Chapter XXIV

Gnosis and Ananda

The ascent to the gnosis, the possession of something of the gnostic consciousness must elevate the soul of man and sublimate his life in the world into a glory of light and power and bliss and infinity that can seem in comparison with the lame action and limited realisations of our present mental and physical existence the very status and dynamis of a perfection final and absolute. And it is a true perfection, such as nothing before it has yet been in the ascension of the spirit. For even the highest spiritual realisation on the plane of mentality has in it something top-heavy, one-sided and exclusive; even the widest mental spirituality is not wide enough and it is marred too by its imperfect power of self-expression in life. And yet in comparison with what is beyond it, this too, this first gnostic splendour is only a bright passage to a more perfect perfection. It is the secure and shining step from which we can happily mount still upwards into the absolute infinities which are the origin and the goal of the incarnating spirit. In this farther ascension the gnosis does not disappear, but reaches rather its own supreme Light out of which it has descended to mediate between mind and the supreme Infinite.

The Upanishad tells us that after the knowledge-self above the mental is possessed and all the lower selves have been drawn up into it, there is another and last step of all still left to us — though one might ask, is it eternally the last or only the last practically conceivable or at all necessary for us now? — to take up our gnostic existence into the Bliss-Self and there complete the spiritual self-discovery of the divine Infinite. Ananda, a supreme Bliss eternal, far other and higher in its character than the highest human joy or pleasure, is the essential and original nature of the spirit. In Ananda our spirit will find its true self, in Ananda its essential consciousness, in Ananda the absolute power of its
existence. The embodied soul’s entry into this highest absolute, unlimited, unconditional bliss of the spirit is the infinite liberation and the infinite perfection. It is true that something of this bliss can be enjoyed by reflection, by a qualified descent even on the lower planes where the Purusha plays with his modified and qualified Nature. There can be the experience of a spiritual and boundless Ananda on the plane of matter, on the plane of life, on the plane of mind as well as on the gnostic truth-plane of knowledge and above it. And the Yogan who enters into these lesser realisations, may find them so complete and compelling that he will imagine there is nothing greater, nothing beyond it. For each of the divine principles contains in itself the whole potentiality of all the other six notes of our being; each plane of Nature can have its own perfection of these notes under its own conditions. But the integral perfection can come only by a mounting ascent of the lowest into the highest and an incessant descent of the highest into the lowest till all becomes one at once solid block and plastic sea-stuff of the Truth infinite and eternal.

The very physical consciousness in man, the *annamaya purusa*, can without this supreme ascent and integral descent yet reflect and enter into the self of Sachchidananda. It can do it either by a reflection of the Soul in physical Nature, its bliss, power and infinity secret but still present here, or by losing its separate sense of substance and existence in the Self within or without it. The result is a glorified sleep of the physical mind in which the physical being forgets itself in a kind of conscious Nirvana or else moves about like a thing inert in the hands of Nature, *jadavat*, like a leaf in the wind, or otherwise a state of pure happy and free irresponsibility of action, *balavat*, a divine childhood. But this comes without the higher glories of knowledge and delight which belong to the same status upon a more exalted level. It is an inert realisation of Sachchidananda in which there is neither any mastery of the Prakriti by the Purusha nor any sublimation of Nature into her own supreme power, the infinite glories of the Para Shakti. Yet these two, this mastery and this sublimation, are the two gates of perfection, the splendid doors into the supreme Eternal.
The life soul and life consciousness in man, prāṇamaya puṇṛṣa, can in the same way directly reflect and enter into the self of Sachchidananda by a large and splendid and blissful reflection of the Soul in universal Life or by losing its separate sense of life and existence in the vast Self within or without it. The result is either a profound state of sheer self-oblivion or else an action driven irresponsibly by the life nature, an exalted enthusiasm of self-abandonment to the great world-energy in its vitalistic dance. The outer being lives in a God-possessed frenzy careless of itself and the world, unmattavat, or with an entire disregard whether of the conventions and proprieties of fitting human action or of the harmony and rhythms of a greater Truth. It acts as the unbound vital being, piśācavat, the divine maniac or else the divine demoniac. Here too there is no mastery or supreme sublimation of nature. There is only a joyful static possession by the Self within us and an unregulated dynamic possession by the physical and the vital Nature without us.

The mind soul and mind consciousness in man, manomaya puṇṛṣa, can in the same direct way reflect and enter into Sachchidananda by a reflection of the Soul as it mirrors itself in the nature of pure universal mind luminous, unwalled, happy, plastic, illimitable, or by absorption in the vast free unconditioned uncentred Self within it and without it. The result is either the immobile cessation of all mind and action or a desire-free unbound action watched by the unparticipating inner Witness. The mental being becomes the eremite soul alone in the world and careless of all human ties or the saint soul that lives in a rapturous God-nearness or felicitous identity and in joyful relations of pure love and ecstasy towards all creatures. The mental being may even realise the Self in all three planes together. Then he is all these things alternately, successively or at once. Or he may transform the lower forms into manifestations of the higher state; he may draw upward the childlikeness or the inert irresponsibility of the free physical mind or the free vital mind's divine madness and carelessness of all rules, proprieties, harmonies and colour or disguise with them the ecstasy of the saint or the solitary liberty of the wandering eremite. Here again there is no mastery, no
sublimation of the Nature by the soul in the world, but a double possession, by the freedom and delight of the mental-spiritual infinite within and without by the happy, natural and unregulated play of the mind-Nature. But since the mental being is capable of receiving the gnosis in a way in which the life soul and physical soul cannot receive it, since he can accept it with knowledge though only the limited knowledge of a mental response, he may to a certain extent govern by its light his outer action or, if not that, at least bathe and purify in it his will and his workings. But Mind can arrive only at a compromise between the infinite within and the finite nature without; it cannot pour the infinity of the inner being’s knowledge and power and bliss with any sense of fullness into its external action which remains always inadequate. Still it is content and free because it is the Lord within who takes up the responsibility of the action adequate or inadequate, assumes its guidance and fixes its consequence.

But the gnostic soul, the *vijñānamaya puruṣa*, is the first to participate not only in the freedom, but in the power and sovereignty of the Eternal. For it receives the fullness, it has the sense of plenitude of the Godhead in its action; it shares the free, splendid and royal march of the Infinite, is a vessel of the original knowledge, the immaculate power, the inviolable bliss, transmutes all life into the eternal Light and the eternal Fire and the eternal Wine of the nectar. It possesses the infinite of the Self and it possesses the infinite of Nature. It does not so much lose as find its nature self in the self of the Infinite. On the other planes to which the mental being has easier access, man finds God in himself and himself in God; he becomes divine in essence rather than in person or nature. In the gnosis, even the mentalised gnosis, the Divine Eternal possesses, changes and stamps the human symbol, envelops and partly finds himself in the person and nature. The mental being at most receives or reflects that which is true, divine and eternal; the gnostic soul reaches a true identity, possesses the spirit and power of the truth-Nature. In the gnosis the dualism of Purusha and Prakriti, Soul and Nature, two separate powers complementary to each other, the great truth of the Sankhyas founded on the practical
truth of our present natural existence, disappears in their biune entity, the dynamic mystery of the occult Supreme. The Truth-being is the Hara-Gauri\(^1\) of the Indian iconological symbol; it is the double Power masculine-feminine born from and supported by the supreme Shakti of the Supreme.

Therefore the truth-soul does not arrive at self-oblivion in the Infinite; it comes to an eternal self-possession in the Infinite. Its action is not irregular; it is a perfect control in an infinite freedom. In the lower planes the soul is naturally subject to Nature and the regulating principle is found in the lower nature; all regulation there depends on the acceptance of a strict subjection to the law of the finite. If the soul on these planes withdraws from that law into the liberty of the infinite, it loses its natural centre and becomes centreless in a cosmic infinitude; it forfeits the living harmonic principle by which its external being was till then regulated and it finds no other. The personal nature or what is left of it merely continues mechanically for a while its past movements, or it dances in the gusts and falls of the universal energy that acts on the individual system rather than in that system, or it strays in the wild steps of an irresponsible ecstasy, or it remains inert and abandoned by the breath of the Spirit that was within it. If on the other hand the soul moves in its impulse of freedom towards the discovery of another and divine centre of control through which the Infinite can consciously govern its own action in the individual, it is moving towards the gnosis where that centre pre-exists, the centre of an eternal harmony and order. It is when he ascends above mind and life to the gnosis that the Purusha becomes the master of his own nature because subject only to supreme Nature. For there force or will is the exact counterpart, the perfect dynamis of the divine knowledge. And that knowledge is not merely the eye of the Witness, it is the immanent and compelling gaze of the Ishwara. Its luminous governing power, a power not to be hedged in or denied, imposes its self-expressive force on all the

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\(^1\) The biune body of the Lord and his Spouse, Ishwara and Shakti, the right half male, the left half female.
action and makes true and radiant and authentic and inevitable every movement and impulse.

The gnosis does not reject the realisations of the lower planes; for it is not an annihilation or extinction, not a Nirvana but a sublime fulfilment of our manifested Nature. It possesses the first realisations under its own conditions after it has transformed them and made them elements of a divine order. The gnostic soul is the child, but the king-child; 2 here is the royal and eternal childhood whose toys are the worlds and all universal Nature is the miraculous garden of the play that tires never. The gnosis takes up the condition of divine inertia; but this is no longer the inertia of the subject soul driven by Nature like a fallen leaf in the breath of the Lord. It is the happy passivity bearing an unimaginable intensity of action and Ananda of the Nature-Soul at once driven by the bliss of the mastering Purusha and aware of herself as the supreme Shakti above and around him and mastering and carrying him blissfully on her bosom for ever. This biune being of Purusha-Prakriti is as if a flaming Sun and body of divine Light self-carried in its orbit by its own inner consciousness and power at one with the universal, at one with a supreme Transcendence. Its madness is a wise madness of Ananda, the incalculable ecstasy of a supreme consciousness and power vibrating with an infinite sense of freedom and intensity in its divine life-movements. Its action is supra-rational and therefore to the rational mind which has not the key it seems a colossal madness. And yet this that seems madness is a wisdom in action that only baffles the mind by the liberty and richness of its contents and the infinite complexity in fundamental simplicity of its motions, it is the very method of the Lord of the worlds, a thing no intellectual interpretation can fathom,—a dance this also, a whirl of mighty energies, but the Master of the dance holds the hands of His energies and keeps them to the rhythmic order, the self-traced harmonic circles of his Rasa-lila. The gnostic soul is not bound any more than the divine demoniac by the petty conventions and proprieties of the

2 So Heraclitus, “The kingdom is of the child.”
normal human life or the narrow rules through which it makes
some shift to accommodate itself with the perplexing dualities of
the lower nature and tries to guide its steps among the seeming
contradictions of the world, to avoid its numberless stumbling-
blocks and to foot with gingerly care around its dangers and
pitfalls. The gnostic supramental life is abnormal to us because
it is free to all the hardihoods and audacious delights of a soul
dealing fearlessly and even violently with Nature, but yet is it
the very normality of the infinite and all governed by the law of
the Truth in its exact unerring process. It obeys the law of a self-
possessed Knowledge, Love, Delight in an innumerable Oneness.
It seems abnormal only because its rhythm is not measurable by
the faltering beats of the mind, but yet it steps in a wonderful
and transcendent measure.

And what then is the necessity of a still higher step and
what difference is there between the soul in gnosis and the soul
in the Bliss? There is no essential difference, but yet a difference,
because there is a transfer to another consciousness and a certain
reversal in position, — for at each step of the ascent from Matter
to the highest Existence there is a reversal of consciousness. The
soul no longer looks up to something beyond it, but is in it
and from it looks down on all that it was before. On all planes
indeed the Ananda can be discovered, because everywhere it
exists and is the same. Even there is a repetition of the Ananda
plane in each lower world of consciousness. But in the lower
planes not only is it reached by a sort of dissolution into it of
the pure mind or the life-sense or the physical awareness, but it
is, as it were, itself diluted by the dissolved form of mind, life
or matter, held in the dilution and turned into a poor thinness
wonderful to the lower consciousness but not comparable to
its true intensities. The gnosis has on the contrary a dense light
of essential consciousness\(^3\) in which the intense fullness of the
Ananda can be. And when the form of gnosis is dissolved into the
Ananda, it is not annulled altogether, but undergoes a natural
change by which the soul is carried up into its last and absolute

\(^3\) cidghana.
freedom; for it casts itself into the absolute existence of the spirit and is enlarged into its own entirely self-existent bliss infinitudes. The gnosis has the infinite and absolute as the conscious source, accompaniment, condition, standard, field and atmosphere of all its activities, it possesses it as its base, fount, constituent material, indwelling and inspiring Presence; but in its action it seems to stand out from it as its operation, as the rhythmical working of its activities, as a divine Maya4 or Wisdom-Formation of the Eternal. Gnosis is the divine Knowledge-Will of the divine Consciousness-Force; it is harmonic consciousness and action of Prakriti-Purusha full of the delight of the divine existence. In the Ananda the knowledge goes back from these willed harmonies into pure self-consciousness, the will dissolves into pure transcendent force and both are taken up into the pure delight of the Infinite. The basis of the gnostic existence is the self-stuff and self-form of the Ananda.

This in the ascension takes place because there is here completed the transition to the absolute unity of which the gnosis is the decisive step, but not the final resting-place. In the gnosis the soul is aware of its infinitude and lives in it, yet it lives also in a working centre for the individual play of the Infinite. It realises its identity with all existences, but it keeps a distinction without difference by which it can have also the contact with them in a certain diverseness. This is that distinction for the joy of contact which in the mind becomes not only difference, but in its self-experience division from our other selves, in its spiritual being a sense of loss of self one with us in others and a reaching after the felicity it has forfeited, in life a compromise between egoistic self-absorption and a blind seeking out for the lost oneness. In its infinite consciousness, the gnostic soul creates a sort of voluntary limitation for its own wisdom-purposes; it has even its particular luminous aura of being in which it moves, although beyond that it enters into all things and identifies itself with all being and all existences. In the Ananda all is reversed,

4 Not in the sense of illusion, but in the original Vedic significance of the word Maya. All in the gnostic existence is real, spiritually concrete, eternally verifiable.
the centre disappears. In the bliss nature there is no centre, nor any voluntary or imposed circumference, but all is, all are one equal being, one identical spirit. The bliss soul finds and feels itself everywhere; it has no mansion, is aniketa, or has the all for its mansion, or, if it likes, it has all things for its many mansions open to each other for ever. All other selves are entirely its own selves, in action as well as in essence. The joy of contact in diverse oneness becomes altogether the joy of absolute identity in innumerable oneness. Existence is no longer formulated in the terms of the Knowledge, because the known and knowledge and the knower are wholly one self here and, since all possesses all in an intimate identity beyond the closest closeness, there is no need of what we call knowledge. All the consciousness is of the bliss of the Infinite, all power is power of the bliss of the Infinite, all forms and activities are forms and activities of the bliss of the Infinite. In this absolute truth of its being the eternal soul of Ananda lives, here deformed by contrary phenomena, there brought back and transfigured into their reality.

The soul lives: it is not abolished, it is not lost in a featureless Indefinite. For on every plane of our existence the same principle holds; the soul may fall asleep in a trance of self-absorption, dwell in an ineffable intensity of God-possession, live in the highest glory of its own plane,—the Anandaloka, Brahmaloka, Vaikuntha, Goloka of various Indian systems,—even turn upon the lower worlds to fill them with its own light and power and beatitude. In the eternal worlds and more and more in all worlds above Mind these states exist in each other. For they are not separate; they are coexistent, even coincident powers of the consciousness of the Absolute. The Divine on the Ananda plane is not incapable of a world-play or self-debarred from any expression of its glories. On the contrary, as the Upanishad insists, the Ananda is the true creative principle. For all takes birth from this divine Bliss; all is pre-existent in it as an absolute truth of existence which the Vijnana brings out and subjects to

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5 Therefore the world of the Ananda is called the Janaloka, in the double sense of birth and delight.
voluntary limitation by the Idea and the law of the Idea. In the Ananda all law ceases and there is an absolute freedom without binding term or limit. It is superior to all principles and in one and the same motion the enjoyer of all principles; it is free from all gunas and the enjoyer of its own infinite gunas; it is above all forms and the builder and enjoyer of all its self-forms and figures. This unimaginable completeness is what the spirit is, the spirit transcendent and universal, and to be one in bliss with the transcendent and universal spirit is for the soul too to be that and nothing less. Necessarily, since there is on this plane the absolute and the play of absolutes, it is ineffable by any of the conceptions of our mind or by signs of the phenomenal or ideal realities of which mind-conceptions are the figures in our intelligence. These realities are themselves indeed only relative symbols of those ineffable absolutes. The symbol, the expressive reality, may give an idea, a perception, sense, vision, contact even of the thing itself to us, but at last we get beyond it to the thing it symbolises, transcend idea, vision, contact, pierce through the ideal and pass to the real realities, the identical, the supreme, the timeless and eternal, the infinitely infinite.

Our first absorbing impulse when we become inwardly aware of something entirely beyond what we now are and know and are powerfully attracted to it, is to get away from the present actuality and dwell in that higher reality altogether. The extreme form of this attraction when we are drawn to the supreme Existence and the infinite Ananda is the condemnation of the lower and the finite as an illusion and an aspiration to Nirvana in the beyond, — the passion for dissolution, immersion, extinction in the Spirit. But the real dissolution, the true nirvāṇa is the release of all that is bindingly characteristic of the lower into the larger being of the Higher, the conscious possession of the living symbol by the living Real. We discover in the end that not only is that higher Reality the cause of all the rest, not only it embraces and exists in all the rest, but as more and more we possess it, all this rest is transformed in our soul-experience into a superior value and becomes the means of a richer expression of the Real, a more many-sided
communion with the Infinite, a larger ascent to the Supreme. Finally, we get close to the absolute and its supreme values which are the absolutes of all things. We lose the passion for release, mumukṣutva, which till then actuated us, because we are now intimately near to that which is ever free, that which is neither attracted into attachment by what binds us now nor afraid of what to us seems to be bondage. It is only by the loss of the bound soul’s exclusive passion for its freedom that there can come an absolute liberation of our nature. The Divine attracts the soul of man to him by various lures; all of them are born of its own relative and imperfect conceptions of bliss; all are its ways of seeking for the Ananda, but, if clung to till the end, miss the inexpressible truth of those surpassing felicities. First in order comes the lure of an earthly reward, a prize of material, intellectual, ethical or other joy in the terrestrial mind and body. A second remoter greater version of the same fruitful error is the hope of a heavenly bliss, far exceeding these earthly rewards; the conception of heaven rises in altitude and purity till it reaches the pure idea of the eternal presence of God or an unending union with the Eternal. And last we get the subtlest of all lures, an escape from these worldly or heavenly joys and from all pains and sorrows, effort and trouble and from all phenomenal things, a Nirvana, a self-dissolution in the Absolute, an Ananda of cessation and ineffable peace. In the end all these toys of the mind have to be transcended. The fear of birth and the desire of escape from birth must entirely fall away from us. For, to repeat the ancient language, the soul that has realised oneness has no sorrow or shrinking; the spirit that has entered into the bliss of the Spirit has nought to fear from anyone or anything whatsoever. Fear, desire and sorrow are diseases of the mind; born of its sense of division and limitation, they cease with the falsehood that begot them. The Ananda is free from these maladies; it is not the monopoly of the ascetic, it is not born from the disgust of existence.

The bliss soul is not bound to birth or to non-birth; it is not driven by desire of the Knowledge or harassed by fear of the Ignorance. The supreme bliss Soul has already the Knowledge
and transcends all need of knowledge. Not limited in consciousness by the form and the act, it can play with the manifestation without being imbued with the Ignorance. Already it is taking its part above in the mystery of an eternal manifestation and here, when the time comes, it will descend into birth without being the slave of Ignorance chained to the revolutions of the wheel of Nature. For it knows that the purpose and law of the birth-series is for the soul in the body to rise from plane to plane and substitute always the rule of the higher for the rule of the lower play even down to the material field. The bliss-soul neither dains to help that ascent from above nor fears to descend down the stairs of God into the material birth and there contribute the power of its own bliss nature to the upward pull of the divine forces. The time for that marvellous hour of the evolving Time-Spirit is not yet come. Man, generally, cannot yet ascend to the bliss nature; he has first to secure himself on the higher mental altitudes, to ascend from them to the gnosis. Still less can he bring down all the Bliss-Power into this terrestrial Nature; he must first cease to be mental man and become superhuman. All he can do now is to receive something of its power into his soul in greater or less degree, by a diminishing transmission through an inferior consciousness; but even that gives him the sense of an ecstasy and an unsurpassable beatitude.

And what will be the bliss nature when it manifests in a new supramental race? The fully evolved soul will be one with all beings in the status and dynamic effects of experience of a bliss-consciousness intense and illimitable. And since love is the effective power and soul-symbol of bliss-_oneness he will approach and enter into this oneness by the gate of universal love, a sublimation of human love at first, a divine love afterwards, at its summits a thing of beauty, sweetness and splendour now to us inconceivable. He will be one in bliss-consciousness with all the world-play and its powers and happenings and there will be banished for ever the sorrow and fear, the hunger and pain of our poor and darkened mental and vital and physical existence. He will get that power of the bliss-freedom in which all the conflicting principles of our being shall be unified in their
absolute values. All evil shall perforce change itself into good; the universal beauty of the All-beautiful will take possession of its fallen kingdoms; every darkness will be converted into a pregnant glory of light and the discords which the mind creates between Truth and Good and Beauty, Power and Love and Knowledge will disappear on the eternal summit, in the infinite extensions where they are always one.

The Purusha in mind, life and body is divided from Nature and in conflict with her. He labours to control and coerce what he can embody of her by his masculine force and is yet subject to her afflicting dualities and in fact her plaything from top to bottom, beginning to end. In the gnosis he is biune with her, finds as master of his own nature their reconciliation and harmony by their essential oneness even while he accepts an infinite blissful subjection, the condition of his mastery and his liberties, to the Supreme in his sovereign divine Nature. In the tops of the gnosis and in the Ananda he is one with the Prakriti and no longer solely biune with her. There is no longer the baffling play of Nature with the soul in the Ignorance; all is the conscious play of the soul with itself and all its selves and the Supreme and the divine Shakti in its own and the infinite bliss nature. This is the supreme mystery, the highest secret, simple to its own experience, however difficult and complex to our mental conceptions and the effort of our limited intelligence to understand what is beyond it. In the free infinity of the self-delight of Sachchidananda there is a play of the divine Child, a rāsa līlā of the infinite Lover and its mystic soul-symbols repeat themselves in characters of beauty and movements and harmonies of delight in a timeless forever.