The Perfection of the Mental Being

The FUNDAMENTAL idea of a Yoga of self-perfection must be, under these conditions, a reversal of the present relations of the soul of man to his mental, vital and physical nature. Man is at present a partly self-conscious soul subject to and limited by mind, life and body, who has to become an entirely self-conscious soul master of his mind, life and body. Not limited by their claims and demands, a perfect self-conscious soul would be superior to and a free possessor of its instruments. This effort of man to be master of his own being has been the sense of a large part of his past spiritual, intellectual and moral strivings.

In order to be possessor of his being with any complete reality of freedom and mastery, man must find out his highest self, the real man or highest Purusha in him, which is free and master in its own inalienable power. He must cease to be the mental, vital, physical ego; for that is always the creation, instrument and subject of mental, vital, physical Nature. This ego is not his real self, but an instrumentation of Nature by which it has developed a sense of limited and separate individual being in mind, life and body. By this instrumentation he acts as if he were a separate existence in the material universe. Nature has evolved certain habitual limiting conditions under which that action takes place; self-identification of the soul with the ego is the means by which she induces the soul to consent to this action and accept these habitual limiting conditions. While the identification lasts, there is a self-imprisonment in this habitual round and narrow action, and, until it is transcended, there can be no free use by the soul of its individual living, much less a real self-exceeding. For this reason an essential movement of the Yoga is to draw back from the outward ego sense by which we are identified with the action of mind, life and body and live
inwardly in the soul. The liberation from an externalised ego sense is the first step towards the soul’s freedom and mastery.

When we thus draw back into the soul, we find ourselves to be not the mind, but a mental being who stands behind the action of the embodied mind, not a mental and vital personality, — personality is a composition of Nature, — but a mental Person, *manomaya puruṣa*. We become aware of a being within who takes his stand upon mind for self-knowledge and world-knowledge and thinks of himself as an individual for self-experience and world-experience, for an inward action and an outward-going action, but is yet different from mind, life and body. This sense of difference from the vital actions and the physical being is very marked; for although the Purusha feels his mind to be involved in life and body, yet he is aware that even if the physical life and body were to cease or be dissolved, he would still go on existing in his mental being. But the sense of difference from the mind is more difficult and less firmly distinct. But still it is there; it is characterised by any or all of three intuitions in which this mental Purusha lives and becomes by them aware of his own greater existence.

First, he has the intuition of himself as someone observing the action of the mind; it is something which is going on in him and yet before him as an object of his regarding knowledge. This self-awareness is the intuitive sense of the witness Purusha, *sākṣi*. Witness Purusha is a pure consciousness who watches Nature and sees it as an action reflected upon the consciousness and enlightened by that consciousness, but in itself other than it. To mental Purusha Nature is only an action, a complex action of discriminating and combining thought, of will, of sense, of emotion, of temperament and character, of ego feeling, which works upon a foundation of vital impulses, needs and cravings in the conditions imposed by the physical body. But it is not limited by them, since it can not only give them new directions and much variation, refining and extension, but is able to act in thought and imagination and a mental world of much more subtle and flexible creations. But also there is an intuition in the mental Purusha of something larger and greater than this present
action in which he lives, a range of experience of which it is only a frontal scheme or a narrow superficial selection. By this intuition he stands upon the threshold of a subliminal self with a more extended possibility than this superficial mentality opens to his self-knowledge. A last and greatest intuition is an inner awareness of something which he more essentially is, something as high above mind as mind is above the physical life and body. This inner awareness is his intuition of his supramental and spiritual being.

The mental Purusha can at any time involve himself again in the superficial action from which he has drawn back, live for a while entirely identified with the mechanism of mind, life and body and absorbedly repeat its recurrent normal action. But once that separative movement has been made and lived in for some time, he can never be to himself quite what he was before. The involution in the outward action becomes now only a recurrent self-oblivion from which there is a tendency in him to draw back again to himself and to pure self-experience. It may be noted too that the Purusha by drawing back from the normal action of this outward consciousness which has created for him his present natural form of self-experience, is able to take two other poises. He can have an intuition of himself as a soul in body, which puts forth life as its activity and mind as the light of that activity. This soul in body is the physical conscious being, *annamaya puruṣa*, which uses life and mind characteristically for physical experience,—all else being regarded as a consequence of physical experience,—does not look beyond the life of the body and, so far as it feels anything beyond its physical individuality, is aware only of the physical universe and at most its oneness with the soul of physical Nature. But he can have too an intuition of himself as a soul of life, self-identified with a great movement of becoming in Time, which puts forth body as a form or basic sense-image and mind as a conscious activity of life-experience. This soul in life is the vital conscious being, *prāṇamaya puruṣa*, which is capable of looking beyond the duration and limits of the physical body, of feeling an eternity of life behind and in front, an identity with a universal Life-being, but does not look
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beyond a constant vital becoming in Time. These three Purushas are soul-forms of the Spirit by which it identifies its conscious existence with and founds its action upon any of these three planes or principles of its universal being.

But man is characteristically a mental being. Moreover, mentality is his highest present status in which he is nearest to his real self, most easily and largely aware of spirit. His way to perfection is not to involve himself in the outward or superficial existence, nor is it to place himself in the soul of life or the soul of body, but to insist on the three mental intuitions by which he can lift himself eventually above the physical, vital and mental levels.

This insistence may take two quite different forms, each with its own object and way of proceeding. It is quite possible for him to accentuate it in a direction away from existence in Nature, a detachment, a withdrawal from mind, life and body. He may try to live more and more as the witness Purusha, regarding the action of Nature, without interest in it, without sanction to it, detached, rejecting the whole action, withdrawing into pure conscious existence. This is the Sankhya liberation. He may go inward into that larger existence of which he has the intuition and away from the superficial mentality into a dream-state or sleep-state which admits him into wider or higher ranges of consciousness. By passing away into these ranges he may put away from him the terrestrial being. There is even, it was supposed in ancient times, a transition to supramental worlds from which a return to earthly consciousness was either not possible or not obligatory. But the definite and sure finality of this kind of liberation depends on the elevation of the mental being into that spiritual self of which he becomes aware when he looks away and upward from all mentality. That is given as the key to entire cessation from terrestrial existence whether by immergence in pure being or a participation in supracosmic being.

But if our aim is to be not only free by self-detachment from Nature, but perfected in mastery, this type of insistence can no longer suffice. We have to regard our mental, vital and physical action of Nature, find out the knots of its bondage and the loosing-points of liberation, discover the keys of its
imperfection and lay our finger on the key of perfection. When
the regarding soul, the witness Purusha stands back from his ac-
tion of nature and observes it, he sees that it proceeds of its own
impulsion by the power of its mechanism, by force of continuity
of movement, continuity of mentality, continuity of life impulse,
continuity of an involuntary physical mechanism. At first the
whole thing seems to be the recurrent action of an automatic
machinery, although the sum of that action mounts constantly
into a creation, development, evolution. He was as if seized in
this wheel, attached to it by the ego sense, whirled round and
onward in the circling of the machinery. A complete mechanical
determinism or a stream of determinations of Nature to which
he lent the light of his consciousness, is the natural aspect of his
mental, vital and physical personality once it is regarded from
this stable detached standpoint and no longer by a soul caught up
in the movement and imagining itself to be a part of the action.

But on a farther view we find that this determinism is not so
complete as it seemed; action of Nature continues and is what it
is because of the sanction of the Purusha. The regarding Purusha
sees that he supports and in some way fills and pervades the
action with his conscious being. He discovers that without him
it could not continue and that where he persistently withdraws
this sanction, the habitual action becomes gradually enfeebled,
flags and ceases. His whole active mentality can be thus brought
to a complete stillness. There is yet a passive mentality which
mechanically continues, but this too can be stilled by his with-
drawal into himself out of the action. Even then the life action in
its most mechanical parts continues; but that too can be stilled
into cessation. It would appear then that he is not only the
upholding (bharty) Purusha, but in some way the master of his
nature, Ishwara. It was the consciousness of this sanctioning
control, this necessity of his consent, which made him in the
ego-sense conceive of himself as a soul or mental being with a
free will determining all his own becomings. Yet the free-will
seems to be imperfect, almost illusory, since the actual will itself
is a machinery of Nature and each separate willing determined
by the stream of past action and the sum of conditions it created,
— although, because the result of the stream, the sum, is at each moment a new development, a new determination, it may seem to be a self-born willing, virginally creative at each moment. What he contributed all the while was a consent behind, a sanction to what Nature was doing. He does not seem able to rule her entirely, but only choose between certain well-defined possibilities: there is in her a power of resistance born of her past impetus and a still greater power of resistance born of the sum of fixed conditions she has created, which she presents to him as a set of permanent laws to be obeyed. He cannot radically alter her way of proceeding, cannot freely effect his will from within her present movement, nor, while standing in the mentality, get outside or above her in such a way as to exercise a really free control. There is a duality of dependence, her dependence on his consent, his dependence on her law and way and limits of action, determination denied by a sense of free-will, free-will nullified by the actuality of natural determination. He is sure that she is his power, but yet he seems to be subject to her. He is the sanctioning (*anumantr* Purusha, but does not seem to be the absolute lord, Ishwara.

Nevertheless, there is somewhere an absolute control, a real Ishwara. He is aware of it and knows that if he can find it, he will enter into control, become not only the passive sanctioning witness and upholding soul of her will, but the free powerful user and determiner of her movements. But this control seems to belong to another poise than the mentality. Sometimes he finds himself using it, but as a channel or instrument; it comes to him from above. It is clear then that it is supramental, a power of the Spirit greater than mental being which he already knows himself to be at the summit and in the secret core of his conscious being. To enter into identity with that Spirit must then be his way to control and lordship. He can do it passively by a sort of reflection and receiving in his mental consciousness, but then he is only a mould, channel or instrument, not a possessor or participant in the power. He can arrive at identity by an absorption of his mentality in inner spiritual being, but then the conscious action ceases in a trance of identity. To be active master
of the nature he must evidently rise to some higher supramental poise where there is possible not only a passive, but an active identity with the controlling spirit. To find the way of rising to this greater poise and be self-ruler, Swarat, is a condition of his perfection.

The difficulty of the ascent is due to a natural ignorance. He is the Purusha, witness of mental and physical Nature, sākṣi, but not a complete knower of self and Nature, ānātṛ. Knowledge in the mentality is enlightened by his consciousness; he is the mental knower; but he finds that this is not a real knowledge, but only a partial seeking and partial finding, a derivative uncertain reflection and narrow utilisation for action from a greater light beyond which is the real knowledge. This light is the self-awareness and all-awareness of Spirit. The essential self-awareness he can arrive at even on the mental plane of being, by reflection in the soul of mind or by its absorption in spirit, as indeed it can be arrived at by another kind of reflection or absorption in soul of life and soul of body. But for participation in an effective all-awareness with this essential self-awareness as the soul of its action he must rise to supermind. To be lord of his being, he must be knower of self and Nature, ānātā īśvaraḥ. Partially this may be done on a higher level of mind where it responds directly to supermind, but really and completely this perfection belongs not to the mental being, but to the ideal or knowledge Soul, viśāṃnamaya puruṣa. To draw up the mental into the greater knowledge being and that into the Bliss-Self of the spirit, ānandānamaya puruṣa, is the uttermost way of this perfection.

But no perfection, much less this perfection can be attained without a very radical dealing with the present nature and the abrogation of much that seems to be the fixed law of its complex nexus of mental, vital and physical being. The law of this nexus has been created for a definite and limited end, the temporary maintenance, preservation, possession, aggrandisement, enjoyment, experience, need, action of the mental ego in the living body. Other resultant uses are served, but this is the immediate and fundamentally determining object and utility. To arrive at
a higher utility and freer instrumentation this nexus must be partly broken up, exceeded, transformed into a larger harmony of action. The Purusha sees that the law created is that of a partly stable, partly unstable selective determination of habitual, yet developing experiences out of a first confused consciousness of self and not-self, subjective being and external universe. This determination is managed by mind, life and body acting upon each other, in harmony and correspondence, but also in discord and divergence, mutual interference and limitation. There is a similar mixed harmony and discord between various activities of the mind in itself, as also between activities of the life in itself and of the physical being. The whole is a sort of disorderly order, an order evolved and contrived out of a constantly surrounding and invading confusion.

This is the first difficulty the Purusha has to deal with, a mixed and confused action of Nature, — an action without clear self-knowledge, distinct motive, firm instrumentation, only an attempt at these things and a general relative success of effectuality, — a surprising effect of adaptation in some directions, but also much distress of inadequacy. That mixed and confused action has to be mended; purification is an essential means towards self-perfection. All these impurities and inadequacies result in various kinds of limitation and bondage: but there are two or three primary knots of the bondage, — ego is the principal knot, — from which the others derive. These bonds must be got rid of; purification is not complete till it brings about liberation. Besides, after a certain purification and liberation has been effected, there is still the conversion of the purified instruments to the law of a higher object and utility, a large, real and perfect order of action. By the conversion man can arrive at a certain perfection of fullness of being, calm, power and knowledge, even a greater vital action and more perfect physical existence. One result of this perfection is a large and perfected delight of being, Ananda. Thus purification, liberation, perfection, delight of being are four constituent elements of the Yoga, — śuddhi, muki, siddhi, bhukti.

But this perfection cannot be attained or cannot be secure
and entire in its largeness if the Purusha lays stress on individuality. To abandon identification with the physical, vital and mental ego, is not enough; he must arrive in soul also at a true, universalised, not separative individuality. In the lower nature man is an ego making a clean cut in conception between himself and all other existence; the ego is to him self, but all the rest not self, external to his being. His whole action starts from and is founded upon this self-conception and world-conception. But the conception is in fact an error. However sharply he individualises himself in mental idea and mental or other action, he is inseparable from the universal being, his body from universal force and matter, his life from the universal life, his mind from universal mind, his soul and spirit from universal soul and spirit. The universal acts on him, invades him, overcomes him, shapes itself in him at every moment; he in his reaction acts on the universal, invades, tries to impose himself on it, shape it, overcome its attack, rule and use its instrumentation.

This conflict is a rendering of the underlying unity, which assumes the aspect of struggle by a necessity of the original separation; the two pieces into which mind has cut the oneness, rush upon each other to restore the oneness and each tries to seize on and take into itself the separated portion. Universe seems to be always trying to swallow up man, the infinite to resume this finite which stands on its self-defence and even replies by aggression. But in real fact the universal being through this apparent struggle is working out its purpose in man, though the key and truth of the purpose and working is lost to his superficial conscious mind, only held obscurely in an underlying subconscient and only known luminously in an overruling superconscient unity. Man also is impelled towards unity by a constant impulse of extension of his ego, which identifies itself as best it can with other egos and with such portions of the universe as he can physically, vitally, mentally get into his use and possession. As man aims at knowledge and mastery of his own being, so also he aims at knowledge and mastery of the environmental world of nature, its objects, its instrumentation, its beings. First he tries to effect this aim by egoistic possession, but, as he develops,
the element of sympathy born of the secret oneness grows in him and he arrives at the idea of a widening cooperation and oneness with other beings, a harmony with universal Nature and universal being.

The witness Purusha in the mind observes that the inadequacy of his effort, all the inadequacy in fact of man’s life and nature arises from the separation and the consequent struggle, want of knowledge, want of harmony, want of oneness. It is essential for him to grow out of separative individuality, to universalise himself, to make himself one with the universe. This unification can be done only through the soul by making our soul of mind one with the universal Mind, our soul of life one with the universal Life-soul, our soul of body one with the universal soul of physical Nature. When this can be done, in proportion to the power, intensity, depth, completeness, permanence with which it can be done, great effects are produced upon the natural action. Especially there grows an immediate and profound sympathy and immixture of mind with mind, life with life, a lessening of the body’s insistence on separateness, a power of direct mental and other intercommunication and effective mutual action which helps out now the inadequate indirect communication and action that was till now the greater part of the conscious means used by embodied mind. But still the Purusha sees that in mental, vital, physical nature, taken by itself, there is always a defect, inadequacy, confused action, due to the mechanically unequal interplay of the three modes or gunas of Nature. To transcend it he has in the universality too to rise to the supramental and spiritual, to be one with the supramental soul of cosmos, the universal spirit. He arrives at the larger light and order of a higher principle in himself and the universe which is the characteristic action of the divine Sachchidananda. Even, he is able to impose the influence of that light and order, not only on his own natural being, but, within the radius and to the extent of the Spirit’s action in him, on the world he lives in, on that which is around him. He is svarāt, self-knower, self-ruler, but he begins to be also through this spiritual oneness and transcendence samrāt, a knower and master of his environing world of being.
In this self-development the soul finds that it has accomplished on this line the object of the whole integral Yoga, union with the Supreme in its self and in its universalised individuality. So long as he remains in the world-existence, this perfection must radiate out from him,—for that is the necessity of his oneness with the universe and its beings,—in an influence and action which help all around who are capable of it to rise to or advance towards the same perfection, and for the rest in an influence and action which help, as only the self-ruler and master man can help, in leading the human race forward spiritually towards this consummation and towards some image of a greater divine truth in their personal and communal existence. He becomes a light and power of the Truth to which he has climbed and a means for others’ ascension.