it and make it walk more confidently and get along on its difficult journey. The
very exclusiveness and one-sidedness of the Mayavada make it a strong staff or a forceful stimulus for a spiritual endeavour which means to be one-sided, radical and exclusive. It supports the effort of the Mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconscience. Or rather it is the Purusha in Mind that wants to get away from the limitations of Mind and Life into the superconscient Infinite. Theoretically, the most radical way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see and treat them as illusions. Practically, when the mind draws back from itself, it enters easily into a relationless peace in which nothing matters — for in its absoluteness there are no mental or vital values — and from which the mind can rapidly move towards that great short cut to the Superconscient, mindless trance, susupti. In proportion to the thoroughness of that movement all the perceptions it had once accepted become unreal to it — illusion, Maya. It is on its road towards immergence.

Mayavada, therefore, with its sole stress on Nirvana, quite apart from its defects as a mental theory of things, serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far. Even, if the Mind were the last word and there were nothing beyond it except the pure Spirit, I would not be averse to accepting it as the only way out. For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect — even when “true”, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance.
I do not think . . . that the statement of supra-intellectual things necessarily involves a making of distinctions in the terms of the intellect. For, fundamentally, it is not an expression of ideas arrived at by speculative thinking. One has to arrive at spiritual knowledge through experience and a consciousness of things which arises directly out of that experience or else underlies or is involved in it. This kind of knowledge, then, is fundamentally a consciousness and not a thought or formulated idea. For instance, my first major experience — radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive — came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought — there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential and impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names. At the same time this fundamental character of spiritual experience is not absolutely limitative; it can do without thought, but it can do with thought also. Of course, the first idea of the mind would be that the resort to thought brings one back at once to the domain of the intellect — and at first and for a long time it may be so; but it is not my experience that this is unavoidable. It happens so when one tries to make an intellectual statement of what one has experienced; but there is another kind of thought that springs out as if it were a body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved in it — or of a part of that consciousness — and this does not seem to me to be intellectual in its character. It has another light, another power in it, a sense within the sense. It is very clearly so with those thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them, thoughts that are of the nature of a direct seeing in the consciousness, even a kind of intimate
The Realisation of January 1908

sense or contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness (I hope this is not too mystic or unintelligible); but it might be said that directly the thoughts turn into words they belong to the kingdom of intellect — for words are a coinage of the intellect. But is it so really or inevitably? It has always seemed to me that words came originally from somewhere else than the thinking mind, although the thinking mind secured hold of them, turned them to its use and coined them freely for its purposes. But even otherwise, is it not possible to use words for the expression of something that is not intellectual? Housman contends that poetry is perfectly poetical only when it is non-intellectual, when it is nonsense. That is too paradoxical, but I suppose what he means is that if it is put to the strict test of the intellect, it appears extravagant because it conveys something that expresses and is real to some other kind of seeing than that which intellectual thought brings to us. Is it not possible that words may spring from, that language may be used to express — at least up to a certain point and in a certain way — the supra-intellectual consciousness which is the essential power of spiritual experience? This however is by the way — when one tries to explain spiritual experience to the intellect itself, then it is a different matter. 14 January 1934

*You ask me whether you have to give up your predilection for testing before accepting and to accept everything in Yoga a priori — and by testing you mean testing by the ordinary reason. The only answer I can give to that is that the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and the infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing — for one cannot see or touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the
earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us — so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first sight seem to contradict it, etc. etc. until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the other hand if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself — as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature — you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of science and its experimentation all by yourself — at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things a priori, well, you have to accept a priori. For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it.

You quote the sayings of Vivekananda and Kobiraj Gopinath. Is this Kaviraj the disciple of the Jewel Sannyasi or is he another? In any case, I would like to know before assigning a value to these utterances what they actually did for the testing of their spiritual perceptions and experiences. How did Vivekananda test the value of his spiritual experiences — some of them not more credible to the ordinary mind than the translation through the air of Bijoy Goswami’s wife to Lake Manas or of Bijoy Goswami himself by a similar method to Benares? I know nothing of Kobiraj Gopinath, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What were his methods? his criteria? It
The Realisation of January 1908 255

seems to me that no ordinary mind could accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour’s talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them a priori or on the sole evidence of Vivekananda which comes to the same thing or to reject them a priori as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could “test” them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could, — to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experiential consequences until I had sufficient Yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?

8 November 1934

One may be aware of the silent static self without relation to the play of the cosmos. Again, one may be aware of the universal static self omnipresent in everything without being supra-sensuously awake to the movement of the dynamic viśva-prakṛti. The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world.

9 March 1936

Don’t you think your realisation of the Self helped you in your crucial moments of struggle, kept up your faith and love?

That has nothing to do with love. Realisation of Self and love
of the personal Divine are two different movements.

My struggle has never been about the Self. All that is perfectly irrelevant to the question which concerns the Bhakta’s love for the Divine.

The sweet memory of that experience of the Self must have sustained you.

There was nothing sugary about it at all. And I had no need to have any memory of it, because it was with me for months and years and is there now though in fusion with other realisations.

We poor people in dark times which pay us frequent visits, fall back on our petty capital of Ananda, even on some of your jokes, to fortify ourselves. If such things can bring back a momentary wave of love and devotion, restored faith, how much would decisive experience not do?

My point is that there have been hundreds of Bhaktas who have the love and seeking without any concrete experience, with only a mental conception or emotional belief in the Divine to support them. The whole point is that it is untrue to say that one must have a decisive or concrete experience before one can have love for the Divine. It is contrary to the facts and the quite ordinary facts of the spiritual experience. 17 March 1936

*I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles — at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples. इत्यादि साधनों के लिए यह सही है और जिसकी जरूरत के लिए निर्वाण के लिए अन्य रुप के ही होते हैं।*
far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path need not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it is so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these, if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking — for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to come. I have seen some astonishing instances here recently of this typhonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence. 22 January 1937

* No aspiration, no nothing — says your teaching. 
Never taught anything of the kind. I got the blessed Nirvana without even wanting it. Aspiration is first or usual means, that is all. 13 April 1937

* I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities — the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure “I” — nor even of any self, impersonal or other, — there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That;² one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but no more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana. Well then, what becomes of

² Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.
your pure “I” and lower “I” in all that? Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an “I” of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something real but ineffable. You may say that there must have been a consciousness aware of some perceiving existence, if not of a pure “I”, but, if so, it was something for which these names seem inadequate.

22 July 1937

*Sri Aurobindo has no remarks to make on Huxley’s comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase “to its heights we can always reach” very obviously “we” does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life. It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience. After three years of spiritual effort with only minor results he was shown by a Yogi the way to silence his mind. This he succeeded in doing entirely in two or three days by following the method shown. There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity but yet was met wherever one

3 In his book The Perennial Philosophy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946, p. 74), Aldous Huxley quoted and commented on the following passage from Sri Aurobindo’s Life Divine, pp. 13–14: “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness—to its heights we can always reach—when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing,’ says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe.” — Ed.
turned. This condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost. At the same time an experience intervened; something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara and felt himself moved by that in all his Sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights to which Sri Aurobindo refers and to which he says we can always rise; for they presented to him no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to carry out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconscious and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

4 November 1946

Silence, Thought and Action

While at the top of the staircase, after leaving my letter for you, I felt an intense force of thought coming in. I felt it in the head — but as if it was an open space.

That is a liberation, if completed. Since 1908 when I got the silence, I never think with my head or brain — it is always in the wideness generally above the head that the thoughts occur.

17 October 1933
Is what I feel really yogic emptiness or has my mind misunderstood it? It has lasted for a long time. In other people, I believe, it only lasts for a day or two.

When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness and I could at any time withdraw from the activity into the pure silent peace. 21 September 1934

* 

You write: “When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness. . .” In my case, I do not see anything coming in. It remains always the same, or grows. But of course it may be preparing the nature for a higher descent.

I had the sheer emptiness with nothing in it for many months together. It is not emptiness really — for there is no such thing as emptiness — but the pure experience of the Self. Your mind accustomed to all sorts of movements looks at it in a negative way, that is all. 22 September 1934

* 

I found it difficult to read, because the higher consciousness was trying to come down and I felt much pressure on the head.

It ought to be possible to read with the inner consciousness looking on and, as it were, seeing the act of reading. In the condition of absolute inner silence I was making speeches and conducting a newspaper, but all that got itself done without any thought entering my mind or the silence being in the least disturbed or diminished. 27 October 1934

* 

Sometimes I feel a sort of void, as if I was just an immobile statue. My mind, life and body are emptied of energy. As a result I find it almost impossible to work.

What you describe is not at all a drawing away of life-energy; it is simply the effect of voidness and stillness caused in the lower parts by the consciousness being located above. It is quite
consistent with action, only one must get accustomed to the idea of the possibility of action under these conditions. In a greater state of emptiness I carried on a daily newspaper and made a dozen speeches in the course of three or four days — but I did not manage that in any way; it happened. The Force made the body do the work without any inner activity.

I am not able to distinguish this voidness caused by the drawing of life-energy and that produced by a spiritual emptiness.

The drawing of the life-energy leaves the body lifeless, helpless, empty and impotent, but it is attended by no experience except a great suffering and unease sometimes. 13 May 1936

You had the emptiness for several years together. But yours seemed to be of a different kind than mine. For you could use it as a wall against anything undesirable.

I never used it as a wall against anything. You seem to know more about my sadhana than I do. 4 June 1936

I believe I have as many hours of hard external work to do as almost anyone in the Asram and I am not aware that I have any leisure or spend even the very short time I have for concentration in a blissful quietism communing with the silent Brahman. Even my concentration is of the nature of action and it is not an airy quietistic contemplation as your informants seem to imagine.

I may add that I have not spent my life shouting down the quietistic ideal and sadhana without knowing why they followed it. All the experiences that the quietistic sadhana can give, I have had, the realisation of the featureless Parabrahman, Maya, Sunya, the illusoriness of the world, the Akshara Purusha. I know also perfectly well why they turned away from the world and have gone through all the million difficulties which they did not care to face. None of the difficulties of which you enumerate one or two are strange to me — only I did not put the blame of
them on anybody or on the Yoga and I overcame them.

Anybody can do the quietistic Yoga, who wants to do it. But if anyone imagines that they [the quietistic yogas] are easy and that these difficulties do not occur there or that the sadhakas of these paths are all of them perfected saints free from the human passions and defects which you see here among the sadhakas, he is labouring under a great delusion. No path of Yoga is easy and to imagine that by leaving the world and plunging inside oneself one automatically shuffles off the vital and external nature is an illusion. If I ask you to develop equanimity and egolessness by work done with opening to the Divine, it is because it is so that I did it and it is so that it can best be done and not by retiring into oneself and shutting oneself away from all that can disturb equanimity and excite the ego. As for concentration and perfection of the being and the finding of the inner self, I did as much of it walking in the streets of Calcutta to my work or in dealing with men during my work as alone and in solitude.⁴

⁴ This incomplete letter-draft was not sent in this form to the intended recipient. It was written sometime in the mid-1930s. — Ed.