

THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS OF SRI AUROBINDO

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

in the subject

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PROMOTER: PROF J S KRÜGER

NOVEMBER 2005

DECLARATION

I declare that "The Religious Philosophy of Consciousness of Sri Aurobindo" is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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2005-11-30

SUMMARY

In this thesis I examine the religious philosophy of consciousness of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). He was an Indian scholar, teacher, politician, writer and mystic who studied in London and Cambridge. In India he developed his spiritual being through Yoga. He wrote more than thirty books, which formed the main source of information for this study.

Sri Aurobindo developed his cosmology using normal intellectual means and through experiencing profound supra-intellectual regions intuitively. For him, Brahman's desire to experience delight was the cause of creation. This prompted Him to cause a creation cycle through the process of involution and evolution. In His state of holistic unity and non-duality beyond space and time, he commenced the involution phase. He spawned Sachchidananda, a composite of *sat* (being), *chit* (consciousness-force) and *ananda* (bliss). These are the cardinal constituent elements of all creation, material and spiritual. From Sachchidananda, Supermind, the first aspect of the Supreme that contained elements of duality, originated. Then followed Overmind, Intuitive Mind, Illumined Mind, and Higher Mind, with all these being domains of being and consciousness. This culminated in a state of Inconscience, a dormant state of utter nescience. Regardless, it paradoxically contains all that Brahman is.

From the inconscient evolution starts. The first phase is the manifestation of Matter. This, which too has all of Brahman inherent in itself, produces Life, and then Mind. This implies different life forms, including humans. Evolution of all that is, including humans, is upwards, back towards Brahman, in an inverse order to that of involution.

Humans possess or are consciousness. Sri Aurobindo mentions and explains the various ordinary states of consciousness namely nescience, inconscience, subconsciousness, intraconscience, circumconscience, superconscience, sleep, dream, and waking state, samadhi and cosmic consciousness. In addition, inherent in humans is the ability and the task to develop the various higher states of consciousness found in the various phases of the involution. This starts with the development of the psychic being or soul, which is spiritual in nature, and the growth of the higher domains of consciousness. This constitutes the spiritual evolution of mankind which culminates in spiritual perfection, in the return to Brahman.

KEY WORDS

Consciousness
Creation
Emanation
Evolution
Indian Philosophy
Indian Religion
Integral Yoga
Involution
Mysticism
Ontology
Psychic Being
Sri Aurobindo

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This thesis is an analysis and interpretation of the religio-philosophical views on various aspects of consciousness of Sri Aurobindo, the great Indian religious thinker and mystic. It explores the reason why he views consciousness as primary in the field of reality. The interrelationship of being, consciousness and bliss is investigated. The nature and importance of each of these components are studied. The stages of consciousness from its most quiescent up to its most expanded and illumined as understood by Sri Aurobindo, are investigated. This includes the reality, nature and components of normal and Higher States of Consciousness, and of the Psychic Being. It examines the genesis of reality and the cycle of consciousness in his cosmology. He obtained the unique and original aspects of his philosophy by subjective means through what he claims are direct insight into subtle and hidden sources. The possibility of the validity and also the importance of such an approach are examined.

For the purposes of this thesis, I refrain from exploring in depth the enticing historical connections of Sri Aurobindo with other Indian luminaries and philosophical systems such as the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutra, the Buddha, Nagarjuna and Mahayana in a wider sense (including both Madhamika and Yogacara), Gaudapada, Shankara, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and so on, and with other Western approaches extending beyond the few mystics that we will be dealing with later on. Such an integrated study would indeed be of great value in understanding not only Sri Aurobindo but also the subtle underlying threads uniting humanity's search for ultimate meaning. These threads should not be confined to the overt or visible, but also the covert or invisible. However alluring such a detailed and comprehensive historical investigation, it falls beyond the limited scope of this thesis, namely an investigation into the structure of Sri Aurobindo's thinking.

The main works consulted were the books that he wrote and which include amongst others *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Letters on Yoga* and *Savitri*. Where

possible secondary sources were used. I have also communicated with experts in this field in the United States and obtained inputs from them.

2. SRI AUROBINDO (1872-1950)

For the purposes of this research project, I shall dispense with a detailed biographical background of Sri Aurobindo; a general overview will suffice. He was born in Calcutta in 1872 and received an English education. He was a brilliant scholar and he studied at St. Paul's School in London and at Cambridge University, concentrating on the culture of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe, and on languages (Greek, Latin, French, German and Italian). Returning to India in 1893, he worked in the civil service and later became a Professor of English. He studied Sanskrit, other Indian languages and Indian philosophy and its religions. He became active in politics from 1902 to 1910, pursuing *Swaraj* (independence) from British rule. He started a daily paper, *Bande Mataram* and the views he expressed in this paper landed him in prison 1908. He spent a year in Alipore Jail during his trial, which time he used to practice Yoga. After his discharge he withdrew from the political field, and in 1910 settled in Pondicherry in French India. After further spiritual practice he began the publication of a religio-philosophical monthly, the *Arya* (an aspiring soul) in 1914 in which most of his more important works (*The Life Divine*, Volume: 18-19, [SABCL]¹, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, Volume 20-21 [SABCL], and *Letters on Yoga*, Volume: 22-24, [SABCL]) appeared in serial form. The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921. Upon his arrival in Pondicherry, he attracted followers which led to the formation of an *Ashram* (a centre for spiritual teaching). Together with a companion, Mirra Richards, he lived, wrote and taught there until his death in 1950.

This thesis deals with the development of the philosophy of consciousness by Sri Aurobindo. His own evolutionary route is the result and extension of the cultural soil in which he matured. He was not religious during his early life as his passion was India, its culture, philosophy, background, and on the political front, total freedom from England. He was aware of the spiritual traditions of India, but he was not interested in following any spiritual path. At that stage for him, following a spiritual path meant renunciation of normal life on Earth. This did not suit him because he was focused on activity, and especially political activity, in this life. He did experience alternate states of

¹ SABCL is an acronym for Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.

consciousness on various occasions earlier on in his life but did not connect that to the world of the spirit. He also did not believe, nor was he interested, in God. He once addressed God along the following lines: God, if there is a God, I need your help to further my political task but I do not want to become an inefficient person in the process. In short, he was intent on mastering the physical and political and not the spiritual world.

His introduction to the spiritual life came when his brother fell desperately ill and was eventually cured in a matter of minutes by a spiritual man. Now, even though convinced of the merits of the spiritual world, he did not think that it applied to matters politic. Recurring experiences of higher states of consciousness caused him, for the first time and after thirteen years back in India, to permit a meeting on December 30, 1907, with a yogi by the name of Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Up till now he distanced himself from otherworldly asceticism and spiritualists. He told Lele that he wanted to do Yoga but for work, for action, not for *sannyasa* (renunciation of life and action) and *Nirvana*. Lele replied: "It would be easy for you as you are a poet."² Lele then spent three days with him and taught him that there were two aspects to the human mind, the active part producing thoughts and the more powerful part which is found in silence. In growing to the level of a yogi, a person becomes a master of both aspects and such a person can then control what happens in the mind. This includes the control of thoughts which according to Lele comes into the mind from a source outside of it. One has a choice of either allowing their entry into the mind or rejecting them. If they are allowed in, the mind can manipulate them. For the next three days Lele then taught Sri Aurobindo how to meditate, using a system of control of the entry of thoughts into the mind. Sri Aurobindo stated that "The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which I had never intended ... and which were quite contrary 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."³ Upon mastering the technique, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "I could turn thoughts 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

² Sri Aurobindo. *On himself*. Volume 26 [SABCL], p. 279.

³ *Ibid*, p. 79

thoughts as a labourer in a thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire." ⁴

He continued with his normal life, which included making political speeches and publishing his newspaper. This resulted in his arrest on May 4, 1908 by the British authorities. The year that the trial took he spent in jail. At first he was dismayed at being arrested but during the first month he realised that shortly before his arrest, he had an awareness from within not to take part in political activity any longer. Inwardly he now realised that he had other work to do and he interpreted his incarceration as a means to separate him from his previous activity and as a preparation for his new task. This was the task of spiritual evolution. He started experiencing a variety of higher states of consciousness on a regular basis. It is as if he lived in a void where the world and the universe took on a new meaning. He gave an indication of this new reality that he experienced when he wrote "At first this experience imposes on the mind and then on all our being an absolute, a fathomless, almost an abysmal peace and silence. Overpowered and subjugated, stilled, liberated from itself, the mind accepts the Silence itself as the Supreme. But afterwards the seeker discovers that all is there for him contained or new-made in that silence or through it descends upon him from a greater concealed transcendent Existence. For this Transcendent, this Absolute is not a mere peace of signless emptiness; it has its own infinite contents and riches of which ours are debased and diminished values. If there were not that Source of all things, there could be no universe; all powers, all works and activities would be an illusion, all creation and manifestation would be impossible."⁵ His time in the prison was filled with experiencing the Supreme in all of creation; in his fellow inmates and in the guards, the judge, and the prosecuting counsel. He said that "This is the integral knowledge; for we know that everywhere and in all conditions all to the eye that sees is One, to a divine experience all is one block of the Divine."⁶ After a year he was found not guilty and discharged. He continued with his political activities but when he had word that the authorities wanted to arrest him, an internal voice prompted his flight to Pondicherry.

⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *On himself*. Volume 26 [SABCL], p. 83.

⁵ Sri Aurobindo *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volumes 23-24 [CWSA], p. 117. In this thesis I utilised a CD-Rom for quotes from *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the page numbering of which differs slightly from the printed version. CWSA is an acronym for 'Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo.'

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 299.

Here he spent a great deal of time in meditation and writing. Apparently he did not have to think about his writing as it automatically came to him. He wrote all his major works in serial form for the publication the *Arya*. These works, which form the basis of the present thesis, have a remarkable internal consistency. His internal growth of consciousness was organic and it was not the result of one experience or vision or a synthesis or a collage of material that he had read or heard, yet in expressing his experiences he does so in the language of his culture. He intimately knew the religions and scriptures of India to the extent that he translated, and commented on, the holy books. This included the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Vedas*.

He started work on the *Upanishads* in Baroda around 1900. Between then and 1910 he wrote complete translations of eight *Upanishads*, incomplete commentaries on the *Isha*, *Kena* and others, and several incomplete expository works on the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. After settling in Pondicherry he continued this work, concentrating as before mostly on the *Isha Upanishad*. The *Isha* and *Kena Upanishads* were completed and originally published between 1914 and 1920 in the *Arya*. He published his final versions of his translations of the *Isha*, *Kena* and *Mundaka*, and the *Readings in the Taittiriya Upanishad* also in the *Arya*. Somewhat earlier, he had revised most of his translation of the *Katha Upanishad*. My references to the *Upanishads* came from a compact disc and is identical to the published book *The Upanishads, Texts, Translations and Commentaries* which "comprises Sri Aurobindo's final translations of and commentaries on the *Isha* and *Kena Upanishads*, his final translations of the *Mundaka* and *Katha Upanishads*, and a commentary on part of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*. They are preceded by a chapter on the *Upanishads* from *A Defence of Indian Culture*. These works represent Sri Aurobindo's *Upanishadic* interpretation in its most mature and finished form. All were written after he settled in Pondicherry in 1910. Translations and commentaries written before that year, or left incomplete by the author, have not been included in this volume."⁷ These incomplete *Upanishadic* translations and commentaries which were written before that date or left incomplete are available in other publications of Sri Aurobindo, notably *Eight Upanishads* (1953) and *The Upanishads* (1972).

⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Upanishads, Texts, Translations and Commentaries*. Second Edition, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1981. Publishers note in front and comments following page 250.

His work on the *Bhagavad-Gita* was not so much a translation as a commentary. As does most of his other works, it too appeared in the monthly review *Arya*. The first series was published between August 1916 and July 1918. Sri Aurobindo revised and published it as a book in 1922. The second series appeared in the *Arya* between August 1918 and July 1920. Sri Aurobindo brought out a revised edition in book form in 1928. The *Essays on the Gita* was published in 1970 as volume 13 of the *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* and in 1997 *Essays on the Gita* was issued as volume 19 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*.

Sri Aurobindo translated large portions of the *Rig Veda* between 1914 and 1920 and these were published in the *Arya*. The headings under which they appeared were:

The Secret of the Veda, August 1914–July 1916.

Selected Hymns, August 1914–July 1915.

Hymns of the Atris, August 1915–December 1917.

In addition to this, further Vedic writings and translations were published, appearing in volumes 14 and 16 of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*. For the purposes of this study I used the text of the electronic, edition (1999) which is identical to that of the CWSA edition of 1998.

He had this comprehensive background in the philosophy and religion of India and it shows in that he recorded his spiritual experiences using the philosophical and religious terminology current in India. He states that the work he produced was his own original individual philosophy based on his own experiences. His references are oriented to especially the Hindu philosophy to convey certain meanings or concepts but his philosophy is not a slavish extension of Hinduism. He had a high regard for the different formal religions of India and his intention was not to replace any of them with a new religious system. His system of Integral Yoga is essentially a practical methodology for evolution of the human race with the intention of living a normal life here on earth after developing higher states of consciousness.

3. POINT OF DEPARTURE

My position regarding Sri Aurobindo and his type of thinking is that in essence I am sympathetic towards matters mystic. My reading of Sri Aurobindo reveals a mystic of

the first order. My treatment of the subject of mysticism and mystics later on in this chapter is intended to open the door to understanding the nature and reality of such people that are intellectually advanced and through a variety of reasons had developed yet a further facet of their abilities namely that of the spiritual or higher states of consciousness. I use the framework of Whitehead⁸ for the scholarly inquiry into Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. Where relevant, the thoughts of Bergson and James regarding different states of consciousness, especially intuition, are touched upon.

In this thesis consciousness and reality, and especially the type of consciousness called intuition are of cardinal importance. In his cosmology and continuing the Vedic tradition, Sri Aurobindo considers consciousness (*chit*) together with being (*sat*) and bliss (*ananda*) as the basis of all that is. These are the three components of Sachchidananda, which entity had been central to thinking in India from earliest times. From a human perspective, the way that we are conscious determines what we observe, and in this process, of major importance are the various states of consciousness that is possible for a human to attain. The field of consciousness is a very complex one, and for now it will not be dealt with fully, but at this point an overview of its nature is in order. According to Sri Aurobindo, there are many types of consciousness possible for a human being, and these will be dealt with in the chapters following, but in this outline for now we will mention only three namely the sleeping, dreaming, and waking states of consciousness. Concentrating on the waking state, we find that we cover a whole spectrum, or more accurately a continuum of consciousness in this state. This can range from a groggy wakefulness in the early morning to a possibly sublime situation later where we 'perceive' or 'think' cosmic truths. I submit that these different states of consciousness, including even the waking, and the processes taking place, namely thinking, are exceedingly complex and the analysis, detail, and explanation thereof is dealt with in this thesis to elucidate the views of Sri Aurobindo. For now, what is important is that we do experience different states of consciousness simultaneously. This is particularly relevant to the waking in conjunction with the higher states of consciousness. The reason for this is we, in the waking state, seem to have the ability of thinking intuitively. This I believe elevates the importance of the waking state to a high

⁸ Whitehead, A N. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 5-7.

level as thinking on the intuitive level only takes place in the waking state. This implies that while we are thinking cosmic truths, we are still in the waking state.

For Sri Aurobindo, all existence and reality, and especially activities such as perception, are possible because of the nature of consciousness. We could view consciousness as a non-linear continuum and we have some form of choice as to where on this continuum we are operating. This implies that in a sense our waking and intuitive perceptions are not only overlapping but are integrally interconnected. All aspects of our consciousness we can develop further, and those aspects that we have developed the most will be the more normal mode for us. Therefore, *we* are primary and we *have* consciousness and, as will become clearer in later chapters, *consciousness* is primary and the manifest entity we call "I" is a vehicle to express consciousness. Because we are in a process of development, I believe that whilst awake, we know that we are in the waking state of consciousness and we are thinking but we do not really understand the process comprehensively on an intellectual level. Sri Aurobindo maintains the intellect of the thinker regards the phenomenal world from the standpoint of the reason but behind the phenomenal world is a transcendent Reality which the intuition alone can see. This is where reason cannot prevail against the intuitive experience, it cannot even relate the two, and therefore it cannot solve the mystery of the universe which lies beyond the realms of the intellect.⁹ With the development of the intuitive faculty, a greater insight is gained into the relationship of different states of consciousness, of waking and intuition and into the complexity of the nature of consciousness and especially what is termed higher states of consciousness. These latter states are higher than but coexistent with waking. The development of the intuitive faculty is a prerequisite for entry into the mystic world. Intuition and mysticism go hand in hand. We could say that intuition is a state of consciousness which is a different and more pure or acute form of perception and actually can and does manifest and operate during waking. The study of the field of mysticism and intuition is a scholarly pursuit that is attracting increasing interest. The fear or criticism that intuitive perception is not strictly a logical or an intellectual exercise is unfounded, as is discussed in later chapters. The knowledge that is brought forth is important and not the methodology that is used to do so. Understanding grows through the building of theories and postulates and Popper says "what is important

⁹ Sri Aurobindo *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 461.

about a theory is its explanatory power and whether it stands up to criticism and to tests, whether (it is arrived at) by an inductive procedure or by an act of intuition."¹⁰ It is not always so but it is mostly the case that well-known mystics are not only intuitive people but also masters of the intellect. This applies to the mystics mentioned later in this chapter. Thinkers quoted within this section, whether explaining or analysing intuition, also produced work of a high intellectual quality. Intuition is actually a very extended part of waking consciousness, dealing with existing realities beyond those known in the waking state. The tools of the waking state are inadequate to convey those realities. That is why these mystics cannot adequately explain their reality using normal logic and reason, despite their wish to do so. Still, a suspicion sometimes lingers that these mystics are either absolutely wrong in some undeterminable way or that they are lost in some illusionary world. The reasonable question, why do they not express themselves clearly? could still be asked, and will elicit the answer: Words are inadequate for the task.

To understand why it is possible that words and language could be inadequate to convey intuitive realities or perceptions, we will, for example, consider the views of Bergson, who accepts the validity of both the intellectual and intuitive route to knowledge. They are related to and dependent on each other. He postulates that through evolution, thought and logic developed conceptualisation to manipulate or manage matter. This is true for the philosophical traditions of both the East and West, but on the whole, in the East the intuitive faculty never lost its status as an important facet of perception as it largely did in the academic world of the West. The academic world has the totally valid function to "give us, in default of a real analysis of the object, a translation of this object in terms of intelligence."¹¹ This is the route to follow for the intellectual understanding of the object. He says that if "consciousness has thus split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because of the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life."¹² The difference between life and matter for Bergson is that life is a facet of being that is an integrated undifferentiated aspect of reality, whereas matter is an aspect or facet of life that has been carved out of or separated from

¹⁰ Popper, Karl. *The World of Parmenides*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 12.

¹¹ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. tr. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911, p. 174.

¹² Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. tr. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911, p. 179.

life and exists in the space-time reality. Life is more dynamic, matter more static. He says that "intelligence, by means of science, will deliver up to us more and more completely the secret of physical operations; (but) of life it brings us only a transformation in terms of inertia."¹³ For him, intelligence and instinct (which is a reduced form of intuition due to evolution¹⁴) are turned in opposite directions, the former towards inert matter, and the latter towards life.¹⁵ Again, both parts of consciousness are absolutely vital for perception. According to James, Bergson, of all the philosophers, "alone denies that mere conceptual logic can tell us what is impossible or possible in the world of being or fact; and he does so for reasons which at the same time that they rule logic out from lordship over the whole of life, establish a vast and definite sphere of influence where its sovereignty is indisputable."¹⁶ This follows from Bergson's total acceptance of the complementarity of logic and intuition, both dealing with different aspects of the same entity. The life facet of humans, which Bergson contends is a perpetual fluid reality that cannot be split up or contained in fragments, can only be dealt with through the intuitive faculty, whereas that aspect that humans wish to understand intellectually namely matter, is dealt with using the intellect with its logic and reason. I believe one could accept a, at the very least, dormant suspicion between people of a logical intellectual orientation and those inclined to a more intuitive approach regarding knowledge. I believe that Bergson's philosophy bridges such a potential hiatus.

Whitehead too was less than satisfied with the adequacy of the traditional scientific concepts to explaining time, space and material. After analysing these elements he reaches the conclusion that "Implicitly, scientific theory is shot through and through with notions which are frankly inconsistent with its explicit fundamental data."¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, in exploring the realities of evolution of both the mental and the intuitive faculties, arrives at a parallel solution to that of Bergson. He says that as the mental development increased, a growing force of reason and mental intelligence replaced the

¹³ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. tr. Arthur Mitchell. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911, p. 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 176.

¹⁶ James, William *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: The Library of America, 1987, p. 739.

¹⁷ Whitehead, A. N. *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Natural Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919, p. 15.

first necessary intuitive formations and states that as man¹⁸ evolves and moves beyond the mere material reality and discovers the processes of physical Nature, he also moves away from operating on the primitive level of magic but he still feels the need of a spiritual element in his life. But Nature keeps alive her intentions in the minds of a few people and uses man's mental evolution to raise them to a higher plane. From this follows that a new attempt at mystic experience begins to manifest itself. The intellect itself, having found that it explains nothing more than the outer process of Nature, has begun to direct research on the deeper secrets of the mind and the life-force and on the domain of the occult which it had rejected a priori, in order to know what there may be in it that is true. The intuitive search for more must in the end follow the upward curve of the human mind and rise more fully at its summits towards its true field in the sphere of a suprarational consciousness and knowledge.¹⁹ It is clear that both Aurobindo and Bergson accept and acknowledge the importance of the different aspects of consciousness, especially as utilised in the intellectual and the intuitive faculties. (There are other types of consciousness as well but this will be discussed in later chapters of this thesis). In this thesis I accept the validity and applicability of the approaches of both Sri Aurobindo and Bergson.

4. METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

Regarding my academic approach to specifically rendering critique on the work of Sri Aurobindo, I do that within a framework of Religious Studies such as presented by Krüger.²⁰ Within this framework I am aware of the subjective distance between my subject and me. My task is to reduce this gap to a minimum in order to obtain the maximum insight into the facts presented me in as scholarly a fashion as is possible. In the world of scholarship the reality of facts should receive its due recognition within the framework of the definition of Whitehead regarding the requirements of coherence, logic, applicability and adequacy²¹ and within the general body of knowledge which pertains to a specific discipline. This material, especially Sri Aurobindo's own works, should be dealt with critically. This of course does not deny the reality of my subjectivity and the bias that naturally precedes and conditions my interpreting of whatever I perceive. Perception of what he said requires an acceptance of not only my

¹⁸ In this thesis, where applicable, the term man includes woman and God, Goddess.

¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 867.

²⁰ Krüger, J S. *Along Edges*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. 1995, p. 79-137.

²¹ Whitehead, A N. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 5.

conscious intentions but also involuntary and unconscious attitudes and motives. The ultimate task remains the phenomenological intention to understand the intended meaning of Sri Aurobindo. The way in which I position myself relative to him determines to a large degree how intimate and accurate my perceptions will be.

My understanding of him could be one of three types: existential understanding, insider (participant) understanding and outsider understanding. The first type is the result of a very close relationship, the second is one where the interpreter has sufficient knowledge of the subject and the situation to get around comfortably, and the third is where the interpreter has merely an external understanding of the world of the subject. I believe that I can obtain adequate understanding of my subject due to my own history and my encounter and dialogue with Sri Aurobindo. I submit that the ideal, existential understanding, is the result of a growth process. This follows study and thought and I do have the intention of understanding him to the subtlest degree possible to me, allowing me to render a true reflection of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy. One can imagine that a point on the continuum of understanding, which point is variable with time and can be set quite validly virtually anywhere, represents the degree of understanding another person. This is a factor of the degree of understanding a person is capable of, of the way in which he can be aware, which varies from the gross obvious to the very subtle.

In the attempt to create a shape of his intentionality, I utilised books, the primary sources being his books *The Life Divine*²², *The Synthesis of Yoga*²³ and *Letters on Yoga*²⁴ which is where he expounded in detail his cosmology, his insights on the nature of reality, and the structure of the components of reality. He wrote clearly and in English and the literature is original in every sense, his language is current and understandable. I also availed myself of his other works as well as works by other authorities on his philosophy. In doing this work I am aware of his background, which includes having had a European education in England and being an Indian steeped in the Indian culture and religions. I do however not intend developing a comprehensive historical or theoretical explanation of the various factors that influenced and impinged

²² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volumes 18 – 19. [SABCL]. Twin Lakes: Lotus Light Publications. 1994.

²³ Sri Aurobindo. *The The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volumes 20 – 21. [SABCL]. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1998.

²⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volumes 22 – 24. [SABCL]. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 1970.

on his thinking. That means that I interpret him phenomenologically as extrapolated to the academic study of religion, and that I will not apply various theories such as that of Katz²⁵ to explain him.

The work of Sri Aurobindo resulted in the formation of certain theories. My task is to understand him within the framework of these theories. The essence of theory formation is the perception of relationships between different elements and the outlining of those relationships. My perception is that for Sri Aurobindo these relationships and these elements are of cosmic proportions, which will be outlined in later chapters and through which I will attempt to explain his world. As already mentioned, this view tends towards the absolute and moves beyond the position of Katz with his involvement with intellectual perceptions dictated by cultural contexts, and more in line with that of Hvolbek for whom mystical experience is essentially different from, and transcends, rational, conceptual thinking and is pure experience and the immediately intuitive understanding of life.²⁶

Regarding the way that Sri Aurobindo interpreted reality and mysticism, however interesting that may be, it will be virtually impossible to prove the 'correctness' or otherwise thereof. What we do have are some majestic intuitive insights into reality. I suppose the important question here is not whether he is 'correct', - his, as does many other philosophical theories, have both adherents and detractors - but whether his religio-metaphysical design adequately covers the range of phenomena it deals with. I do however not prejudge him and my approach here could perhaps be called a naturalistic religious metaphysics, which implies that I sincerely attempt to look at the facts of the subject matter clearly, honestly and broadly to enable me to see what has relevance to understanding him. This should result in a dialogue of discrimination or critique with reference to an insider discourse about mysticism.

²⁵ This does not imply that I deny the validity of the constructivist approach of Katz up to a point, in which he contends that experience is mediated by cultural influences. Not only is the value of such an approach restricted to the relative level where comment on experience of others is made, but as far as I can ascertain, he does not deal with the cardinally important facet of consciousness which extends above the intellect through intangibly higher states of consciousness and beyond that to the true home of mysticism, to the divine. The subject is further developed in the section *Problems Concerning The Modern Conflicting Schools* of this chapter.

²⁶ Hvolbek, R. *Mysticism and Experience*. New York: University Press of America, 1998, p. 2.

Due to the nature of his thinking and of the subject matter he dealt with, his religious cosmology is broad-based. It appears that to him normal and religious life all exists on one continuum. I believe he extended himself to the outward regions of his awareness, and of that of being in general, in order to do justice to his subject. In this instance the following quote from the broad Indian religio-metaphysic context in which Sri Aurobindo also worked, could apply to his religious philosophy: "If philosophy is concerned with the total view of reality, it must take into consideration the various modes of our experiences, namely sensory, mental, as well as intuitional. The world of waking, dream, dreamless sleep and transcendental experiences cannot all be duly comprehended and assessed by the exclusive use of either the senses or the mind. It is unphilosophical to assume, without proper scrutiny and examination, that supra-sensory intuition is not a genuine and valid experience, as sense experience and intellectual experience are. The fact that the former is rare and hard to attain, while the latter are more common and easily accessible is no ground to discredit the former. (This faculty of finer discernment) is a rare possession of some highly cultivated persons."²⁷

5. MYSTICISM AND THE STUDY THEREOF

Sri Aurobindo was a mystic and moved in a subtle world that spanned the complete range of consciousness. The domain of the mystic is not always clear and is seldom accessible. Therefore, in order to understand Sri Aurobindo better and by placing him in a wider context, we introduce the subject of mysticism, attempting to establish provisionally whether there is a common philosophy applicable to mystics, define mysticism and mystics, clarify two opposing basic philosophies regarding approaches to mysticism, and present the views of some thinkers on the subject of mystics.

As the primary nature of this thesis is the region of consciousness and the associated subject mysticism, we will briefly examine these fields first. What becomes evident when mysticism is discussed is that it is most often the "symptoms" thereof, and not the state itself, that is discussed. In these symptoms would be that part that is more tangible or visible whereas the state actually refers to the internal reality of mysticism. To further clarify the words symptoms and state, or appearances and underlying reality, they are on an ascending continuum and are analogous to the shadows versus the marionettes and

²⁷ Upadhyaya, K. N. Some Reflections on the Indian View of Philosophy. *Indian Philosophy: Past And Future*. Ed. S. S. Rama Rao Pappu and R. Puligandla. Delhi: 1983, p. 144.

other role players right up to the sun (in its role as the source of all) of Plato's cave.²⁸ Here the shadows are very real to the observers but arguably the marionettes are even more real. This argument runs through all the way up to the Sun which is the basic reality of all below it. It is clear therefore that the different role players each perceive reality from their own particular points of view. As their levels of consciousness all differ, their interpretation of what is vary from time to time and from other people.

PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY

Even though there is no accepted formal system of thought that mystics subscribe or adhere to, (formal in the sense of an organisation or an agreed upon set of ground rules) it seems that the so-called perennial philosophy describes the commonality of the mystics. Perennial Philosophy as a concept was popularised by Huxley²⁹ who contends that at all times in history, it was possible for all humans to have had a direct insight into the true Nature of Reality.

Huxley could well have considered Sri Aurobindo as an exponent of the perennial philosophy as the following evidence indicates. A comment by Huxley was quoted in Sri Aurobindo's *The Life Divine* as follows: "Aldous Huxley in his book, *The Perennial Philosophy* (1946 Edition), p. 74 quoted Sri Aurobindo (with approval) as follows: '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.'³⁰ (Regarding this quote from *The Life Divine*.) 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."³¹ It seems therefore that Huxley, in his evaluation of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, views him as yet another example of a proponent of the perennial philosophy. He could quite conceivably be correct as the main elements of the perennial philosophy repeatedly appear in the works of Sri Aurobindo. The question

²⁸ Plato. *The Republic*. Chapter 7. Etext of Project Gutenberg on: www.gutenberg.net

²⁹ Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1946.

³⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 11.

³¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 126.

that could arise here is whether Sri Aurobindo had knowledge of the perennial philosophy and structured his own philosophy on that. That is possible but I believe unlikely, as I have found no further reference to the perennial philosophy in any of his works. What I have also noticed in the way in which Sri Aurobindo worked was that even though the material that he is dealing with is well-known and accepted within the philosophical or religious world, he tends to concentrate on what he has experienced himself. He appears quite neutral in recorded instances where his experience and that mentioned in the *Upanishads* are similar. He did not appear to require validation for his experiences from outside sources.

Because of the very matter that it deals with, the perennial philosophy is not easily defined. The intangible reality thereof is perceived by a sympathetic and sensitive sense of an awareness of a beyond, which beyond Schuon (another champion of the notion) describes as having three aspects namely Absoluteness, Infinitude, and Perfection or Sovereign Good.³² This does not deal with the external world of material phenomena, but is in the nature of an invisible and an unseen reality superior to the seen. Insight into this beyondness could follow the practice of spiritual disciplines, the study of holy books, or it could be the natural and spontaneous experience of union with God or the Ultimate. Because of the universal applicability of these experiences,³³ it is held that we all originated from a single spiritual Source, that we are of the stuff of this source and that our spiritual development is only complete upon our return to that One. Different authorities interpret mysticism differently, but there is sufficient agreement to conclude that it has all the elements of a system of mystical religion, the basis of the philosophy being comprised of idealistic and spiritualistic components. In the West it flourished early on in pagan Greece and Rome, and proponents thereof continue to come to the fore to the present day. Originally the title of a book, *De perenni philosophia* published by Agostino Steuco of Gubbio in 1540,³⁴ it is the metaphysic that purports to recognise

³² Faivre Antoine. *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*. Editors, Jacob Needleman and Karen Voss. New York: Crossroad Publishing. 1992, p. 350.

³³ 'The universal applicability of these experiences' is not really all that universal. If it is it certainly has not been reported or recorded. What is happening here is that we are looking at this whole field from the perspective of mystics and commentators on this subject. Generalisations such as this 'universal' one should be seen within this context. But within this context, the mystics quoted later in this chapter from Parmenides right through to Böhme all subscribe to the basic set of principles comprising our divine origin, our essential reality and our spiritual telos.

³⁴ Audi, Robert. *The Cambridge Dictionary Of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001, p.667.

a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; (it is) the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing (the perennial philosophy) is immemorial and universal,³⁵ according to Huxley.

Despite apparent differences due possibly to communication based on a cultural bias, it seems to have been present in some form or other, in primitive traditions as well as in every religious tradition and in all the principal cultures of Asia and Europe. There is not necessarily total agreement by all as to what the essence of perennial philosophy is, but in general this "The Divine Ground" or "Highest Common Factor" of Huxley, which may be called "God", involves a supra-personal, Wholly Other, transcendent pure non-physical spiritual Ultimate Reality, which is beyond temporality, spatiality and duality. This God is a non-personal God and despite all the descriptions above, it cannot be named. All aspects of the Universe, the visible or the invisible, the real or the illusionary, form part of it, yet are not bound to any of the parts. In humans, as the eternal soul or divine spark is of the same nature as the Divine Basis, the contention is that human beings can experience the Infinite by a direct suprarational intuitive and unitive encounter. Further, because of the limitations of both the intellect and the common verbal languages used for communication, human thought is confined to the finite world or Universe. For that reason it is not possible to convey the truths of this particular beyondness in our normal mode of communication using the intellect and the tools of the intellect namely words and concepts. However, the experience of a particular reality and the description thereof are two different issues. Experiencing this mystical reality is possible and may be described or expressed to a greater or lesser degree of adequacy by silence, through various artistic means and by negative language. For this philosophy the purpose of life for humans are both to realise their essential unity with God and, through God, with one another. A further purpose of life according to this philosophy is to return to the "Self" or the transcendental infinite. Regarding the reality of our tangible created universe, the views held differ and range from the absolute "One" as the only true reality, with the world existing as an illusion, to the world having various increasing degrees of reality.

³⁵ Huxley, Aldous. *The Perennial Philosophy*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1946, p. 1.

Despite these differences, the views not only of mystics generally, but also of Sri Aurobindo seem to correspond broadly with the perspectives above which I suggest then also brings Sri Aurobindo into the fold of the perennial philosophers.

DEFINITION OF MYSTICISM

The word mysticism comes from the same root as mystery; it is a relationship, a uniting of the soul with God or the ultimate reality. When mystics refer to this contact, it is commonly said to be ineffable and indescribable. Mysticism is religious by nature and is achieved by contemplation of some form or another. The purpose of this contemplation is not to gain a mere analogical knowledge of the Infinite (in this region such knowledge is in any case not attainable) but to intuitively experience the Infinite directly. Accepting that a complete definition of mysticism is not possible, and even though dictionary definitions are normally fairly general and superficial, such definitions do give a flavour of the range and nature of the subject under discussion. To achieve that I used Webster's dictionary which defines mysticism as "the doctrines or beliefs of mystics; specif., the doctrine that it is possible to achieve communion with God through contemplation, also any doctrine that asserts the possibility of attaining an intuitive knowledge of spiritual truths through meditation, also vague, obscure, or confused thinking or belief" and defines a mystic as "a person initiated into esoteric mysteries, and also a believer in mysticism; specif., one who professes to undergo mystical experiences and so to comprehend intuitively truths beyond human understanding".

This definition illustrates the problematic nature of the subject as it uses the words 'beyond human understanding' for the specific type of understanding of a mystic. It could imply that a mystic is not human! It might be more complete and fair to mystics to look at *their* pronouncements regarding their subject which would lead one to the conclusion that the understanding of the mystic is still of a human being but only in a more complete and comprehensive way. This is because a mystic understands more ultimately, he utilises the potential regarding consciousness inherent in a human more fully compared with the person that operates restrictively on ordinary levels of consciousness. Notably these definitions quite correctly do not associate mysticism with a geographical area or with a specific culture. Mystics were found among the San people of Africa and the Inuit in the Arctic. Different populations have always had

mystics. From these definitions it may seem that it is not so much mystics that differ, but that mystics differ from the rest of their group members.

PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE MODERN CONFLICTING SCHOOLS

In addition to the definitions of mysticism, there are also many conflicting interpretations and perceptions as to the essential nature of mystical experiences, which gave rise in the past few decades to two basic conflicting schools of thought about the comprehension and interpretation of mysticism, namely the perennialists and the constructivists.

The perennialists, exemplified by Robert K. C. Forman,³⁶ maintain that mystical experience represents an immediate direct contact with an absolute principle on a higher level of consciousness. This is in line with the perennial philosophy as outlined above. This philosophy maintains that mysticism is largely the same across traditions and time, and thus is not the product of tradition-bound expectations. In having had a mystic experience, and *after* having made that immediate contact with the "something more" (or absolute principle), that person that experienced such a state, could (but not necessarily would) attempt to communicate his or her perceptions within the structure of some medium such as concepts and words. It is at this point where the differences of the two schools as embodied by the views of Katz and Forman emerge. Here we find two totally different diverged points of view: the one is related to the context within which the event takes place, and the second one to the nature of the event. For Katz the question is whether the event takes place within or beyond a particular cultural context, and for Forman the issue is not whether the event is reported completely or adequately, but whether it can be reported in words at all.

Regarding the approach of Forman, what happens in practice is that the event, if it is reported – and there is no reason to assume that it will be – then it of necessity has to be done utilising a language (German, Hindi) that is available and put across in a reference system (German Christianity or Hindu philosophy) that, to the audience, is familiar and accessible. Forman argues that since interpretive categories, which include the cultural background, do not enter into the transcendental experience, mysticism is by and large

³⁶ Forman, Robert K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1990, p. 3.

transculturally homogenous. His main focus is on the experience and for him it is this experience with its small number of basic characteristics that should be analysed independently of culturally bound mystical philosophies.³⁷ It is important and significant that Forman in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* confined his research into pure consciousness to what he calls the Pure Consciousness Event. This he terms introverted mysticism, this is where there is no awareness of the external world per se; the experience is of the self itself. This could be called an early or less developed form of mysticism to the alternative, namely the extrovertive form of mysticism. In this latter form one perceives a new relationship between the external world and the self.³⁸ At this stage of one's development the ability to extend or operate beyond the self and experience higher states of consciousness whilst within the relative world has been developed. If he did bring this advanced aspect into the fray, it would have extended the scope of understanding of higher states of consciousness and it would have highlighted the complexity of this field even further, but it would not have changed the basic nature of the two departure points.

Forman indicates that a person evolves to the level of mysticism by repeatedly experiencing the level of restful alertness in consciousness and habituating the physiology to such a state, which then eventually becomes the norm. This spiritual development continues and further growth of consciousness follows.³⁹ However, not all writers are enthusiastic about mystics. The very subject of mystics and gnostics is divisive. Despite theoretical and academic knowledge about mystics, O'Regan makes it clear that his overall assessment of gnostic influence on modernity is negative.⁴⁰ It appears that to him, as with Katz, esoteric matters should be subservient to the intellect. In clear opposition to this view is that of Versluis who describes it rather scathingly as "a bizarre form of ideological misinterpretation of mysticism and of the esoteric more generally, and eventually—under the influence of the so-called 'linguistic turn' of French literary theory— has given rise to hypertheoretical works like those of Cyril O'Regan, which turn the works of mystics like Böhme into totally abstract objects

³⁷ Forman, Robert K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1990, p. 3-4.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.

³⁹ Forman, Robert K. C. *What Does Mysticism Have To Teach Us About Consciousness?* Paper delivered at a conference "Towards a Science of Consciousness 1996 (Tucson II) April 1996".

⁴⁰ O'Regan, Cyril. *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative*. Albany: State University of New York, 2002.

evidently useful for constructing one's own jargon-based linguistic system, but totally divorced from the actual phenomenon of mysticism."⁴¹

Spurgeon comments on mysticism - correctly I believe - as analogous to rivers of higher consciousness coursing through historical time in India and Europe. The different traditions are connected on levels of subtle and complex realities and consciousness.⁴² She defines mysticism positively as follows: "In the first place, it is the leading characteristic of some of the greatest thinkers of the world – of the founders of the Eastern religions, of Plato and Plotinus, of Eckhart and Bruno, of Spinoza, Goethe, and Hegel. Secondly, no one has ever been a lukewarm, an indifferent, or an unhappy mystic. If a man has this particular temperament, his mysticism is the very centre of his being: it is ... an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy. ... But all alike agree ... that unity underlies diversity (in creation). This ... is the basic fact of mysticism, which (is) founded upon an intuitive or experienced conviction of unity, of oneness, of alikeness in all things."⁴³ As Krishna states in the Bhagavad-Gita: "When one sees eternity in things that pass away and Infinity in finite things, then one has pure knowledge"⁴⁴ (which translates to being a mystic). "It is of course quite possible that humans intuitively or subconsciously know that man must have some share of the nature of God, (that) he is a spark of the Divine, hence their interest in this field. Consequently, man is capable of knowing God ... through his soul or spirit. For the mystic believes that as the intellect is given us to apprehend material things, so the spirit is given us to apprehend spiritual things. The methods of mental and spiritual knowledge are entirely different. For we know a thing mentally by looking at it from outside, by comparing it with other things, by analysing and defining it, whereas we can know a thing spiritually only by becoming it."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Versluis, Arthur. *Methods in the Study of Esotericism*. Part II, *Esoterica* IV 2002, p. 30.

⁴² The nature of the field where mysticism is operational is, by all accounts, beyond temporal and spatial reality. The intellect could balk at the notion that unidirectionality of time or the existence of separating space could be nonoperative, that two separate objects could influence one another 'backwards' in time and separated by space. (How? The clue here is that 'two separate objects' in this domain are one in a spaceless 'Here' and timeless eternal 'Now'). But this is the type of reality that is implied in this suprarational field of mysticism and simply because it does not make intellectuals sense, does not mean that it is not true. All time is now in the implicate order of David Bohm.

⁴³ Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. *Mysticism in English Literature*. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Mascaró, Juan. *The Bhagavad-Gita*. London: Penquin. 1962, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. *Mysticism in English Literature*. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>, p. 4.

The opposing views of the mystical constructivism school, ably represented by Katz⁴⁶ holds that "(t)here are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences." [Emphasis in the original work.] This implies that all experiences, whether mystical or commonplace, are culturally mediated. The implication is that as a member of a society, your evaluation of all your experiences of the world is subtly influenced by the rules and customs of your particular society. This could well be so, as long as we are referring to an *evaluation* of experiences and not to experiences itself. If this is what Katz intend, then I believe that his view is right and valid. If however he is serious about his statement as it stands, then he commits the reductionist or totalising error of absolutising that view. Katz, by his own admission, it is not a mystic and his statements should be viewed against that background. His pronouncements on the interpretations of experiences by mystics can be given the credence it deserves. He brings a rigorous analytical approach to this arena even though according to his own admission he has not had mystical experiences himself. Those that can comment authoritatively on such experiences are the mystics, and in evaluating their experiences, they tend to do so in negatives and they are unanimous in that it is 'neither this nor that'. They contend that it cannot be conceptualised nor conveyed by conceptual means. Even so, the constructivist perspective of Katz has peripheral (regarding the two main conflicting points at issue) merit which Forman cannot deny; a useful intellectual discipline is brought to bear on the subject of mysticism which Forman admits was not dominant in the perennialist case due to naive and methodologically unsound use of primary texts in the past.⁴⁷

However, as matters now stand we do have this conflict between these two perspectives. To me it appears that the approach of Forman is more valid than that of Katz.

By analysing the situation a bit further, I believe that this conflict can easily be resolved. We can use an analogy of a mystic mountain. This is a mountain with different paths leading up to the peak and which are used by travellers from two settlements at the bottom, the one a German, and the other a Hindu settlement. The mountain has a ring of clouds below the summit that separates the lower warmer part of the mountain from the mountain peak with its clear views, its bracing atmosphere and the snow which is

⁴⁶ Katz, Steven T. *Language, Epistemology and Mysticism*, quoted by Forman, Robert K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1990, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Forman, Robert K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1990, p. 4.

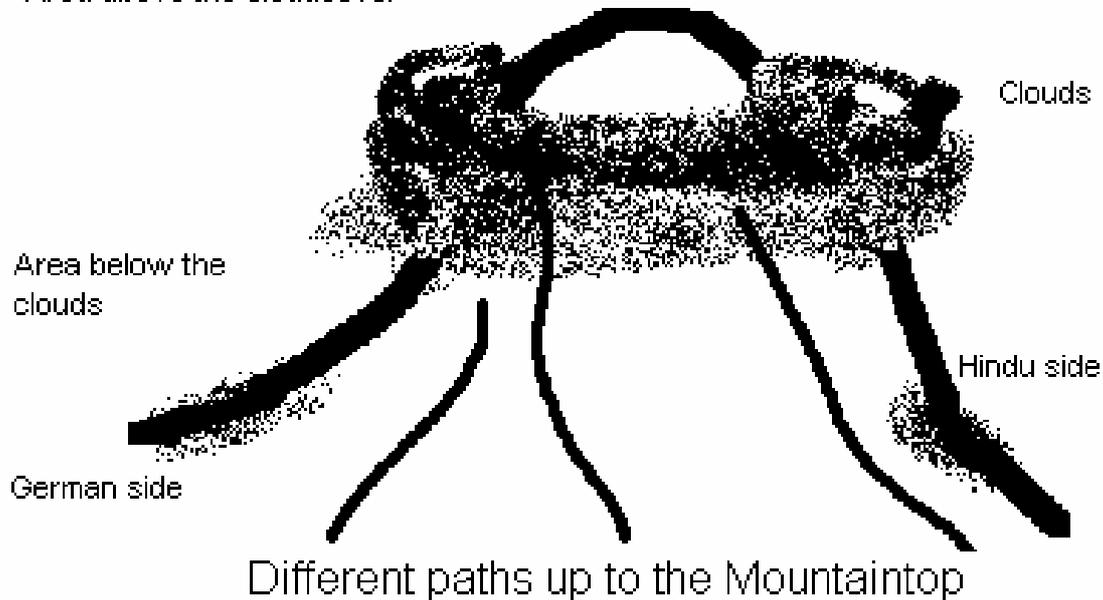
totally unknown below. The clouds restrict the view of the mountain summit from below. It separates the lower side from the peak which has the nature of purity as represented by snow. There are different paths that are unique to each traveller and which leads to the mountain peak. Each of the villages down below operates according to their own cultural traditions. Because of the uniqueness of the snow (or in this analogy the mystic reality), which is never present below the clouds, returning travellers always bring a handful of snow to show their friends. And always the snow melts as soon as the warm atmosphere below the clouds are encountered. The snow melts but the knowledge and the memory thereof remain with the traveller that has experienced it. Communication in the villages takes place successfully within their cultural context. Visits between the villages are fairly common but communication is not perfect, even given the wealth of goodwill existing between the two groups. In the area below the clouds the various customs of humanity pertains.

The snow-covered peak sticking out is the field of the mystic. The snow the mountaineer or mystic brings down from the top and that melted before he reached the lower parts represents pure consciousness and pure knowledge and is only available *in the tangible form of snow* above the clouds. The lower part of the mountain represents the relative world which is the area that Katz covers. This mystic cannot show this solid-state water to anybody, and as many mystics have found, talking about this can be dangerous. (I mean, solid water, what next!). The top of the mountain is the field that Forman covers; it is the domain of mysticism, of higher states of consciousness where the mountaineer experiences realities beyond anything conceivable below the cloud level. The view is unique; it is the view from Whitehead's aeroplane.⁴⁸ Whatever takes place there is cosmic, complete and permeated with unboundedness, which according to the mystics simply cannot be conveyed with normal language. The different paths represent the differing spiritual disciplines and the two settlements represent the cultures of all the seekers of the world. Four types of communication are relevant here, that taking place within a village amongst the normal people which is conducted in either German or Hindi, the interaction between the two villages where they use their second language Hindi or German, communication taking place on top of the mountain between visitors meeting up which is beyond words and signs and is purely on the

⁴⁸ Whitehead, A. N. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 7.

Snow-covered Mystic Mountain with clouds around the summit

Area above the cloudcover



intuitive level, and finally the communication of the returning travellers with their own people.

When this mystic returns, and in reporting to his audience, whether in Hindi or in German, he will be using whatever tools are available to him to communicate his experiences. There are only two subjects of interest in his communication, the first is the view, which is that of infinity, and the second is the snow. Above the mountain both these facets are so obvious that intuitive communication here is not to inform or convince but the expression of a living reality of joy and ecstasy. At the lower level of the mountain, it is for the sake of his audience that he communicates. And here the Hindu or any other mystic is forced to use language and images to communicate - inadequately- his truth. No other language excepting the normal language using words can be used below the cloud cover. The only exception is when two mystics, regardless of their village of origin, communicate because they have the option to use either words or intuitive means for communication. And when they use words they are not restricted to accepting the normal meanings and usage of words. Then these mystic friends perceive everything they say correctly and intuitively.

But in communicating with their non-mystic kin, they do the best they can for they can do none other, communicate they must, in the words of Bergson: "Hardly had these mystics come back from Heaven to earth, when they felt it incumbent on them to teach mankind."⁴⁹ This is very similar and parallel to the following quote, only here the subtle differences between the type of teachers or mystics are highlighted a bit more: "Chuang Tzu said, To know the Way is easy; to keep from speaking about it is hard. To know and not to speak -- this gets you to the Heavenly part. To know and to speak -- this gets you to the human part."⁵⁰ All teachers will teach their truth in their own way, within their cultural context, even though the communication of these sublime realities are ill suited to the tools at hand, and in the teaching their audience will learn according to their abilities (and learn they will, if the vast number of followers of the mystics throughout the ages is of any account). His audience here consists of ordinary normal people and I would suggest for consideration that the mystics perceive and then manipulate the truths, which are their direct intuitive perceptions, by using the intellect (or possibly also the emotion), even though he deals with something that is an extension in consciousness, namely the intuition. For him partial dissemination of the knowledge is better than none. This reasoning does not deny nor dismiss the important analytical intellectual function, but a sufficient number of intellectually developed mystics have stated that intuitive truths cannot be communicated accurately using the intellect and its tools, despite some intellectuals such as Katz arguing differently. But this is not the issue here, as has been stated repeatedly; such an intellectual is not dealing with an experience but with a *reporting* of an experience. Again, as this reporting is partial, it certainly can be done within any cultural context. The problem arises with a person that is developed intellectually but not intuitively and who could argue that intuition could be understood by the intellect. In a way that is true and possible, but the nature of that understanding would be partial and not be an "existential understanding" as it were, but an "outsider" or at best a "participant" understanding as defined by Krüger.⁵¹ I believe that by analysing and clarifying the different perspectives starting with the conflict point, a seemingly irreconcilable situation with two radically different departure points were found to be complementary.

⁴⁹ Bergson, Henri. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. tr. R. Ashley Audra & Cloudesley Brereton. Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1935, p. 233.

⁵⁰ Watson, Burton. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1968, p. 355.

⁵¹ Krüger, J S. *Along Edges*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. 1995, p. 91.

The problematic issue that arises when dealing with the subject of mysticism using words or language should be analysed further. To deal with this language situation, we should mention the following facts. We have a human observer with a particular physiology, psychology and history, which history includes his cultural heritage. This totality is the entity that observes. If this observer has a mystical experience, it would be his own personal first-hand experience. If he were to communicate in words what he experienced, he would, due to linguistic limitations, only be able to produce approximate concepts of what he experienced, and that will be done with the language and within the framework of his culture. The philosophers mentioned above (James and Bergson) made out a case that, regardless of the mundane or sublime nature of the experience, these concepts are and remain partial and incomplete. From the point of our observer here, he is in no doubt as to the reality and validity of his experience. The problem therefore lies not in his experience but in utilising a particular 'language' in communicating his experience. As said before, comments on the report of a mystical experience made by an 'outsider' does not deal with the experience, and not even with the reporting by the mystic of the experience, but with *his (the outsider's) concept and understanding* of a report of the experience of that mystic, (which mystic would in any case have said that his report is incomplete and inaccurate, not by choice but through lack of the capabilities of the communicating medium, in this case words).

In this context I understand that an argument could be raised about the following two components: that the problem is not the relationship between the intellect and the intuition but the relationship between intuition and general cultural factors. I believe both these elements are important, but they should not be confused and should be dealt with differently. The relationship between the intellect and the intuition is not very clear. It appears to be still the mind that does the thinking or perception. I have dealt with it in my discussion on Katz where I contend that there are apparently two totally different modes of operation by the human mind. Yet both can be, and mostly are, present simultaneously and the presence of the one does not invalidate the value of the other. The important point in this regard is the fact that it is only the mind and not the intuition that takes part in this particular discussion about the *relationship* between these two. This discussion of the relationship is completely one-sided and presents only the perspective of the mind: the intuition in truth does not figure at all.

Further, regarding the relationship between intuition and general cultural factors, as I have argued above, the intuitive insights of a mystic are – in fact can only be – communicated within a particular cultural framework by using signs or words if he is addressing non-mystics. Here the intuitive level has largely been left behind and his communication takes place mostly on an intellectual or emotional level. His awakened intuitive faculty would still be present and active but if his audience does not perceive him intuitively, it is on these other levels that he perforce will have to operate on. Here he is in the classical unenviable position of the teacher of putting out knowledge knowing full well that his audience by and large will only receive information.

Overall, the end result of the conflict dealt with above could be beneficial. Even though I personally am more convinced of the validity of the perennialist approach, the constructivist's approach of Katz has merit in that it analyses diligently all the shades of differences between mystics from various backgrounds. It provides an even clearer epistemological model for mystical experiences than does the perennialists. In this way mysticism can now be approached not from an *a priori* angle but by the use of social analysis. But here is it not true mysticism that is dealt with, it is a relativised and despiritualised concept of mysticism that is being discussed. The perennialists in turn highlight the existence, importance and difference of the intuitive faculty and its supra-intellectual mode of operation compared with that of the intellect and thereby should become more sympathetic to the fact that what they with a sense of superiority consider spiritualism is in fact emotionalism. Their righteous stance becomes tempered with a brush of humility.

What is really relevant to our present discussion is what is the nature of the mystical experience - especially that of Sri Aurobindo. Could it be said that what Sri Aurobindo wrote, was essentially coloured by his cultural background? How universal is what he says - is he speaking as a Hindu? Further, does he communicate in a discursive or an apodictic style? Is he authoritarian or democratic? How believable is he? These are elements that we should bear in mind when we examine his works. Experiences in general can be categorised to a greater or smaller degree of accuracy as philosophical, creative, aesthetic, elemental, and psychical. Should this not be true also of mystical experiences? If those experiences are exceedingly difficult to verbalise, should they

necessarily be excluded from categorization? To explain the difficulty of categorisation, one needs to have a clear picture of the element you wish to categorise. Something as intangible as consciousness is especially difficult. For people to convey the reality of their own waking state of consciousness to others is virtually impossible; for a mystic to convey the reality of mystical states of consciousness to non-mystics could arguably be even more difficult. But that does not allow the mystic to relinquish his duty, on the contrary, it defines and clarifies his task of communicating his truth efficiently and effectively.

Therefore the difficulty of the task should not deter us from elucidating the concept "mystic". Furthermore, the essential reasons why it is that we cannot master this problem should be found. Is it not possible that the intellect simply is not up to the task, that a new and exciting expanded field of consciousness and mode of perception lays beyond that of the intellect? Is it not possible further that this field which apparently excludes the working of the intellect and is the gateway to untold subtle knowledge and insights? On a more pragmatic and intellectual level, the construction of even a framework has great merit in that that could outline the problematic involved and could be the starting point of further development in this field. Moore⁵² distinguishes between six different types of mystics. There are mystical theorists (who believe in the reality of mystical experience), practicing mystics (people who have had such experiences), accidental mystics who neither theorise about nor practice mysticism, traditional mystics operating according to a set custom, natural mystics having spontaneous experiences of mysticism and experimental mystics who follow a traditional discipline. He mentions five dimensions of mysticism namely experience, effects, conditions, ideas and setting. In some way his thinking is parallel to that of Katz. For instance he regards the mystic as starting with some intellectual conditions, with a type of expectation as to what he will experience. Whether this is generally true could be debated and for answers we should be looking at particular instances. By all accounts it appears to be true that in the world of the mystic the absolute is very prominent and relative reality very often seems to be less unimportant. These two instances, that of the absolute and the relative, we will examine in our example, Sri Aurobindo, and so gain insight into his philosophy by studying the content of his work, which we deal with in later chapters.

⁵² Moore, P G. *Problems in the analysis of mystical experience with special reference to the work of R C Zaehner, W T Stace and M Laski*. PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 1977.

We will then also find what degree of integration, if any, there is regarding these two aspects in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

The views on mysticism by some prominent Western thinkers that are given below are interesting and illuminating. They are all highly erudite and if they have not had some form of personal experience of mysticism, they are all very well informed on the subject. They all however have different approaches in dealing with their subject. Despite their differences, if we consider the views of Sri Aurobindo and his philosophy, it is striking to note to what degree they seem to agree with some aspect or another of his philosophy in outlining their own approaches. What becomes clear is that whether the mystics hailed from the West or the East, they all shared a number of common qualities and characteristics, even though some of these qualities might be more dominant in one mystic than in another.

In his classic study *The Varieties Of Religious Experience*,⁵³ William James based his statements on recorded material available to him and he mentions four qualities that he associates with mysticism. The first is ineffability; the quality of the experience of the mystic is so unutterable that it defies expression. It is therefore a direct personal experience that cannot be adequately imparted or transferred to others, unless that other person also has had similar experiences. The next one is the noetic quality where mystical states seem to those who experience them, to be also states of knowledge. Here great depths of truth are revealed unaffected by the discursive intellect. When the mystic does convey his experiences, James says that as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time. Further, there is a transience in the experience of mystical states, as it cannot be sustained for long. He mentions that the experience lasts for at most an hour or two duration, after which their quality can but be imperfectly reproduced in memory. It can recur and then its inner richness and importance is again recognised. This statement of course is debatable in that it would be completely untrue for a person, a mystic that has evolved to the level of permanently experiencing higher states of consciousness. However, the paucity of the known (and thus for him absent) examples of such a nature drives him to that conclusion. I would argue that few such representatives moving in higher states of consciousness would declare that themselves

⁵³ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: The Library of America. (1987).

or allow themselves to become "known" unless it falls within the ambit of the task they have to perform on earth. The last quality is one of passivity. Whatever procedure is required for the experience, when it does happen the mystic feels as if his own will were suspended and as if he were held by a superior power. Mystical states are not experienced as an interruption in life, on the contrary it is experiencing the essence of life, and afterwards the memory and a profound sense of their importance remains. To a greater or lesser extent they modify the 'normal' inner life of the subject between the times of their recurrence.⁵⁴

C G Jung did work of great significance in the field of depth psychology. "Jung was drawn to the mystics because he tended to see the Western psychospiritual movement toward a more radical interiority most dramatically expressed in their writings. For Jung, the mystics were simply people who had undergone an intense and unmediated experience of the power of the archetypal world. Yet, this power works always to compensate personal and societal consciousness and therefore grounds a historical development."⁵⁵ He enumerated a number of characteristics of mystics and said: "Tracing the development of mystical consciousness in the mystics (he found) the following common elements and historical development. (A)ll of these mystics wrote out of their immediate experience. All spoke of a certain intimacy between the divine and the human that implies a divine need for the human as creature and therefore a necessity in the creator to create. All spoke too of a unity that they accessed, in which the distinction between their being and that of the divine was negated toward total fusion. From this union, they return to the world revitalized for its challenges and possessed of an intensified appreciation of the good of humanity and of all that negates such good in their surroundings."⁵⁶ The Jungian concept of the "collective unconscious," which he defines in "The Man and His Symbols" as a part of the psyche that retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of humanity, could well explain the phenomena of an invisible but obviously interrelated nature of consciousness. The interior and subjective world was of paramount importance to Jung, which is in complete agreement with the views of Sri Aurobindo. Jung was very aware of the

⁵⁴ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: The Library of America, 1987, p. 342-344.

⁵⁵ Dourley, John P. "The Religious Significance of Jung's Psychology" *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 5.2 (1995), p. 86.

⁵⁶ Dourley, John P. "The Religious Significance of Jung's Psychology" *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. 5.2 (1995), p. 86.

inadequacies of the intellectual faculty to deal with what is beyond. He says: "I am quite conscious that I am moving in a world of images and that none of my own reflections touches the essence of the Unknowable."⁵⁷ With time he was led to believe that there are many things that are beyond our normal intellectual comprehension. The very basis of causality and temporality and spatiality became questionable to him. He came to view coincidences, which are events without an apparent link between cause and effect, not as something that happens by serendipitous chance, which has an illogical reality about it, but as synchronicity where the reality is that events are linked in an acausal fashion,⁵⁸ by an acausal connecting principle. Synchronicity could thus be termed the unifying principle behind meaningful coincidence, individual consciousness and the totality of space and time. This implies that the link between occurrences does exist, but it is based in the reaches of a domain beyond the normal accepted time/space continuum. This is completely in line with the acceptance by various thinkers, including Sri Aurobindo of the ontology of being, as envisaged by the concept of holism. Jung appreciated that the growth of consciousness, which he calls "the instinctive *Urgrund* of his being," is where true transformation can take place, and that happens on the level of the psyche.⁵⁹

W T Stace listed seven typical and representative samples selected from different periods, lands, and cultures as being common characteristics of extroversive mystical states of mind. He mentions an experience of a unifying vision, which is expressed abstractly by the formula "All is One" which is perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects. There is a real awareness of the One as being an inner subjectivity in all things, which he names life, consciousness, or a living Presence. Here nothing is "really" dead. Further qualities are a sense of objectivity or reality, a feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, and satisfaction, a feeling that what is apprehended is holy, or sacred, or divine. This is the quality which gives rise to the interpretation of the experience as being an experience of "God." It is specifically the religious element in the experience. It is closely intertwined with, but not identical to,

⁵⁷ Jung, Carl Gustav. *Answer to Job*. London: Routledge. 1952, p. xiii.

⁵⁸ Jung, C. G. *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1955, p.14.

⁵⁹ Coward, Harold. *Jung and Eastern Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press. 1985, p. xiv.

the previously listed characteristic of blessedness and joy. The experience could also be paradoxical and even though real, difficult to verbalise.⁶⁰

We find that many mystics were thinkers of the first order, with most using logic with very well developed intellects as well as being intuitive thinkers. That however was not always or necessarily the case. They also, as humans, had to grow and develop their thinking and philosophies. Most operated within their cultural traditions and verbalised and conceptualised what they experienced within that particular framework. However, it is arguable that they did not always convey all that they knew. Even so, often what they said was completely new and beyond their cultural paradigms. This, especially in the West, placed them on a collision course with the established spiritual leaders. The matters of interest to them were subtler realms, and when they spoke or wrote about their particular field, the subject of consciousness was a dominant one. The subjects of cosmology and of God are also prominent in their thinking. The nature of the God that they dealt with might be transcendental, immanent or both. They had various experiences of a supramental spiritual nature, which in time for some could become a permanent state of awareness. What they said or preached was also very often incomprehensible to their listeners, but they did inspire people regardless of whether they were understood. It could take years or centuries for people to evolve to the point where they comprehended the messages of the mystics.

A number of non-mystics, intrigued by the subject of mysticism, have made contributions to this theme. Katz's definition of a mystic is a person that has had a mystical experience,⁶¹ although it is arguable that this is a very low standard that is set. It does however have merit in that through having had one incident or experience of higher states of consciousness, one would realise that there existed a mystical realm. An example of such a person was Saint Augustine who said: "And thus with the flash of one trembling glance it (his being or consciousness) arrived at THAT WHICH IS. And then I saw Thy invisible things understood by the things which are made. But I could not fix my gaze thereon; and my infirmity being struck back, I was thrown again on my wonted habits, carrying along with me only a loving memory thereof, and a longing for

⁶⁰ Stace, W. T. *Mysticism and Philosophy*. London: Macmillan Press, 1960, p. 78-80.

⁶¹ Katz, Steven T., ed. *Mysticism and Language*. 1992, p. 123.

what I had, as it were, perceived the odour of, but was not yet able to feed on."⁶² He indicated that he had experienced such a transcendental vision only once or twice in his life, whereas for advanced mystics such a state of consciousness is normal, and in fact it forms part of their normal everyday consciousness, therefore in this study the assumption will be that a mystic is a person that experiences higher states of consciousness and can either remain in that state, or can return thereto at will. Experiencing higher states of consciousness is not in contradiction to, or in conflict with, other normal states of consciousness such as waking, dreaming and sleeping. According to Sri Aurobindo, quite the reverse is true, spiritual evolution leads to the development of higher states of consciousness, which does not replace the normal states of consciousness but operates integrally with those states. Even though higher states of consciousness are very important to Sri Aurobindo, this does not preclude the importance of the ordinary waking state. He says, "On the contrary, it is in the waking state that this realisation must come and endure in order to be a reality of the life. If experienced in trance it would be a superconscient state true for some part of the inner being, but not real to the whole consciousness. ... (and it) is only when the realisation is constant in the waking state that it is truly possessed. Therefore in this yoga most value is given to the waking realisation and experience."⁶³ Subjective characteristics of a person so developed include happiness with and acceptance of the relative life and with bliss as a basis of being.

6. THE WIDER RELIGIO-PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXT OF SRI AUROBINDO'S THOUGHT

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) forms part of the broad sweep of the Indian religious and philosophical history. In understanding Sri Aurobindo it is necessary to have an overview of the history of this intellectual and spiritual landscape with its main characters and various trends of thought. Because of the breadth and originality of his thinking, to understand Sri Aurobindo it is necessary, in addition to analysing his religious philosophy as outlined in the research problem above, to view a broader backdrop, in both the temporal and spatial sense, of religious philosophy in the Indian and the European frameworks. The phrases Indian and European, Eastern and Western,

⁶² Saint Augustine. *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*. Translated by Edward Bouverie Pusey, Etext of Project Gutenberg: Edition 10, 2002, p. 82.

⁶³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-23-24. [SABCL], p. 743.

and Oriental or Occidental, are commonly – even though arguably incorrectly – used to describe two opposing poles of seeing and dealing with this world. Generally, the term 'Western' conjures up an image of scientific objectivity, whereas 'Eastern' is taken to refer to a subjective and unscientific way of thinking and doing. This very much applies to both philosophy and religion. This broad view is not necessarily a correct generalisation. For perspective on this issue we should rather look at the individual philosophers of both the West and the East, as well as at the history, environment and general climate and structure in which they operated as both geographical areas produced philosophers that had common characteristics. The commonality in religious metaphysics in both the East and West are displayed through remarkable similarities between their thinkers. Regardless of who and where they were, all speculative mystics wanted to arrive at supreme knowledge. This involved the concept or reality of all, including God. In practical terms and regarding the influence of their environment on their day-to-day lives, the wider cultural contexts including the various social institutionalised forms of religion in these two geographical areas, profoundly influenced the thinking of philosophers. It is so that in the West, the dominant religious culture restrictively dictated the probity of thinking whereas in the East a much more relaxed approach by the organised or established religions were followed, arguably because they were more steeped in the mystical and spiritual realities, and the spiritual thinkers were free to use their intuition in addition to their intellects without interference from a prescriptive church. This general religious and philosophical climate allowed greater freedom for intuition, in addition to the exercise of reason, resulting in a culture accepting the spiritual reality in all aspects of the universe.

Despite the apparent inhibiting factors in the West, this intuitive development has always taken place, as is evident by the fact that over vast periods of time there existed a strong mystical tradition in both the East and the West that was personified by a number of great figures, original thinkers that reached for and believed to have penetrated the essence of things. It is interesting that this mystical thread runs through vast distances and epochs separated by both space and time, the time applicable here being measured in millennia and the space from Japan right through to Ireland. The great similarities that exist in the basics of their insights and pronouncements are without regard to their cultural background. We know that there were esoteric traditions both in the East and West that by definition were secret and were taught only to those deemed fit and worthy

to receive higher knowledge. These traditions in the West are embodied in a variety of teachings such as alchemy, astrology, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Kabbalah, magic, mysticism, Neoplatonism, a variety of religious and occult movements movements, Rosicrucianism, secret societies, and theosophy, wiccans, the pagans, and the Templars, to mention only a very few. Those interested in these matters generally know this list. What is important is the inner reality of these different organisations, which in its nature are secret and occult spiritual teachings. The evolved people involved in this field were the joy of that part of evolving humanity that was ready for the next leg of their evolutionary progress. As a general rule, these knowledgeable beings in the East were readily accepted, whereas in the West they were controversial in that they brought to the fore knowledge that differed from generally accepted dogma, which knowledge deviated in some instances dramatically from accepted belief, particularly in the Western (compared to Orthodox) Christianity.

6.1. THE 'WEST'

The Western religio-philosophical tradition includes a profound mystical tradition, as indicated below and this tradition interacts beyond time and space with the rest of the world. There is a profound connection binding these different traditions. All the different mystical traditions, East or West, deal with the subtler and higher spiritual aspects of existence. This is in contrast to the obvious and external history as written in the normal history books which paints a sad and repetitive theme of conflict and win/lose. Welfare is dictated by the ego. This welfare is of me and mine, and it emphatically excludes you and yours. Festivals for racial conflict find itself on the two extreme poles of the calendar – 16th June and 16th December, and yet we are all one. The history that is important for mankind is that of the mystic tradition with its inspiring transcendental reality and where it is the subtle and the sublime that constitute the blank pages. Only, we have to know about it. Here the mystical tradition can be traced from Japan right to Ireland, and it existed in the different continents over time. We have an inspiring and wonderful historical stream of communication and interaction spanning more than two millennia of India with other parts of the world. This includes Europe and China but there is evidence of interaction with Africa and suggestions that other countries should also be included. The world of the mystic is perennial and forms not so much a sub- as a super-culture which due to its subtlety and profundity remained the

important guiding principle for humanity. This is the philosophy that is related to that of Schweitzer, that can be the guiding force for the progress of humanity.

SOME WESTERN MYSTICS

In this section we will briefly analyse both the type and the comparabilities of thinking of a limited number of Western metaphysical mystics, and note some complementarities to the thinking of Sri Aurobindo. For this purpose it is necessary to give a short outline of Sri Aurobindo's cosmology, which is represented more fully in chapter 3. He postulates an ultimate or first cause, which is "The One". Through various mechanisms this spawns "lower" agencies which are still, in essence, Itself. The first one is Sachchidananda which, with the formation of a succeeding descending variety of spiritual levels, eventually reaches the lowest level namely a state of nothingness called the Inconscient. At this point evolution starts, and it moves back up through the various levels of matter, life, mind, and the higher states of consciousness right back to "The One". Sri Aurobindo is clear that all levels, including the material level, are inherently divine. This is a very inadequate and incomplete summary, but it is sufficient for the comparative purposes we have in mind. It is striking that all the different mystics including Sri Aurobindo seem to provide *prima facie* substance to the claim of the 'perennialists' in that there is substance to the principles of the perennial philosophy. This however will be investigated in more depth as the argument proceeds.

Parmenides (b. 510 BCE) was a Presocratic philosopher and he and other philosophers mentioned in this section had a very critical approach to knowledge. He lived at the very beginning of the recorded philosophical tradition. Russell sums up the philosophy of Parmenides very well with: "Parmenides divides his teaching into two parts, called respectively 'the way of truth' and 'the way of opinion'."⁶⁴ Popper, an admirer of the Presocratics, showed that both Xenophanes – the teacher of Parmenides – and Heraclitus disdained knowledge gained by the inductive procedure. They knew that knowledge to be gained through the intellect is incomplete but they kept searching for the way to true knowledge. They knew that it existed, as Heraclitus said: "(knowledge) is in the divine nature".⁶⁵ Democritus stated: "But in fact, nothing do we know from

⁶⁴ Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1959, p. 66.

⁶⁵ Popper, Karl. *The World of Parmenides*. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 24.

having seen it; for the truth is hidden in the deep."⁶⁶ Of course, not that Popper viewed inspired divine non-intellectual modes of gaining knowledge all too favourably – quite the opposite, in fact.⁶⁷ Tarnas⁶⁸ contends that Parmenides use "purely abstract rational logic" and "unprecedentedly rigorous deductive logic", whilst also stating that he, Parmenides, had a divine revelation which gave him the access to the knowledge and insights he had. Perhaps Tarnas is correct in his contention about Parmenides having rational and deductive logic, but it could be that he misses the point in regards to the divine revelation aspect; Parmenides thought logically but gained his special type of knowledge using the divine revelatory route. From a practical perspective, we have the views of Kingsley who paints a picture of Parmenides as a highly evolved person at home in the subtle realms, as well as at work on earth as a leader, lawgiver, teacher and healer.⁶⁹ He was a remarkable exponent of each of these diverse fields. Regarding his cosmology, Parmenides, in his few fragments, argued that all of reality is a single, unchanging substance, what is, is, and it can never become what it is not. What is not is not and should not be spoken about. Here, as in the thinking of all the different mystics that follow, the presence of paradox is a common denominator. In its essence, there is no space or time for duality that creates the possibility for something else to exist. Duality exists, but it is part of the One. All is One; the true reality remains changeless and unitary and is complete. This is difficult to intellectualise about as supramental matters can only be dealt with using the applicable tools namely higher states of consciousness, which is difficult to comprehend for even an evolved intellectual that has not experienced – or experienced it often enough to become used to it – higher states of consciousness. These views of Parmenides relate to the views of Sri Aurobindo regarding the existence of a supramental original absolute and a subsequent yet timeless relative creation.

Plato (427-347 BCE) (a student of Socrates, who in turn was influenced by the teachings of Parmenides) searched for truth using a technique of critical discussion. He distinguished between appearance and reality and maintained that the subtle was the actual reality. Plato's cosmology in *Timaeus* (to restrict our brief overview to that work) identifies the real as distinguished from the apparent. To Plato there is something that

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 25.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 34.

⁶⁸ Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. London: Pimlico, 2000, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Kingsley, Peter. *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*. London: Duckworth, 1999.

always is and has no becoming, and that is the real. It is that stable state or reality which is apprehended by understanding, by intelligence and reason, whereas the apparent, that which is always becoming and never is, is reality to a human as the result of an opinion formed by the senses and without true reasoning.⁷⁰ In this cosmology the world is a good place, as good as God could make it, and because he wanted the world to be as perfect as it could be, he endowed the world with life, soul and intelligence.⁷¹ This world forms part of the unitary created heaven or universe.⁷² He created the world in a form that was suitable and natural to beauty, the most perfect form being a globe, based on one of Plato's forms.⁷³ The nature of the world, of matter, is physical, visible and tangible and therefore for Plato includes fire and earth. For these two to be combined, air and water was created. His perception of astronomy apparently still had the earth as the centre of the universe. A very insightful statement says that time and the heaven came into being at the same instant.⁷⁴ This is comparable to the views of other mystics who contend that time and space is the result of duality. It is clear from the *Timaeus* that to Plato, it is the invisible universe of eternal principles that is important. It is not sense perceptions that are basic but that what is perceived by what he calls intelligence. A very lucid example of his penetrating thinking is found in the cave analogy⁷⁵ where different levels of reality are depicted, from the least real, the shadows, which the inhabitants of the cave accept as the true reality through the intervening stages of reality up to the eventual highest of what is the Sun, which is the initially overwhelming source of all and the blinding light of knowledge. Acclimatising to this bright light and assimilating the knowledge would require time. The unfortunate fate of a person that went out and gained this knowledge, and then returned to impart it to the denizens of the cave, would be ridicule and disbelief or worse.

Plotinus (205-270) dealt with transcendental and cosmological questions. It is obvious from his descriptions of what he had experienced qualifies him as being a mystic. He writes: "Many times it has happened: Lifted out of the body into myself; becoming external to all other things and self-centered; beholding a marvellous beauty; then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order; enacting the noblest life,

⁷⁰ Plato. *Timaeus*, translated by Jowett, Benjamin. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Plato. *The Republic*. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library Charlottesville, Va. Edited and translated by Benjamin Jowett, p. 210.

acquiring identity with the divine; stationing within It by having attained that activity; poised above whatsoever within the Intellectual is less than the Supreme: yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning, and after that sojourn in the divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be."⁷⁶ This is a classical description of experiences of higher states of consciousness. One can only postulate that the questioning that takes place when he descended from that higher realm is due to the fact that it is not a permanent reality in his being. After such an experience he intellectualises about both the questions and the answers regarding higher states of consciousness. This differs somewhat from Sri Aurobindo who is clear, based on his own experiences, as to what the nature of high states of consciousness is all about. This one can postulate due to the clarity of descriptions and depth of explanations the Sri Aurobindo had supplied which becomes clearer later on in this thesis. From this point another conclusion could possibly be drawn namely that there is a far greater degree of intellectual effort by Plotinus to arrive at the cosmological conclusions he did compared with those of Sri Aurobindo which he states he had experienced intuitively. About the ontological primordial Being, Plotinus wrote "Bringing itself close to the divine Intellect, becoming, as it were, one with this, it seeks still further: What Being, now, has engendered this God, what is the Simplex preceding this multiple; what the cause at once of its existence and of its existing as a manifold; what the source of this Number, this Quantity? Number, Quantity, is not primal: obviously before even duality, there must stand the unity."⁷⁷ In his *Enneads*⁷⁸ he extended the thoughts of Plato and developed a complex spiritual cosmology involving three hypostasis: the One (absolute Unity), the Intelligence or Divine Mind (the totality of Divine thoughts), and the Soul (this includes the World-Soul and individual souls). Lower than these three is matter with only a dim spark of divinity. It is from the productive unity of these three Beings that all existence emanates. This structure in broad outline seems to correspond clearly to that of Sri Aurobindo. The principle of emanation is not simply causal, but also contemplative. In his system, Plotinus raises intellectual contemplation to the status of a productive principle; it is by virtue of contemplation that all existents are said to be united as a single, all-pervasive reality and

⁷⁶ Plotinus. *The Fourth Ennead*. 8th Tractate, section 1. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

⁷⁷ Plotinus. *The Fifth Ennead*. 1st Tractate, section 5. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

⁷⁸ Plotinus. *The Six Enneads*. written 250 A.C.E, translators: Mackenna, Stephen and Page, B. S. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

arrived at a comprehensive view of reality in which everything flows in series from the unitary centre towards an outside and into ever less significant things. Even though human beings are viewed as belonging to the lowest element of nature, Plotinus considered humans as being a microcosm of the universe as a whole, with the ability to contemplate the divine unity. In essence, God is the supreme inconceivable reality and the principle of all realities. All worlds, invisible as well as visible are a derivation or emanation from God. Here there is a downward movement from God to the world, and an upward movement from the world to God.⁷⁹ This too is parallel to the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo.

Matter, Form, and Soul. Plotinus desired to create an account of reality in which the relations of metaphysical dependence obtaining between its various levels could be explained within the confines of the limitations of human language and its conceptualisation. He postulated the One, which is the single archetypal reality from which everything else in the universe emanates. The One must, in Plotinus's view, be utterly simple in order to function as a principle. Matter exists in this universe; it has form, quality and magnitude. The essence of matter is an invisible substrate of some kind without magnitude – this could well be a description of the nature of the quantum state of matter. Its reality is not lessened by the fact that it is not apprehended by the senses. It is in its nature incorporeal. The nature of matter, because it lacks the fullness of being associated with the good, is intrinsically evil. He also says "There remains, only, if Evil exist at all, that it be situate in the realm of Non-Being."⁸⁰ One could argue the non-being is a form of absence of Godness. Logically speaking, in the relative existence Godness cannot be associated with evil, and yet there is a general acceptance of the existence of evil, where it could then be argued that the degree of absence of Godness indicates the degree of evil in existence.

The Priority of Actuality. For Plotinus Mind, or pure abstract thought is better (in the sense of being more perfect) than Soul, and therefore must be prior in actuality. Mind is prior to and independent of Soul, and contains (indeed is identical with) the Forms in their truest state. He says that the soul Mind is immortal. No aspect of the mind is separate or independent of any other aspect, but Each Form is simply a distinct aspect (or potentiality) of Mind. It follows that the reality of intellectual activity is not a

⁷⁹ www.utm.edu/research/iep.

⁸⁰ Plotinus. *The Six Enneads*. written 250 A.C.E, translators: Mackenna, Stephen and Page, B. S. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>. Eighth Tractate, nr. 3.

thinking subject and thought object; Thought is a type of actuality since it is clearly not a potentiality – but it can only be the primary substance.

The Causal Structure of Reality. Plotinus postulates a unique intellectual Mind beyond the creative Soul, and a One beyond both which is ultimately responsible for everything that there is. The One's uniqueness is supreme whatever else changes. All existing things necessarily produce around themselves existence, which depends upon themselves, and is reflective of the archetypes which produced it. This intellect being like the One, produces in a similar way using the power inherent in it. When there is activity in Mind, its substance is Soul which manifests while the Mind remains unchanged. The Soul generates an image which is the life-force found in all individual living things, including plants. This life is not primary, but is subject to what is above life namely the cause of life. In this way is Mind a self-explanatory unity because of its participation in the One.

Cosmology and Freedom. Plotinus does not use the popular "the will of God" approach to explain the creative organisation of the world. He produces a novel solution to the problem of the celestial circular motion of the heavenly bodies. It is neither wholly natural or due to the material, nor wholly due to the influence of Soul, but is rather the sum of the two tendencies. Matter tends to move in a straight line, while Soul tends to pull inwards, and the result is perfect circular motion.

Regarding the relations between souls and matter on the one hand and the higher hypostases on the other are of concern to Plotinus. Although embodied souls are naturally constrained by the material nature of their bodies, they can still enjoy freedom ultimately causally dependent upon the overflowing power of the One as it ramifies through the lower hypostasis. And he must further clarify both how matter can be intrinsically evil without compromising the unsullied goodness of the One, and how the One, being whole and indivisible, can in fact be present to all the rest of creation. The relations between souls and matter on the one hand and the power of the One restrict souls but do not compromise their freedom totally.

He argues that because we are created with freedom of choice, directing our own lives, this results in us sometimes choosing evil instead of good. To gain real freedom we have to go beyond, and become free of the actions of the body. This implies striving for our divinity and transcending our humanness.

Plotinus' fundamental worry is not Heidegger's; of why there is something rather than nothing, but rather that of why there are many things rather than simply One.⁸¹

The influence of Plotinus and of Neoplatonism on the mystics of the West can hardly be overrated.

The main theme of the Irish philosopher John Scottus Eriugena (800-877) as expressed in the *Periphyseon* is *natura*. Eriugena states that the first and foremost division of all things that can either be perceived by the mind or transcend its grasp is into things that are and things that are not, and this could be given the general name of *natura*. He views *natura* and *divisio* as totally interrelated and he predicates *natura* as the general name of all things that are and that are not. Through the complementary character of being and non-being this implicitly constitutes an exhaustive totality. The division of things into being and non-being arises from the distinction between things that can be grasped by the mind and things that extend beyond the mind's reach. For him, the power of the mind allows for the division of *natura*.⁸² Eriugena perceived a close interrelationship between being and rational understanding; only what can be represented accurately in thought, and conversely, what can be thought necessarily possesses some sort of being. Otten's understanding is that there is ultimately no mode of being that does not yield to the tenacious grasp of the human intellect.⁸³

Although Eriugena indicated that intellectually the divine was incomprehensible, he contended that it is still possible for man to know God through his creation. In his cosmology the highest principle was the immovable self-identical one, the infinite, transcendent and 'unknown' God, from which all things originated and which was then retrieved back into itself. For Eriugena, *Natura* is the universal, the totality of all things, containing in itself being and non-being. All phenomena are manifestations of the unity of nature. It falls in four classes,⁸⁴ 1. that which is not created but creates which is God as efficient cause, 2. that which is created and creates, which could be viewed as the primordial, or first, cause, which is comparable to Sachchidananda of Sri Aurobindo, 3. that which is created but does not create, which would be all created things, animate and

⁸¹ Hankinson, R. J. *Cause and Explanation in Ancient Greek Thought*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, p. 404.

⁸² Otten, Willemien. *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, p. 7+.

⁸³ *ibid*, p.40.

⁸⁴ John Scottus Eriugena. *Periphyseon*. Sheldon-Williams, I. P. Ed. Dublin: The Dublin Institute For Advanced Studies, 1978, p. 37.

inanimate, 4. that which is not created and does not create which is regarded as final cause. The first class has God as the ground or origin of all things, the last is God as the telos of all things, to which the world of creation ultimately returns. The second and third is the created universe, which is a manifestation of God, an eternal God in process. In this divine system the three components of beginning, middle and end are in essence one and if there is a difference it is only due to our limited conception and understanding. What we see is beyond time but as we exist in a temporal reality, that which is supra-temporal cannot be described. Here he develops a metaphysics of nonbeing in which the nothingness is the transcendent being of God. Of course, that which is not created and does not create could be viewed as nihil, as the absence of what is, which on the relative level could be viewed as the absence of the first cause, the ultimate Godness, but this particular point of view could only be possible in the dualistic relative domain. As stated above, this nothingness or nihil would only be yet another reality of the ultimate Godness.

He had the ability to perceive the esoteric truth in Scriptures. This is brilliantly displayed in *The Voice of the Eagle* where in chapter 1 of the gospel of St. John, he identified St. John as the disciple "of innermost theology and intuitions of most brilliant and high contemplation (who) transcends all vision and flies beyond all things that are and are not. ... John therefore flies beyond not only what may be thought and spoken, but also beyond all mind and meaning." In this way John is elevated to the spirit beyond all things and he becomes one with the principle of all. "There he clearly distinguishes the superessential unity and the supersubstantial difference of the beginning and the Word" referring to the Father and the Son, both of which are incomprehensible. A person that uses sense-bound thinking, however brilliant, cannot match the "keenness of profoundest contemplation (which) on the other hand, once it has perceived the countenance of the truth, neither hesitates, nor slips, nor is ever darkened by any cloud."⁸⁵ This very much reminds one of Pseudo-Dionysius for whom "The first task of contemplation is to penetrate the sensible images of the Scriptures to discover their true intelligible meaning."⁸⁶ Eriugena was influenced by amongst others Gregory of Nyssa

⁸⁵ Bamford, Christopher, Translator. *The Voice of the Eagle* by John Scottus Eriugena. New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1990, p. 21.

⁸⁶ John J. O'Meara, *Eriugena*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, p. 65.

(born in Caesarea in Cappadocia about 33) who viewed the contents of the substance of the Deity as transcendent and incommunicable.⁸⁷

Meister Johannes Eckhart (ca. 1260-1327) who entered the Dominican order became a professor of theology, preacher and writer, was charged with heresy and condemned after his death. It seems that as with most of the mystics mentioned here, Eckhart was greatly influenced by the neoplatonic metaphysics. In his philosophy on the neoplatonic metaphysics the One reemerges with vigor so that God is the One, pure of all being. He takes the words of Ex 3:14 as expressing God's wish to remain unknown as the cause of all being beyond being. Yet, he also says that, because God is one, he has being -- so much so that in comparison to him creatures are pure nothingness.

He maintained that there is in the soul a divine element, a spark of the divine Intellect - something uncreated and uncreatable. His mature works describe four stages of the soul's union with God: dissimilarity, similarity, identity, and breakthrough. The first stage emphasizes the nothingness of creatures in comparison with the being of God. In the second stage the soul finds itself to be the image of God with a resemblance to God. The third stage of identity does not involve a substantial oneness but rather a oneness of God's operation and man's becoming. The fourth stage moves beyond identity with God to a breakthrough beyond God to the point that the soul is the Father and engenders the Son.

He wrote *Of Invisible Things*. In this work he contended that being and intellect of a human could approach that of a unified deity and grasp it only through mystical apprehension of the divine through the divine spark of the soul. "Anything that we know or are able to impart or that we can define, that is not God: for in God is neither this nor that which we can abstract nor has he limitation."⁸⁸ He insisted that God could be found, directly and decisively, anywhere and by anyone. This specifically includes everyday life.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Gregory of Nyssa. *Dogmatic Treatises, Etc.* New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892, Chapter 3.

⁸⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meister_Eckhart

⁸⁹ McGinn, Bernard. The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism. *Church History*. 65.2. 1996, p. 199.

According to McGinn, Christian mystical theologies cannot be described as purely intellectual, (or intellectual at all). This contention could well be applicable to Eckhart as it becomes clear in the following series of propositions: 1. God is unknowable in the sense that the divine nature cannot be grasped through rational, discursive concepts. 2. Love has a special access to God because God is love and because he bestows his own form of loving on human persons so that they may love him in return. 3. The love by which we grasp or attain God can be correctly called a form of "knowing" (*intelligentia, notitia, intellectus*), though not a form of reason (*ratio*). 4. This form of knowing subsumes the lower aspects of the reasoning process into a higher and transformed state.⁹⁰ He is a remarkable example of the union of a profoundly speculative mind and a simple childlike spirit⁹¹ with a desire to teach others about the blessings of the mystic way.⁹²

Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464) was a many-faceted and talented person from Central Europe. "The doctrines of Inghen and Buridan, that rational or discursive proof is an approximate rather than an absolute approach to truth, left its stamp on the inquiring mind of Cusa as a result of his studies at Heidelberg."⁹³ His spiritual works include *Of Learned Ignorance* and *Vision of God* which contained his mystical ideas particularly about the nature of the Trinity. There is clarity in the mind of Cusa about the reality of God and discussion about God. For him, it is not possible to conceptualise or place God. "Cusa, in his search for certainty, makes a clear distinction between the revelation of God Himself and the results of discursive philosophy."⁹⁴ His comprehensive view of divinity caused some to suspect him of holding pantheistic beliefs, however, he was never accused of being a heretic.

Falckenberg outlined his ontological views as follows. Human knowledge and the relation of God to the world are two important aspects. His insights of what is can be graded from the lowest which is the spectrum of knowledge which is possible to be obtained by the senses and which yields only confused images. The next higher is the

⁹⁰ McGinn, Bernard. *Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*. *Church History*, 56.1 1987, p. 12.

⁹¹ Jones, Rufus M., contributor *Studies in Mystical Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1909, p. 238.

⁹² Forman, Robert K. C. *What Does Mysticism Have To Teach Us About Consciousness?* Paper delivered at a conference on "Towards A Science Of Consciousness 1996" (Tucson Ii) April 1996.

⁹³ Nicholas De Cusa, *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings*, ed. John Patrick Dolan. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, p. 12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 15.

intellectual understanding which analyses the relative aspects of creation, the third being the speculative reason which reconciles opposites. The last is the highest of all, which is the mystical, supra-rational intuition and for which the opposites coincide in the infinite unity.⁹⁵ He had as his central insight that all oppositions are united in their infinite measure, in the infinity of God, so that what would be logical contradictions for finite things, coexist without contradiction in God (the coincidence of opposites). He affirms that in the infinity of God all oppositions are identified, all distinctions overcome, and all contrariety fades into nothingness, since the correlative is not to be found.⁹⁶

Regarding his cosmology, Cusa defends two basic principles, firstly that of "learned ignorance" which is the highest level of intellectual understanding accessible to the human intellect. This is so, as humans cannot know supreme Truth, as it is absolute and yet infinitely simple. The relative knowledge which in its nature is multiple, relative, and complex, is partial and incomplete. By using intellect and reason one only approaches true knowledge but can never reach it. He says that the path to Truth leads beyond reason and the principle of non-contradiction. The way to discover God is by using the intuition and here all contradictions are obliterated. As long as we see two sides as opposing and not complementary, so long we remain in ignorance. Phan states that Cusa in *De Docta Ignorantia* had a "peculiar way of knowing, which is distinct from mythos and logos, and can, if properly practiced, lead to the recovery of the love of wisdom in our postmodern age." The ignorance of Cusa is actually the wisdom of a holy fool and "only the wisdom of (that) holy fool leads to the love of wisdom." "Cusanus's questioning of the possibility of knowledge, his antithesis between irrational absolute and logical reason, his affirmation of knowledge beyond reason through intuition, his insistence on the necessity of a conscious recognition of the limitations of our intellect as a condition for wisdom, and his unification of all contradictions in God, all of these elements pave the way for the "coincidence" of foolishness and wisdom."⁹⁷

Smirnov⁹⁸ contends that Nicholas of Cusa accepts the thesis that God is indefinable, and, also that the world is not God but is not anything other than God. As a mystic he

⁹⁵ Falckenberg, Richard. *History Of Modern Philosophy From Nicolas Of Cusa To The Present Time*. Translated by A.C. Armstrong, Jr, 1893. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

⁹⁶ <http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Cusa.html>.

⁹⁷ Phan, Peter C. The Wisdom of Holy Fools in Postmodernity. *Theological Studies*. 62.4. 2001, p. 730.

⁹⁸ Smirnov, Andrey V. Nicholas of Cusa and Ibn 'Arabī: Two Philosophies of Mysticism. *Philosophy East & West* 43.1. 1993, p. 85.

realised that it is impossible to define God, as did other medieval philosophers and thinkers. Indefinableness here traverses the limits of the indefinable in the sense of Aristotelian logic. It is not possible to make any definite proposition about the Divine essence as any assertion about God would then be only metaphorical and would not serve as an established basis of knowledge. God is indefinable as He embraces all the limits, and He precedes any limit. To rationalise the mystical concept of an indefinable God, He should be viewed either as Divine Nothing making itself explicit as the world, or as Divine Everything with the world as its reflection. To achieve this Nicholas of Cusa had to find a new, nondiscursive language. Cusa, in defining what is, including God, went about it in a unique way. He defined definition, and arrived at the concept of *Not-other*. (The definition which defines everything is not other than what is defined.) Not-other is not other than Not-other. Not-other serves us as a way to the Beginning, and also quite closely befigures the unnamable name of God.⁹⁹ He uses the concept of the non-other in his dialogue, and says this "is what I was looking for all the long years through the coincidence of opposites"; the non-other "is to be seen before any affirmation or negation"; it comes before any positive category, be it eternity, truth, existence or unity. At the same time "the non-other exists before everything so that it cannot but be present in all that appears after it, even when one of it is opposite to another," and this non-other is "the principle of existence and knowledge." He states that Infinitude which is the measure of God is not more and is not less than anything, and does not equal anything. Cusa was a tolerant person and realised the destructiveness of opposing religions and was aware that different religions actually just present the views of people and not that of one God. "When they teach a plurality of gods, they teach one antecedent principle of them all... never was there a race so backward which believed in a plurality of gods and did not admit some first cause, a principle or Creator of the universe."¹⁰⁰

Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) travelled and lectured widely in Europe and England. After years in Europe Giovanni Mocenigo, an agent of the Jesuits invited him to come to Venice where he was betrayed, arrested and imprisoned by the Inquisition on May 22, 1592. He was accused of holding and teaching views contrary to that of the Church.

⁹⁹ Hopkins, Jasper. *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-other*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1979, p. 31.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas De Cusa. *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings*. John Patrick Dolan – ed. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, p. 204.

He defended himself by explaining the rationale of his philosophy, but to no avail. On January 20, 1600, he was sentenced to be burned at the stake, which tragic event took place in the early morning hours of Friday, February 17, 1600. To this day he remains a heretic in the eyes of the unrepentant church.

His main works are *Ash Wednesday Supper* 1584, *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds* (1584), *On the Cause, Principle, and Unity* (1584) and *The Expulsion Of The Triumphant Beast*. This last mentioned work was in response to his experiences when he entered the church initially. He was very well versed in and influenced by the Hermitic philosophy. Yates maintains that that is the philosophy he referred to in his lecture to the Oxford professors as follows: "Before 'the philosophy which suits you so well arose, there existed that of the Chaldeans, of the Egyptians, of the Magi, of the Orphics, of the Pythagoreans and other early thinkers which is more to our liking.'"¹⁰¹ In a similar fashion he addressed the doctors of the Wittenberg University on the "temple of wisdom" which arose out of, and was built by, the same tradition. He was influenced by Cusanus of whom it is said to be a man "who has found a way to mount to the sky."¹⁰² He based his philosophy on a perception of an infinite universe with an infinity of worlds. It was a totally holistic conception with everything in the universe, including all phenomena whether material or spiritual, interconnected in a vast interrelationship throughout space and time, in a sense then a Jewel Net of Indra. This implies that everything was individualistic and yet also part of the whole. He perceived a reality called cosmic metabolism. Every aspect of nature had life as an inherent quality. All material components had two aspects, the underlying essence and the form. As an analogy we can think of the essence as clay and the form as a pot. The pot can be broken, always leaving the clay behind. He however does not think in terms of clay but conceives of a minimum, which is the substance of all things. For him primal origin is equated with matter and form with soul. The form and the soul are at once the whole and also every part of the whole. Things change perpetually and this is the effect of activity of an object to its environment. His philosophy certainly appears as a universal pantheism and to him matter was divine. For him there was a Prime Origin which is not that which moves, but is itself still and immobile, and it gives the power to generate

¹⁰¹ Yates, Frances A. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermitic Tradition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1964, p. 235.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 236.

their own motion to innumerable worlds, to great and small animals throughout the vast space of the universe, each with a pattern of mobility, of motion and of other accidents, conditioned by his own inward nature. This inward nature he viewed as an inherent necessity, which is present in everything from the smallest to the largest. God was immanent and totally perfect with the result that all his works could only be good. Whatever was not perfect could not be the object or the subject of the power or will of God, or of any necessity. Because of this he spoke out against priests who would rank either divine freedom or our own freedom as only contingent and possible. The immanence of God in creation translates to an infinite universe with a universal cosmic free will. Similar to Cusanus, both the origin and destination of everything is one primal foundation or supreme cause. The infinite is composed of finite components but no corporeal sense can perceive the infinite, as no human sense perceptor can perceive both the substance and essence of anything. In creation the common factor is matter and the uniqueness of individuals is seated in the form. But in the Absolute of these two aspects there is no difference; there they are one. The basis of natural and divine knowledge is "The One". Everything, matter and form, potentiality and action, is simply One. At that level there are no distinctions of any nature. He states that all is in all but all is not totally and in every mode within each one. Throughout the whole, the foundation of all kinds and of all forms is Being. He said that we could never believe that we are united to the primal being and universal substance until we understand indivisibility.¹⁰³ This indivisibility is the unity of the components of Sachchidananda in the language of Sri Aurobindo.

6.2. THE 'EAST'

In the 'East' and more specifically in India, there never was a single dominant and oppressive religious organisation. To give a flavour of the Indian religious landscape, an incomplete list of important schools of religions that developed and coexisted in India are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism and Carvaka. At the time of Sankara it was reported that there were in excess of 70 different religious sects in Hinduism alone. This indicates the wealth of religious and philosophical thinking.

As Sri Aurobindo is steeped in the Hindu philosophy, I will concentrate on and give an overview of that philosophy only as a necessary background to the understanding of Sri

¹⁰³ Singer, D. W. *Giordano Bruno – His Life and Thought*. New York: Henry Schuman, 1950.

Aurobindo. To this end I used the books by De Bary, Hay, Weiler and Andrew Yarrow¹⁰⁴, Sri Swami Sivananda¹⁰⁵ and Dasgupta¹⁰⁶.

Hinduism consists of six astikas (schools) namely Mimamsa, Samkhya, Yoga, Vaisheshika, Nyaya and Vedanta. Their fields of interest were the subjects that are of concern to most philosophers namely the ontological nature of consciousness, how cognition itself is experienced, is *chit* (mind) intentional or not, and whether cognition has its own structure. There exists five systems which analyses the different aspects of an object in its relative existence, whereas Vedanta reveals ultimate reality as the basis of all the relative phases of being. As Vedanta is intimately connected with the thinking of Sri Aurobindo, it is dealt with in somewhat greater depth.

OUTLINE OF THE VEDAS

The importance of the Vedas for this present thesis on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is because that is the culture where he was born into and became a master of. His writings were essentially based on expressing his experiences and his thoughts within the framework of his cultural tradition, of which the Vedas were central. For a brief overview of the Vedas, the following. It is said to be approximately 4500 years old, and the result of the spiritual growth and the literary activity of many generations and a variety of philosophers. The different philosophies resulted in different schools being founded. These schools of philosophic thought (*Darshana*) all aspire to know Reality but they have different ways of achieving that. A prominent contributor to the organising of the Vedas was Veda Vyasa, one of the two of many outstanding personages of the Vedic era, the other being Sankara. Vyasa is credited with codifying the Veda into different divisions and he wrote the Brahma Sutras and the Puranas. Some important sections are the Shrutis and the Smritis, the Upanishads, and the vast epic the Mahabharata.

THE SIX SYSTEMS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Theodore De Bary, Stephen N. Hay, Royal Weiler, Andrew Yarrow. *Sources of Indian Tradition*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1958.

¹⁰⁵ Sri Swami Sivananda. *All About Hinduism*. Shivanandanagar: The Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram, 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963.

¹⁰⁷ Here I have made use of the following books:

1. Theodore De Bary, Stephen N. Hay, Royal Weiler, Andrew Yarrow. *Sources of Indian Tradition*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1958.
2. Sri Swami Sivananda. *All About Hinduism*. Shivanandanagar: The Divine Life Society Sivananda Ashram, 1999.

For the sake of completeness and to indicate further the richness of the Indian religio-philosophical background, I will just mention the different components of the six systems. Their purpose is to analyse, deal with and arrive at knowledge, which knowledge can only be accepted as true when it has passed the judgment of each of the following components.

The *Nyaya* system is the science of reasoning. Arguably this system did not figure so prominently in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. This is because he contends that he gained his knowledge not through rigorous reasoning but through intuitive insights. The *Vaiseshika* and the *Sankhya* systems allow discrimination between objects, and the obtaining knowledge of the components of an object in its completeness. These methodologies are applicable to Sri Aurobindo. He based his technique of development or growth namely the Integral Yoga on the basis of the *Yoga* (union) component of the six systems. This allows direct perception of the essence or true knowledge of an object. The last two also fall within the framework of what he used namely *Karma Mimansa* which provides close scrutiny of action, that being cardinal to the nature and the evolution of an individual, and *Vedanta* means the end of the Vedas, which is the Upanishads.

Regarding the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo, not only knowledge but also Brahman is incarnate in all manifestation, including humans. For him, humans therefore not only can but must attain to the divinity within them. He does not oppose the six systems but he does not use it as the components of a system that he has adopted. As we have seen above, it did influence him in his spiritual writings even though he focused instead on his own system which is the integral yoga.

SHANKARA (788-820 CE)¹⁰⁸

Dasgupta gave a good rendering of Sankara's views and is reproduced below.¹⁰⁹ Prior to Shankara, Hinduism has produced an impressive array of subtle and profound thinkers. In India there always has been a great interest in religion. A large number of spiritual people put forth their conflicting views. The whole subject of religion and philosophy

3. Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.easterntradition.org/original%20sankaracarya.pdf> quoted in www.wikipedia.org

¹⁰⁹ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963, pp. 406-494.

became very confusing and disorderly. Different sects abounded, such as *Charvakas*, *Lokayathikas*, *Kapalikas*, *Shaktas*, *Sankhyas*, *Buddhas* and *Madhyamikas*. Humans being human argued amongst themselves and the familiar negative tendencies found in human life came to the fore.

It was into this situation that Sankara incarnated. He was an Indian Reformer, philosopher and theologian. He became a Hindu ascetic and exponent of the *Advaita Vedanta* school of philosophy. Sankara perceived that despite appearances, there was ultimately no difference in essence between the different philosophical systems in India. For him the relative conditions produced a lower truth. The absolute truth is that All is One. Shankara reformed Hinduism with a monistic interpretation of the Vedanta. He was probably the most famous *Advaita* philosopher and had a profound influence on the growth of Hinduism through his non-dualistic philosophy. He advocated the greatness and importance of the important Hindu scriptures, the Vedas (most particularly on the Upanishads, also known as Vedanta), and spoke of a spirituality founded on reason and without dogma or ritualism.

He became a disciple of Swami Govindapada Acharya and gained insight into the various religions and underlying philosophies. He met the leaders of different schools of thought and through discussions convinced many of them of his alternate views of the Vedas.

Sankara wrote commentaries on the Brahma Sutras, the Upanishads and the Gita. His works dealt with logic and metaphysics, practical knowledge, and inspirational material. His legacy includes the establishment of four different *Maths* or centres of learning in the North, East, West and South of India. Very able Saints became the *Sankaracharyas* of these maths.¹¹⁰

Regarding the relationship between Sankara and Sri Aurobindo, it is striking that in his *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo referred to Sankara in a total of only six paragraphs.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ <http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/saints/sankara.htm>.

¹¹¹ Certain concepts that both Sri Aurobindo and Sankara uses are common and well-known in the Indian philosophical tradition and is not original to Sri Aurobindo. Minor differences of interpretation appear but this is more indicative of their different philosophical approaches. An example is the definition of *Ajnana* (nescience). Sri Aurobindo defines this in the *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms in Integral Yoga Literature* as "Knowledge-Will; operation by which the consciousness dwells on an image of things so as to govern and possessed it in power." For him nescience is a form of inconscience, or more accurately, a state or a consciousness that is even less conscious than inconscience. Dasgupta in *A History of Indian Philosophy* says that for Sankara, *Ajnana* is the cause of all illusions and is defined as that which is beginningless, yet positive and removable by knowledge. Though it manifests itself in all ordinary things which have a beginning in time, yet it itself has no beginning, for it is associated with the pure consciousness which is beginningless. The emphasis for Sankara is on illusions and the removal thereof

His views of the philosophy of Sankara becomes clear in his statement: "Shankara's wordless, inactive Self and his Maya of many names and forms are equally disparate and irreconcilable entities; their rigid antagonism can terminate only by the dissolution of the multitudinous illusion into the sole Truth of an eternal Silence."¹¹² It is clear that Sri Aurobindo does not think that Sankara has succeeded in integrating the material and the spiritual in his philosophy. He acknowledges the intellect of Sankara but to him, Sankara was just another of the great thinkers of India as becomes clear in the following statement: "Shankara's, great and temporarily satisfying as it was, is still only one synthesis and interpretation of the Upanishads."¹¹³ The mind of India had been and is being influenced by a variety of thinkers in a broader context than did Sankara, as the following quote makes clear: "There have been others in the past which have powerfully influenced the national mind and there is no reason why there should not be a yet more perfect synthesis in the future. It is such a synthesis, embracing all life and action in its scope, that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have been preparing."¹¹⁴

7. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In the above Chapter 1, I outlined the research problem and gave an overview and a background to the religious philosophy of both the east and west. The philosophies of a number of mystics were given in summary form. The very strong comparabilities, perhaps even similarities and concurrences of the mystics of both geographical areas are noted.

Chapter 2 will deal with the epistemology of Sri Aurobindo within the context of some Western thinkers and philosophies.

Chapter 3 will deal with the basics of his cosmology namely a cycle of involution and evolution where the role of *The One*, the Absolute, the Omnipresent reality, which is a paradoxical supramental reality is explained. The mechanics of the involution cycle, through the different subtle fields of the spiritual world to the formation of Matter and the return journey to *The One* through evolution, is outlined.

by knowledge. For Sri Aurobindo an illusionary reality has a reality which is not illusionary on the level at which it is.

¹¹² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 7.

¹¹³ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*. Volume 13. [CWSA], p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

Chapter 4 will deal with the reality and development of the Psychic Being. For a human being, one of the important facets of the evolutionary process is to realise and develop the psychic being, which is only possible after experiencing Matter, Life and Mind. At this stage of evolution the nature of divinity becomes an experiential reality. It is here that we grow towards unity with *The One*.

Chapter 5 will deal with the various different ordinary states of consciousness, which performs a vital role in the evolution of life of a human being. These states are the nescience, inconscience, subconsciousness, intraconscience, sleep, dream, waking, subliminal, circumconscient, samadhi and cosmic consciousness.

Chapter 6 will deal with the higher states of consciousness above mind namely Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind, Supermind and Sachchidananda.

Chapter 7 presents an overview and conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 2

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF SRI AUROBINDO

SRI AUROBINDO'S METHODOLOGY OF GAINING KNOWLEDGE

This chapter presents the exposition of the cosmological philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, which knowledge he gained using introspective techniques, as the following quotes indicate.

"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."¹¹⁵

"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."¹¹⁶

As to the state of consciousness the Mind should be in to be able to see directly into the essence of what is, has been outlined in the following quotation:

*"Outgrow its early grammar of intellect
And its imitation of Earth-Nature's art,
Its earthly dialect to God-language change,
In living symbols study Reality
And learn the logic of the Infinite.
The Ideal must be Nature's common truth,
The body illumined with the indwelling God,
The heart and mind feel one with all that is,
A conscious soul live in a conscious world."*¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *On Himself*. Volume 26 [SABCL], p. 88.

¹¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volumes 22-23-24 [SABCL], p. 52.

¹¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri – A Legend and a Symbol*. Volume 33-34 [CWSA], p. 76.

Sri Aurobindo contends that because man is a mental being, he thinks that the mind is indispensable. This is wrong, even for obtaining knowledge mind is not the only or the best possible instrument but only "a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and the vaster infallible superconscious action of the Godhead.

There is nothing mind can do that cannot be better done in the mind's immobility and thought-free stillness. When mind is still, then Truth gets her chance to be heard in the purity of the silence. Truth cannot be attained by the mind's thought but only by identity and silent vision. Truth lives in the calm wordless Light of the eternal spaces; she does not intervene in the noise and cackle of logical debate. Thought in the mind can at most be Truth's brilliant and transparent garment; it is not even her body."¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he states that it is possible that there "can be a thought-body of Truth, but that is the spontaneous supramental Thought and Word that leap fully formed out of the Light, not any difficult mental counterfeit and patchwork. The supramental Thought is not a means of arriving at Truth, for Truth in the supermind is self-found or self-existent, but a way of expressing her. It is an arrow from the Light, not a bridge to reach it."¹¹⁹ For him the mental mind is an instrumental entity or consciousness whose function is to think and perceive,¹²⁰ to reason, consider and find out or value things whereas the function of another facet or type of mind, the vital mind, is to plan or dream.¹²¹

We can have a greater understanding of the thinking of Sri Aurobindo if we could look into his mind, if we can be told what takes place there. He did just that as is shown by the following. Sri Aurobindo maintains that there are two separate parts of the mind that becomes developed through evolution of consciousness namely the active part which manufactures thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is the invisible superior Witness and Will. The Yogi perceives thoughts as coming from the Universal Mind which is outside, with the main business of the mind to respond by accepting or rejecting such thoughts. He learnt the truth of these statements through his instruction by Lele who told him to observe such thoughts and to reject them in order to become proficient at mind control. He became successful within three days and he states that "(f)rom that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a

¹¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA]. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. p. 255.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 255.

¹²⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume: 22-24. [SABCL], p. 322.

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 334.

universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought as a labourer in thought factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundreds of realms and free 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 it and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for, of course, the latter fullest developments of this new untrammelled mental power took time, many years) but a progressive freedom and mastery of one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of any one who has the faith and the will to undertake it."¹²²

Sri Aurobindo contends that utilising the mind in a superior way requires a calm mind. Such a calm mind is the substance of the mental being that is so still that nothing disturbs it. If thoughts come from outside they cross through the mind and pass without disturbing the mind or leaving a trace. Even violent events that pass across it do not affect the calm stillness of the mind. "It remains as if the very texture of the mind were a substance of eternal and indestructible peace. A mind that has achieved this calmness can begin to act, even intensely and powerfully, but it will keep its fundamental stillness—originating nothing from itself but receiving from Above and giving it a mental form without adding anything of its own, calmly, dispassionately, though with the joy of the Truth and the happy power and light of its passage."¹²³

A person could arguably use whatever methodology is necessary to obtain knowledge. However, he should then be prepared to both define and defend that methodology if he presents that knowledge to the public at large. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, the implications of what he stated above are that whatever knowledge he gained was through the use of higher states of consciousness, that is the intuitive faculty. In a reading of his works it is clear that he definitely operated on a high level of the reasoning logical intellect and yet in his work he was not restricted to that but reached beyond that level. Regarding the criteria of definition and defense of a methodology, the following. In most of his works (with a notable exception in *Savitri*, his epic poem) it is clear that he goes to great lengths to explain in detail and to define what the different

¹²² Sri Aurobindo. *Sri Aurobindo on Himself*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo ashram. 2000, p. 84. This paragraph was written on 5-8-1932.

¹²³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 638.

terms that he uses mean. Regarding the defense of his way of thinking, until such time as he went into seclusion after 1926 he was totally accessible to any of his students or visitors, and he comprehensively answered all questions regarding all aspects of his philosophy and thinking. This is evidenced by a reading of *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani¹²⁴ and is also confirmed in *Letters On Yoga*.¹²⁵

This methodology of gaining knowledge where the aspect of intuition is so prominent raises a number of questions, all of which will have the subject of the validity of his knowledge at heart. To this end we will call in the assistance of René Descartes (1596-1650), Karl Popper (1902-1994), Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). What is relevant here is the fact that these different prominent Western thinkers and intellectuals produced work that profoundly influenced the course, not only of their own disciplines but arguably that of the history of the world. The question here is whether there was a commonality in their collective approach of gaining knowledge or insights in their fields. The way in which *they* say they went about performing their intellectual tasks is important. I would argue that that commonality does exist and it follows a similar approach to that of Sri Aurobindo; it is a blend of intuitive insight and a verification of the validity of the obtained knowledge through the use of the intellectual faculty.

DESCARTES

Both Descartes and Sri Aurobindo were disciplined thinkers. They both had intuitive insights which were then validated through intellectual reasoning. Wild thinking did not appeal to Descartes. He is quoted as saying "In my college days I discovered that nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher... But, like a man who walks alone in the dark, I resolved to proceed so slowly, and to use such circumspection in all things, that even if I made but little

¹²⁴ *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo* recorded by A. B. Purani. Downloaded from http://members.tripod.com/~neuro_net/evetlksa.htm. These talks were recorded in writing by A B Purani during fairly informal evening meetings over a number of years. Normally they were six to nine disciples present at these meetings. Literally any question could be posed to Sri Aurobindo and he would respond. These records put a human face to this spiritual being, Sri Aurobindo. People were "deeply impressed by his (Sri Aurobindo) radiating presence," people gained an insight into the "richness, its many-sidedness, its uniqueness" of his personality and the versatile nature of his genius, the penetrating power of his intellect, his extraordinary power of expression, his intense sincerity, his utter singleness of purpose.

¹²⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL].

progress I should at least be sure not to fall. (AT, VI, 16–17)"¹²⁶ In his later years, Descartes was already clear "that sensory experience is not to be favoured as a source of knowledge: 'we must note that while our experiences of things are often deceptive, the deduction or pure inference of one thing from another can never be performed wrongly by an intellect which is in the least degree rational' (AT, X, 365). He was also clear that intuition, the basic epistemic act in the Rules, is not sensorial: 'By "intuition" I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conception of a clear and attentive mind' (AT, X, 368). And he left no doubt about the background against which he was writing when he added dismissively: 'I wish to point out here that I am paying no attention to the way these terms have lately been used in the Schools' (AT, X, 369). But he did not yet present any considered views regarding the role, if any, of sensation in knowledge and the relation between the intellect and the senses."¹²⁷ For Descartes therefore the two ways of gaining knowledge are intuition and deduction. He states that "(B)y *intuition* I understand, not the fluctuating testimony of the senses, nor the misleading judgment that proceeds from the blundering constructions of imagination, but the conception which an unclouded and attentive mind gives us so readily and distinctly that we are wholly freed from doubt about that which we understand. Or, what comes to the same thing, *intuition* is the undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind, and springs from the light of reason alone."¹²⁸ I believe that one can perhaps argue about certain of the details of this definition as it stands here, and specially that of the very last phrase but the principle is sound; both intuition and the intellect are necessary for gaining knowledge. I could engage in an argument regarding the approach of Descartes and the agreements and parallels or otherwise with the thinking of Sri Aurobindo, but the main point I wanted to highlight was the basic approach regarding the two are elements of the intuition and the intellect.

POPPER

Popper analysed the problem of understanding how new ideas could be generated and he distinguished sharply between the process of conceiving a new idea and the methods and results of examining it. He intimates that inspiration could be the origin of a new

¹²⁶ Secada, Jorge. *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 82.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 31.

¹²⁸ Hung, Edwin H.-C. *The Nature Of Science*. London: Wadsworth Publishing Company. 1997, p. 264.

idea. More specifically, he states that "However, my view of the matter, for what it is worth, is that there is no such thing as a logical method of having new ideas, or a logical reconstruction of this process. My view may be expressed by saying that every discovery contains an 'irrational element', or a creative intuition, in Bergson's sense."¹²⁹ Popper then quotes Einstein "who speaks of 'the search for those highly universal laws ... from which a picture of the world can be obtained by pure deduction. There is no logical path leading to these ... laws. They can only be reached by intuition, based upon something like an intellectual love ('Einführung') of the objects of experience."¹³⁰

This does not mean that Popper had just accepted any inspirational or so-called inspirational thought as the truth or as beyond examination. He now brings in the analytical intellectual faculty and uses the invaluable falsifiability criterion in assessing the worth of a thought. His approach was that a statement or a theory can never be totally comprehensive and therefore is false to a degree. The way in which such a theory should be approached is to falsify it. This simply means that he viewed any theory as a provisional hypothesis, the validity of which should be tested rigorously, because he did not accept that one could find or express the complete truth. One of the benefits of this approach is to replace uncritical dogmatic thinking with critical thinking. For Popper the basis of his approach was "that the scientific attitude was the critical attitude, which did not look for verifications but for crucial tests; this which could refute the theory tested, though they could never establish it."¹³¹

If we followed Popper's approach, we would have to find some way of being able to subject Sri Aurobindo's statements to one of the many detailed routes or methodologies found in the scientific and philosophical discourse. The type of question that a person presenting a new approach or theory should be able to answer is – "Under what conditions would I admit that my theory is untenable?"¹³² Popper's approach is – and quite correctly so – that theories are never complete and can always be improved upon. Even if for argument's sake, one arrived at the stage where theories are no longer open

¹²⁹ Popper, Karl. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London and New York: Routledge Classics. 2002, p. 8.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 8-9.

¹³¹ Popper, Karl. *Unended Quest*. London and New York: Routledge Classics. 1992, p. 39.

¹³² Ibid, p. 43.

to correction, simply because they were true, they would still not be complete.¹³³ One could however consider that this stance of Popper is unrealistically or unreasonably strict and confining. One could imagine, in considering the complete truth of or about either an atom or the universe, that surely, all the truth of both those two entities are contained within them.¹³⁴ That would be valid and true regardless of whether they were two individual entities or if they formed one holism, as is so beautifully expressed by William Blake:

"To see a world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour."

In making the statement about the atom and also in quoting Blake, I touch on the important cardinal concept of reality. Therefore, I believe that at this point a little further analysis and examination of the ontology of the two types of reality that we should be looking at, is in order. The reason for this discussion has to do with the components and the relationships that exist in the methodology of Popper, namely an observing subject, an object and the process of observing. What I am referring to as 'the two types of reality' I will call the realities of the Absolute and the relative. Regarding the Absolute reality, this is not something that in itself can really be discussed in relative terms. The reason for that is that whatever we do to place the absolute in its true perspective, which is completely, utterly and irrevocably beyond any trace of duality, is not possible because as soon as we talk about the absolute we relativise it. I will go even further and say that even thinking about it, we do the same. But the problem is that in communicating on the level of words and concepts regarding the absolute, I cannot not talk about the absolute in this regard, because of my desire to communicate somewhat about the absolute. Yet, as soon as I start a discussion, I invalidate completely whatever half-truths or trace truths there might be in my argument. Whatever we say is subject to the insidiousness of dualism; we can never *'talk'* absolute,

¹³³ Popper, Karl. *Unended Quest*. London and New York: Routledge Classics. 1992, p. 150.

¹³⁴ Of course, that truth can also be contained somewhere else but what I'm getting at here is that the truth for it to be true does not need the validation of a human intellect. It is an act of arrogance on the side of the human mind to think this way. *For himself and for his own purposes* the human mind can validate truth, but that validation is for himself only and does not affect the validity or truth of any object.

we can only talk *about* the absolute. So it is with no small measure of hesitance and trepidation that I proceed. In talking about the absolute we should start with the relative. That is the only place to start because that is where we find ourselves in. This space that we find ourselves in is the result of the mostly not thought of nature of the reality of duality. The major consequence of duality is one of separation, as in duality there is space and time, and there everything can be viewed (and in fact has) as having individuality. The result of individuality for a human in this particular discussion is that he is an individual and is separate from everything else as soon as he utilises his normal mental intellectual processes. The fact that he actually forms part of a holism of all that is, is rendered apparently invalid by the utilisation of the logical intellect. Therefore, if he says 'absolute', he creates a concept of the absolute. However skilful he attempts to describe any aspect, characteristic, feature or anything else of this 'absolute', it is not the absolute but a relativised created absolute. It exists only for him and it is part of his relative and limited world. In looking at the ontology of the absolute, we will find any number of thinkers that have stated that in this absolute there is no duality and if there is no duality then everything is everything else. This is totally in line with the analogy of The Jewel Net of Indra of Hua-yen Buddhism.¹³⁵ What is important here is the fact that there *are* individual jewels in existence, but their true nature is that they simultaneously are individual and also constitute a one and indivisible whole, they are part of the warp and weft of the whole of all that is, in fact so much so, that if one were to disappear, not only would the whole of creation disappear, it would simply never have been. To apply this to the epistemology of Popper which operates on the level of the relative, he creates a position of an observer and an object of observation and a process of observation. This is a classic dualistic situation. From an absolute point of view, none of these three would exist separately nor would they be necessary. The absolute simply absorbs and reconciles all that cannot be reconciled according to our logic. If we were to view a grain of sand, that grain would in fact encompass and constitute the whole of the universe. It would know every other grain of sand and everything else that is, because all of that is itself. But as soon as duality comes into play, this holism disappears irrevocably and what remains are the different separate and ignorant components. Ignorant because they do not know each other because they do not know themselves, they are not aware what it's true reality is, that it constitutes a holism.

¹³⁵ Cook, Francis H. *Hua-yen Buddhism*. London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977, p. 2.

I believe that we can reconcile this relative/absolute problem in the following way while still retaining all the reservations mentioned above about considering the absolute in any way. There are these two different realities of the relative and the absolute and knowledge or truth from the absolute perspective is gained or experienced through the process (paradoxical non-process) of what we could call participation. Sri Aurobindo calls this knowledge by identification. This is the situation of the actual reality of 'Isness' being totally one with everything else and certainly in this instance with the object of which one wishes to gain knowledge or Truth. On the other hand, on the conventional level Popper is totally correct. Here the relationship between the part and the whole is a mental construct. Here, in a rather labourious and in fact infinite process the observer, with every observation, gains a little bit more knowledge about the object but it never gains full knowledge because that would only be possible if he ceased to be separate from the object, if he operated in a state of consciousness which is beyond the relative, beyond duality, and where he became the object. It so happens that the truth is that virtually the whole of humanity finds itself engrossed and enmeshed within the relative, it can do no other than operate in the mode of reality as is done by Popper. At the epistemological level of knowledge, Popper's methodology is correct; what he does is to create a *mental* construct; here he imagines certain characteristics regarding the existence of knowledge or of a type of knowledge. Regarding this scenario, the reality is that this particular type of knowledge about an object can only be gained piecemeal and therefore when we examine or think of an atom, we do not experience or see or perceive or realise the totality of the atom, it is done partially, sequentially and incompletely. Therefore, in this mode of operation we must be very clear in our minds that we are thinking *about* an atom; we are not *thinking* (and perhaps more accurately *being*) the atom. Here there is a distance between the atom and us, which distance we simply cannot bridge using intellectual means.

The question could be asked: what is the purpose of the above rather involved and involuted examination? As we do find ourselves in the domain of this dualistic planet and universe, should we not simply accept that reality? That certainly would be much easier and more comfortable. Unfortunately, that is also a rather incomplete and unsatisfactory solution. If we know and understand the intricacies of the ontology of being, we are better prepared to deal with and understand the relative. The above line of reasoning can render an answer to the question as to whether this activity of speculation

or examination is performative and transformative, which I believe is in the affirmative. The purpose of enquiring about knowledge in this apparently non-anthropocentric way is parallel to the approach of Descartes when he stated that " 'the most useful inquiry we can make at this stage is to ask: What is human knowledge and what is its scope? ... This is a task which everyone with the slightest love of truth ought to undertake at least once in his life' (AT, X, 397–8). Though in later metaphysical works radical methodical doubt will take the place of this inquiry, there is a common intellectualist aim underlying both projects."¹³⁶ I believe that in our search for knowledge, there are just certain questions that we normally or as a matter of course refuse to ask probably because it is so obvious that there is no answer to it, or our current perception dictates that there is no answer to it. And this one, where we are asked to step outside our anthropocentric reality of intellectualism and logic is one of them. Vary rarely do we consider the fact whether there is a difference between human knowledge and truth knowledge, and for that we are the poorer for it.

The previous paragraph does not denigrate the value of the anthropocentric and analytic approach of gaining knowledge. We have not so much a dual – which implies two opposing and contrasting components – reality, but a synergistic and holistic nature and reality. Therefore, the atom statement and approach still bear some looking into. We should enquire whether firstly, is this not just a vision, an erroneous and untested assumption, which begs the question? In considering what we know about Sri Aurobindo, is this ephemeral and non-concrete approach not exactly the one that he followed? In the second place, is this not merely a hypothesis, a form of speculative postulate, such as the metaphysical thinking of Whitehead seems to be? The essence of these first two points is that it is meant in all seriousness (the vision and the speculative inevitability) by a person operating in that particular type or mode of thinking. The third possibility is that such a view could be a mytho-poetical imagination, a type of speculation, such as what we would expect from Mahayana philosophy, as manifested in for example the Lotus Sutra. One should look yet broader at this issue. One should consider the basic stance in considering the validity of the original supposition above, that of the atom and the universe, namely whether the departure point of considering its validity should be an anthropocentric one. It is a teasing possibility that we simply are

¹³⁶ Secada, Jorge. *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 32.

unable to access total reality from our present human perspective, furthermore, in considering this extra- or suprahuman aspect, we are still functioning as human beings, we are still bound by the same restrictions imposed by our humanness, and therefore we cannot answer that question. Operating anthropocentrically, we operate relatively or perspectively. At this point a question arises namely whether we have any other perspective than the above-mentioned 'present human perspective'? For the post of answering this question, only experienced tiger jockeys need apply. Our present reality is that we only *do* have our present human perspective. To have anything more, we need a superhuman type of knowledge, or an ability to experience knowledge in a superhuman mode or fashion. This implies that that type of knowledge does exist, that that type of ability is available to us. And the question here is simply, says who? Well, for one, Sri Aurobindo says so. Well, again, the question is so what? Do we not find ourselves in a situation of a circular argument with no possibility of, not winning the argument, but of gaining the truth and an understanding regarding this vexing problem of a greater perspective than our 'present human perspective' that we are dealing with now? Let us view the nature of the circular argument not from above where only a perfect circle is observed, but from the side when we notice that the apparent circle is in fact a spiral. The route of the spiral is a perfect circle with an ascending nature or reality. Here only our perspective or mode of observing determines, for us, what its reality is. I would postulate that the relative route is the one of the circle, and the absolute is the one of the ascending spiral. But at this point again, I want to restate the fact that we cannot intellectually wriggle into the absolute using a spiral staircase. Forever the open front door of the absolute will be only just one further step away. If that is so, we need to use the back door. That door is locked and there we will find very little traffic; that is the door that the mystics use. The key is available; it is within us. It lies in the domain of consciousness; it is the realisation of what we truly are. Realisation here being the two meanings namely understanding and making it a reality. I believe that the question still remains, and we will again ask the question: says who? But now the answer should be a bit more forthright. The recipient of the question should really be qualified to handle the answer, and as I believe has become obvious, this answer cannot be dealt with on the level of the intellect, it should be addressed to a mystic. This is so because that question is asked on the level of the intellect and the expected answer is required or demanded to be on that same level. It is demanded that it should conform to the rules of logic and reason. And *that is not* where the true

answer lies. The answer lies in the domain of higher states of consciousness, and this answer to the 'says who' question simply cannot be answered or pursued on the intellectual level, the answer here is gracious and generous, it is not a persuasive answer but a performative and transformative one. A reasonable reading of the paradoxical and incomprehensible pronouncements of the mystics should lead one to two understandings namely firstly, that the above answer is not to be found nor comprehended on the level of the intellect and secondly, that the mystics will only give hints but that we will have to do the homework, we will have to become Mohammed and not only make peace with the mountain, we have to become a piece of that mountain.

Now, are these restrictions therefore not applicable to Sri Aurobindo as well? Surely he was human? Again, this we have to analyse a bit further too. Firstly, we should consider what he says explicitly. As will become clearer in later chapters where he outlines the basis of his knowledge, which was obtained through his experience and development of these different higher states of consciousness, he states that the present position that humanity as a whole occupies is a transient stage in the whole cycle of evolution and it is just one of many steps on its journey towards higher states of consciousness and towards its source. The methodology he used to develop his consciousness was through meditation. For him, that was a very important and valuable activity and achievement. That methodology that he used was what he taught, but in the reading of his works it is obvious that he is not a fanatic missionary. He is simply giving out his knowledge, knowing full well that the hearer will only receive the information. From his own experience he knows that this knowledge he gives out can have a positive transformative influence. Whatever descriptions he gave, in especially *Letters On Yoga*, which were the responses to questions posed to him by his students, we find them not to be prescriptions but advice. He accepts that there exist restrictive views of the abilities and the possibilities of humanity, but he deems it a reality only at this point of the journey. The various statements made in this paragraph is the subject matter of later chapters and will not be expanded on here, but for now he boldly states that man can reach the infinite, that godlike powers are already within his fibre and being. This is because of the fact that he (Sri Aurobindo) had traversed that particular route himself. He is not subtle about this, he does not imply anything; he explicitly states this as a fact.

This reality could be operative on different levels and on the finest level; it could well be a part of a holistic universe. Specifically, the knowledge of that object would be integrally lodged within the object, within here to be read very widely, quite possibly external to the confines of space and time. One could argue that the real problem of a human in trying to gain the absolute knowledge of an object has nothing to do with the accessibility or otherwise of that knowledge and has everything to do with the limitation of the perceptive abilities of a human being. I am fully aware that in making these statements in this paragraph, I am yet still in my own anthropocentric cocoon. It is a clumsy and unsuccessful attempt to operate beyond that ever-present cocoon. But moving away from my cocoon to the butterfly, we find that at the core of this whole argument is the matter of reality. As a Chuang-Tzu said about his butterfly, last night I dreamt I was a butterfly. Today I wonder whether I am not a butterfly dreaming I am a human. What is the reality here? Who knows? And does not this butterfly explode Sri Aurobindo's entire construction? Let us consider this a little deeper. To satisfy us intellectually, Chuang-Tzu must either choose the reality of the dream as his true reality, or he must accept that as being illusory and choose the waking reality where reason prevails as his reality. Now we have an either/or situation. This is a situation that definitely crops up in the field of logic, whichever way we try to argue the merits or demerits of a case. We have two points of view, or more accurately two opposing realities, the reality of the intellect which conforms to a very strict discipline of reasoning, and another reality which is different to, and even perhaps higher than that of reason. But 'higher than' again implies duality, relativity and an intellectually comforting concrete reality. This is related to what we think which in turn is related to what we observe, but that should bring into question: what do we observe? I believe that this is something we do not question radically enough.

Whether true or not, the laser technology artist Hiro Yamagata¹³⁷ makes a sobering observation that of the total spectrum of light that is emitted by the Sun, the eye has the ability to perceive only 0.34% thereof. If what he states is true, then the human eye does not observe a staggering 99.66% of what there is to see. He remedies that by his interactive laser display/arts shows. With these facts, we return to the position of Sri Aurobindo. As will become clear in the chapter on ordinary states of consciousness,

¹³⁷ www.hiroyamagata.com.

what is to us an illusionary state of consciousness namely dreaming is, according to Sri Aurobindo, an exceedingly complex reality of which, as an analog, we could use the 0.34% above (which percentage is not what Sri Aurobindo states or maintains, but it serves to illustrate the point) as an indication regarding our efficiency in perceiving what is available. Just using this example of the light, we are truly deficient in our observational abilities. Could it not be that we are also just as deficient in utilising our other observational apparatus? And if that is so, what should be our level of confidence that what we are observing is what there is to be observed? In the later chapter in this thesis quoted above we are given alternate insights or perhaps postulates by Sri Aurobindo as to the nature of dreaming. We can all along question what he says because of the fact that it does not accord with our normal experience. Even so, we have to accept that this is what he said and read him with either explicit or implicit reservations, but what we cannot do is to reject what he sees out of hand, at most we can doubt the veracity of his statements. This is because of the fact that we are now dealing with a cardinal consideration namely the field of consciousness, which is his domain. Of concern here is the essence of reality.

We return to the point of vision dealt with above. According to our scientific stance, what we perceive could be either subjective or objective. If it is subjective (and it can be nothing else but that as we can be no else but be that), then we perceive using our sensorial apparatus. This is what we rely on to supply us with valid knowledge, which valid knowledge should not be arbitrary; from a scientific discipline point of view, two objective scientists viewing the same object will perceive the same and gain the same valid knowledge. This is one of the cardinal cornerstones of the scientific method. But is this factual or is it just a theory? In analysing this particular methodology, we are dealing with the philosophy of science. This is not the place for a fully-fledged analysis of that particular branch of philosophy. However, in order just to indicate the non-settled state of that philosophy, to point out only one small crack of many, and to also point out the fact that in general the "laws of science" are accepted unquestioningly as valid, real and binding, whereas an alternative statement that knowledge was perceived through intuitive means could raise the strongest possible objections regarding its validity and acceptability, the following by Hung about the "understanding of the empirical evaluation in scientific practice." He talks about the distinction between direct and indirect tests in the field of sensory perception. He takes the hypothesis "There is a

dog next door." He states "(i)t may seem obvious that to directly test it, we need only open the adjoining door and look through. What if the door is locked? Would listening through the door be counted as a direct test? After all, the difference is only between the use of the faculty of hearing and the faculty of sight. But somehow we feel that the use of sight is more direct, especially if we can only hear scratching noises and not barking. The intuition seems to be that direct tests are veridical (amounting to certainty), whereas indirect tests only yield probable results. It seems that if we see a dog, there has to be a dog, whereas if we only hear barking, there need not be a dog that does the barking."¹³⁸ Further conditions must be adhered to in order to arrive at the truth, but in the final analysis we find that our truth is merely a pragmatic truth, it is never the absolute truth.¹³⁹

The position of Sri Aurobindo in the arguments above can only be mentioned superficially as a more complete elucidation of his views, beliefs and attitudes will become clearer in later chapters. He conveys his knowledge, which could possibly be only a conviction that the human mind at its present level of evolution is capable of only perceiving reality at the particular level it is at. This differs from person to person and from time to time for the same person. To know or perceive more is not a matter of a different mindset that is required, but to something that is principally different namely that of a different state of consciousness. In this different state one would strive towards higher understanding, requiring a search for a greater comprehension of whatever is, resulting in the expansion of the mind and perhaps the understanding of the limitations of thinking. And if, as is possible, one were to reach that domain of pure knowledge (actually the domain where we have the ability to access pure knowledge, as pure knowledge is in any case always available or present) which he states is beyond the intellect, then only are we in a position to garner new types of knowledge. What he said might be true or it might not be. But then, true for whom? It is obvious that it is true for him, and he further maintains that it could be true for the rest of humanity also. He specifically states that if a person develops his higher states of consciousness which is the domain of a superior consciousness, then the present reality of the intellectual level

¹³⁸ Hung, Edwin H.-C. *The Nature Of Science*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997, p. 23.

¹³⁹ Popper too asserted that the case for sensorial observation as being the basis for obtaining knowledge, is somewhat suspect. Rather, in *The World of Parmenides* p. 8 he argues that Western science started with bold theories about the world, *followed* by experimentation. The justification or validation of those theories of course is a different matter but that is not what we are concerned with now.

will not be supplanted but integrated into the new reality of such a person. The net result will be a more complete and comprehensive mode of being, perceiving and living.

What I am doing in this paragraph is raising questions about not only the pronouncements of Sri Aurobindo, but also his personal or subjective stance in making his statements. If his personal stance were that his statements are hypotheses or postulates, then he removes himself to quite a large degree from criticism and from the necessity of 'proof' for what he says. On the other hand, if his stance were that what he says is what he had experienced in higher states of consciousness and therefore is true, then his methodology of gaining knowledge and the veracity of both the methodology and of the knowledge is open to intense scrutiny and questioning. The fact is, he states categorically that this is what he had experienced in higher states of consciousness. He probably would have known that in making such statements as being statements of fact to an audience operating from the mental intellectual level, he could expect to be questioned but if he followed the mytho-poetic route and left all he said as postulates, he could reasonably expect to personally be dealt with much more leniently. As will become clearer in later chapters, he is quite aware that intellectuals deal in a, to him, limited and uncomprehending manner with matters outside the domain of their intellects, still using the intellect. As they had not yet developed any alternate mode of perceptual and comprehending faculty, and are totally reliant on only the mental level, he accepted that that is their reality and he certainly made no concessions in his work to accommodate them. He was not condescending, but their particular approach was simply not of any concern to him.

Regardless, our task still remains and whatever his views or convictions, the question should still be asked whether it is possible to deal with the work of Sri Aurobindo with falsification in mind. If the answer is yes, I believe that we will find ourselves in a quandary through lack of the necessary apparatus to evaluate what he said. We could find that it lies in the more abstract mythical field where nothing is really false. But if we do adhere to the approach of Popper, in order to find his falsification point, we should examine what Sri Aurobindo says regarding the framework of requirements that he lays down for this particular 'experiment' or 'theory', which framework is a fundamental prerequisite for any person in order to investigate what the relative merits are of what he said. The person inquiring into the theories of Sri Aurobindo should

operate on a level of higher states of consciousness, which level is beyond that of the intellect. That requirement is not unreasonable as it certainly falls within the paradigm of what he said and what we wish to test. The question then is: if we examine his work and we do not operate in higher states of consciousness, can we truly find a meaningful solution in our search to the limits of his particular theories or postulates? I believe the answer is no. Of course, we can decide not to accept Popper's approach, in which case we leave an unsatisfactory gap in the fabric of our search to understanding.

EINSTEIN

Einstein too, in keeping with the group, was totally accepting of the value of an intuition, as the following examples indicate. When special circumstances occur which falls outside an accepted paradigm, then "the potential for emergence of a new paradigm arise. The paradigm provides a lens, as it were, to focus intuition. It gives a set of criteria for what forms of theory are to be considered elegant, simple, economical, and beautiful. But its ultimate validity is metaphoric rather than rational or empirical. (Then) the necessary existence of a paradigm is explicitly acknowledged and thus the occurrence of a paradigm shift becomes rationally comprehensible rather than accidental or unpredictable."¹⁴⁰

"... Einstein is neither empiricist, rationalist, nor rational-empiricist. Nor is he any mere mystical intuition-ist, for he strongly insists on the necessity of both rational and empirical validation of truth claims. His final court of appeal, however, is intuition. Logic and experience play an indispensable role of support, but intuition is the cutting edge. The role of logic and experience is to help in selecting those intuitive combinations of precept and concept possessing the greatest degree of certainty."¹⁴¹

A further contribution by Einstein indicating both the uncertainty about the principles of gaining knowledge and the importance of the intuitive faculty could be in order. "(I)n a paper entitled "Principles of Research" delivered before the Physical Society in Berlin, he writes: The supreme task of the physicist is to arrive at those universal elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction. There is no logical path to these laws; only intuition, resting on sympathetic understanding of experience, can

¹⁴⁰ Ryan, Dennis P. ed., *Einstein and the Humanities*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987, p. 28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 19.

reach them. . . . But evolution has shown that at any given moment, out of all conceivable constructions, a single one has always proved itself absolutely superior to all the rest. Nobody who has really gone deeply into the matter will deny that in practice the world of phenomena uniquely determines the theoretical system, in spite of the fact that there is no logical bridge between phenomena and their theoretical principles; . . . Physicists often accuse epistemologists of not paying sufficient attention to this fact."¹⁴²

WHITEHEAD

The method of Whitehead in his *Process and Reality*¹⁴³ will be analysed and expanded to apply, or to see whether it can be made applicable, to Sri Aurobindo's approach. Here I am looking only at the relevant material regarding a particular definition of his and not at the contents of his work in *Process and Reality*.

Whitehead utilised a definition to define the philosophy he expounded in *Process and Reality*, which philosophy he termed "Speculative Philosophy". The reason he defined speculative philosophy was in order to defend it as a valid method that could produce important knowledge. Whitehead states, "speculative philosophy is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted." He proceeds to explain that by this notion of 'interpretation' he means that everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme. Therefore the philosophical scheme should be coherent, logical, and, in respect to its interpretation, applicable and adequate. Here 'applicable' means that some items of experience are thus interpretable, and 'adequate' means that there are no items incapable of such interpretation. Coherence, as here employed, means that the fundamental ideas, in terms of which the scheme is developed, presuppose each other so that in isolation they are meaningless. This requirement does not mean that they are definable in terms of each other; it means that what is indefinable in one such a notion cannot be extracted from its relevance to the other notions. It is the ideal of speculative philosophy that its fundamental notions shall not seem capable of abstraction from each other. In other words, it is presupposed that no entity can be conceived in complete

¹⁴² Schilpp, Paul Arthur., ed., *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*, La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1970, p. 401.

¹⁴³ Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 5.

abstraction from the system of the universe, and that it is the business of speculative philosophy to exhibit this truth; this character is its coherence.

Whitehead mentions the concept 'adequacy' of the scheme and says that what is required is that the texture of observed experience, in illustrating the philosophic scheme, is such that all related experience must exhibit the same texture. Thus the philosophic scheme should be 'necessary,' in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact. He says that what does not so communicate is unknowable, and the unknowable is unknown; and so this universality defined by 'communication' can suffice. This doctrine of necessity in universality means that there is an instance in the universe which forbids relationships beyond itself, as a violation of its rationality. Speculative philosophy seeks that essence.¹⁴⁴

Now, we should try to understand what basic approach Sri Aurobindo follows. The two approaches that come to mind are reproduction and construction. By that I mean the routes outlined in Buddhism where the Buddha experienced reality and that is what he taught, and on the other hand the approach found in the Mahayana which tend to be more of a speculative nature such as one would expect in the work of Whitehead, albeit done with skilful means. Both the criterion and justification for the speculative approach rest on the test whether it is existentially useful. In the beautiful analogy of the burning house, where the father wanted his children to leave but they were too engrossed in playing, he told them a lesser truth namely that he would give them toys outside. The greater truth was his concern for their welfare but he had to utilise the lesser existentially useful truth, namely the toys (which in the event they did receive) to get them out of the burning house.

In considering where to place Sri Aurobindo in the approaches above, I believe he fits within the first approach, namely that of the Buddha. He makes it abundantly clear that he taught what he experienced, and when he speculates about different alternatives when he writes, it is for the sole purpose of giving greater clarity to possibly obscure or contentious points, to not bluntly only present *his* truth but to intellectually investigate

¹⁴⁴ Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 6.

the possible alternatives. I believe this differs from the approach of Whitehead which could be used as the example of a speculative philosopher. Whitehead's speculation is undeniably very disciplined; he stated, "The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it lands again for renewed observation rendered acute by a rational interpretation."¹⁴⁵ The implication here is that in the main the observer remains on earth and whatever inspirations or insights he has or gets from the 'thin air of imagination', is viewed as speculation and is tested thoroughly and rationally. The context within which he arrived at his insights was through rational intellectual discovery. On the face of it these are the three steps that are also followed by Sri Aurobindo. However, there is one crucial difference and that is that Sri Aurobindo maintains that in his 'flight', the reality of the truth of the experiences that he observes is complete and absolute. After the completion of his 'flight' he is paradoxically still flying, still experiencing the truth that is only available during flight, and yet simultaneously he has landed and is dealing intellectually and analytically with the truth that he had observed. I would submit that the essential difference between Whitehead and Sri Aurobindo from their different pronouncements is that Whitehead gains the different partial insights which is dealt with rationally and intellectually after the occurrence thereof, whereas Sri Aurobindo's insights are complete and his rational and intellectual treatment thereof are concerned not so much with whether it is true, nor with the way in which this is to be presented in order to be understood by his audience. This interpretation is based on the fact that in the works and statements of Sri Aurobindo, he very clearly says that all his work is based on truth that he had actually experienced. His basic mode of gaining knowledge therefore is intuitive. According to him there is no speculation involved in his work at all. The effect of this statement is that an outside person cannot view his work as something that can be falsified, according to the approach of Popper. One could argue that there is no control over the veracity of his work, but I believe that this is only partially true. The reason for that is the fact that he states categorically that a person that develops his higher faculties or higher states of consciousness, will arrive at the same insights that he had arrived at. A parallel example comes to mind, namely that of Böhme. In his (Böhme's) mind there is no doubt as to what he had seen or experienced. Due to his lack of literary background

¹⁴⁵ Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. New York: The Free Press. 1969, p. 7.

and skills, he found it very difficult to convey the profound visions that he was privy to. This made him very difficult to understand. This is in contrast to the method that Bruno used in which logic was used to explain subtleties in a skilful manner. A person can understand what Bruno explains due to this skill that he exhibited. But all this does not detract from the fact that Böhme experienced what he did. There is nothing deficient regarding his experience; it is his communication thereof that could be less than perfect. In the case of Sri Aurobindo, it is easy to understand his writing even though the concepts that he puts forth are radical and otherworldly. Therefore, the only real test of his veracity can be done by the reader himself by following the instruction of Aurobindo, namely to develop his higher states of consciousness.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH OF SRI AUROBINDO

I believe that it is necessary at this stage to attempt to formulate and define the parameters of the philosophical approach of Sri Aurobindo. He deals in the main with abstract matters. His main interest is the framework of creation/emanation. He deals extensively with the realm of consciousness, and makes his postulates and conclusions based on observations or perceptions during experiences of higher states of consciousness that he had. At this point it is important to again state that Sri Aurobindo said that in developing higher states of consciousness, not only can that become an ever-present reality even in the waking state of consciousness, but also that that perpetual state is what he had experienced. All his insights and experiences took place in *his* mind, and it is impossible to objectively verify his insights and experiences, therefore to prove him wrong or a fraud (or right, for that matter). He states that to understand the realms that he writes about, one has to experience it oneself. The normal acceptable logical scientific rules of observation and evaluation of facts cannot be applied there, as it, according to him, requires the possession or development of higher states of consciousness to be able to do the verification. One might then reasonably ask whether Sri Aurobindo can make any statement however unrealistic, and 'get away with it'. Are the pronouncements of Sri Aurobindo now to be accepted as is without any scrutiny or criticism? I believe that that is not the case. I believe that we should still view his philosophical scheme according to the criteria of Whitehead as to its coherence, logic, applicability and adequacy. Until we actually experience it ourselves, there are questions that we simply cannot answer such as whether these higher states of

consciousness actually exist, further, whether they are the same for all people, and more specifically, whether any higher state of consciousness that I experience will give me the same insights that Sri Aurobindo had. The motivation for this argument is, seeing that I know that my waking state is different to yours, will my higher states be different to yours too? Or is the one relative to the person experiencing it (waking) a relative reality, and the other (higher states of consciousness) Absolute in its being and therefore universal in its reality? He gives no assurances that will withstand logical scrutiny. His descriptions of the reality in these different realms are unique, and again according to him, still fall short of the reality that he is describing. If this is the case, the question should be asked: is his a realistic theory of knowledge? Or is he busy expounding a mytho-poetic epistemology? Words apparently are inadequate conceptualisations of the supra-logical perceived reality. Yet he is still using words to convey his message. Does he require his audience to accept on faith the revolutionary revelations he presents, knowing full well that they cannot independently verify his statements, as they are not operating in higher states of consciousness? Even though Phillips takes him on very convincingly and persuasively in his *Aurobindo's philosophy of Brahman* as discussed under 'The Reception of Sri Aurobindo' in my MA dissertation,¹⁴⁶ I believe that that is not the case. The basic departure point of Phillips is that of a Western radical intellectual base. He embraces the scientific ideal, in using the objective tools of logic. For him, knowledge must be validated and empirical with the use of the intellect. Phillips uses as a basis the constructivist model in gaining knowledge about the experience of mysticism. The implication of this is that mystic experiences are structured by culture and belief. I submit that a shortcoming in this approach is the inability or the unwillingness of Phillips to follow the advice of Sri Aurobindo and to develop his innate abilities of experiencing higher states of consciousness. Then he too can speak authoritatively and then, if he so wishes, he can denounce the approach and conclusions of Sri Aurobindo.

In looking at the two sides of the argument, my personal conclusion regarding the validity of the knowledge that Sri Aurobindo is expounding is as follows. Sri Aurobindo is very clear in the statements in his books that whatever experience he had, is possible for every other person to also experience. For that to be the case, he presents the

¹⁴⁶ Barnard, A. G. *The Religious Ontology Of Shri Aurobindo*. M A dissertation, UNISA, 2004.

methodology that such a person should use for that experience. It is through the development of consciousness that all this knowledge that he is dealing with was obtained. This methodology he has set out in his system of integral yoga. It is also very clear that even though the supreme knowledge is to be gained in higher states of consciousness, the intellect should still be developed and has an important place and role to play in our development. It is not that the intellect as it is now is not important; it is just that it is not adequate to deal with matters which are beyond its capabilities namely that of supra-intellectual material. The mere fact that it is supra-intellectual and that we are used to dealing with matters on an intellectual level, does not preclude us from understanding his philosophy or even from experiencing it, using the correct methodology as stated above. I would argue that if we (and Phillips for that matter) really were serious about gaining this type of knowledge, then we simply have to master the prerequisite technical expertise for us to succeed. I find the argument that everything can be understood using the logical intellectual approach, and therefore it is not necessary to develop any other or further abilities, rather inadequate. The parallel that I can draw is between our experience of gaining knowledge in the dream and in the waking state, where a person in the dream state is told that further and more superior knowledge is to be obtained in the waking state, the only prerequisite being that he has to operate in the waking state. If he refuses this instruction based upon arguments applicable to the reality of the dream state, then it must be obvious to us operating in the waking state that, however valid his arguments are in his lower (dream) state, he simply cannot experience nor, talk authoritatively about, the reality of the knowledge of the waking state. What remains for us is to proceed with the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo within the cautionary constraints of Popper and Whitehead.

The following factors relevant to my thesis are some of the issues to bear in mind when considering the epistemology of Sri Aurobindo from a religious studies perspective.

1. The study of Sri Aurobindo is based mainly on the extensive original research material available and produced by him, and in addition the further secondary sources that came to hand. I need that to interpret him factually and empathetically. To this end, he rendered me a great deal of assistance in that he left me a wealth of material in English that he wrote himself, the meaning of which had not been changed by translations and interpretations. I have made extensive use of his major

works, *The Life Divine*, *Letters on Yoga* and *Synthesis of Yoga*, and to a lesser degree of his other works. Almost all his various books appeared in serial form in a monthly publication named *Arya*, from 15th August 1914 until 1922. This publication was written, edited and published by Sri Aurobindo. As mentioned above, he stated that he obtained his knowledge and insights while experiencing higher states of consciousness, which condition became a permanent reality to him after Lele instructed him, which means that his higher states of consciousness was experienced also during his waking, dream and sleep states of consciousness. Lele was a Yogi skilled in the art of meditation, which art he taught Sri Aurobindo. It is an interesting fact that Sri Aurobindo did not want to learn this meditative technique to escape from this world into the world of the spirit, but he believed that in gaining this ability, he would be more successful in his daily life and in his main purpose for living which he believed to be the gaining of political freedom for India from England. After mastering the art of meditation within three days, he experienced the reality that the subtler world of the spirit is actually the base of our material existence on earth. It is apparent from his works that this knowledge of the relationship between the gross and the subtler was not the results of intellectual analysis and reasoning but of direct intuitive perception of Reality.

- 1.1. Sri Aurobindo denies being a philosopher. He arrived at writing and thinking about matters that we can call his philosophy initially from the background of a scholar and a politician, and eventually from a mystic perspective. But whether he sees himself as a philosopher is immaterial in that here we are dealing only with a definition of what the nature is of the body of knowledge that he left us.
- 1.2. He was a teacher in the sense that he gave out knowledge, initially to a selected group of readers of his "Arya", later to the community in his ashram and still later to a worldwide audience of people that obtained and read his books.
- 1.3. He taught his system of 'Integral Yoga' at his ashram as a methodology towards higher states of consciousness. Obviously being taught personally is the best way but he later wrote that a disciple only has to rely on the Divine. One could do the Integral Yoga without instruction by a master simply by relying on the

inner Divinity.¹⁴⁷ The Guru is the fount of wisdom, and the gateway to evolution to higher states of consciousness and this Guru, according to Sri Aurobindo, is inherent and involved in every human being.

1.4. He makes it clear that the way in which he obtained his knowledge was through a process of internal growth of consciousness and not through a process of reasoning, as the quotes at the beginning of this chapter show. It is through an opening to a higher consciousness, through the intuitive faculty that this can take place. Sri Aurobindo described his own process as having a silent mind and simply opening to a "higher" consciousness.¹⁴⁸

As to these higher states of consciousness, he categorically stated, "(t)hese are obviously divine and, as man is *at present* (cursive mine) apparently constituted, superhuman states of consciousness and activity."¹⁴⁹

In the evolution of consciousness a person finds that "(b)y this intuition he stands upon the threshold of a subliminal self with a more extended possibility than this superficial mentality (which) 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."¹⁵⁰ The use of the word "intuition" (defined in Webster's as "the direct knowing or learning of something without the conscious use of reasoning; immediate understanding") implies that no mental or intellectual exercise is used for attaining knowledge. Philosophy is not unaware of the existence of intuition. Spinoza (1632-1677) postulated that intuition is a faculty of great importance in that it is a way of knowing ultimate truth. He mentions that in addition to opinion or imagination and reason, a third kind of knowledge exists, the intuition. (PROP. XL). He then argued that this is the vehicle to use in order to know God because he "who has an adequate idea or knows a thing truly" is in a position to " ... add that our mind, in so far as it perceives things truly, (which) is part of the infinite intellect of God (II. xi. Coroll.); therefore, the clear and distinct ideas of the mind are as necessarily true as the ideas of God. (PROP.

¹⁴⁷ Email correspondence with Dr Don Salmon, May 29, 2004.

¹⁴⁸ Chapter on *A Life Sketch*, Volume 30. [SABCL], p. 157.

¹⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 23-24 [CWSA], p. 17.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 634.

XLIII)."¹⁵¹ Bergson (1859-1941) outlines distinctively the mode of operation, problematic and task of the mystic. Having mystic experiences is not essentially due to a desire or effort. They just cannot help it. "True mystics simply open their souls to the oncoming wave."¹⁵² He dealt with the difficulties of communication experienced by the mystic and says, "...how could the conviction derived from an experience be handed down by speech? And, above all, how could the inexpressible be expressed?"¹⁵³ He indicated the, if not superiority, then difference between the life created by the intellect and that of a mystic intuition. He states that "Joy indeed would be that simplicity of life diffused throughout the world by an ever-spreading mystic intuition; joy, too, that which would automatically follow a vision of the life beyond (and presumably superior to) attained through the furtherance of scientific experiment."¹⁵⁴ His teleological vision of earth requires of man " ... to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods."¹⁵⁵ Despite the apparent difference regarding the causative nature of experiencing higher states of consciousness between the position of Bergson (not essentially due to a desire or effort) and that of Sri Aurobindo (development using yogic techniques), I believe that what Bergson says is correct in the main. There certainly are instances of people experiencing higher states of consciousness spontaneously. But there are also people that develop their mystic abilities through desire and effort, and having mystic experiences for them would be essentially due to the effort they expended. This for instance would be the case of people practicing the integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. But this small qualification of Bergson's work does not change or challenge the essence of his contentions.

Knowledge is different in different states of consciousness. (From our normal experiences, sleep – nothingness, dream – illusion, waking – logical thoughts.

The same argument applies to higher states of consciousness but is dealt with in

¹⁵¹ Benedict de Spinoza *The Ethics. (Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata)* Translated from the Latin by R. H. M. Elwes. E-text Gutenberg Project, p. 60.

¹⁵² Bergson, Henri. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books. 1935, p. 99.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p. 233.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 317.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 317.

chapter 6). According to Sri Aurobindo, all the different states of consciousness are part of the potential of man, and consequently accessible to a human through development using yogic techniques. Sri Aurobindo asserts that intuition is "a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate than the lower ranges of spiritual mind to the original knowledge by identity; it gets the Truth in flashes and turns these flashes of Truth-perception into intuitions - intuitive ideas. Intuition is always an edge or ray or outleap of a superior light. What is thought-knowledge in the Higher Mind becomes illumination in the Illumined Mind and direct intimate vision in the Intuition."¹⁵⁶ The intuitive knowledge of these subtle regions is the knowledge that he puts forth in his writings.

To convey definite knowledge of exactly what is perceived at these higher levels is difficult. I believe that neither he in his pronouncements nor we in our critical evaluation thereof can communicate successfully unless we establish a criteriology of 'truth'. Some of the more important elements to be considered would be under four headings, the first including coherence, consistency, logical nature, the second simplicity, its aesthetic nature, the third the degree of integration with, and comprehensiveness of, existing thinking of mysticism as well as Hinduism, and the fourth the criteria relating to the implication of the requirement of integration, covering the facts relating to the subject by both extension and intention. To the question whether, when we apply the above to the writings of Sri Aurobindo, what he says is valid and whether he supplies any final proof, the answer must be no. It can only be valid and proven to a degree which is determined largely by the individual makeup, knowledge and background of the reader. This however should not obviate the necessity for rationality in evaluation of his views.¹⁵⁷ This approach would induce a degree of criticality to the examination of his work, which, if it were of a superior nature, would highlight that fact.

Sri Aurobindo says that intuition is a tool or vehicle whereby knowledge from the higher levels of consciousness, which he postulated, can be obtained. When such intuitions appear in the mind, the normal human mind (which is more

¹⁵⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volumes 22-24 [SABCL], p. 1154.

¹⁵⁷ Krüger, J. S. *Along Edges*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. 1995, p. 108.

limited than Mind in higher states of consciousness) as a rule interprets the knowledge with the result that this knowledge loses its comprehensive clarity and completeness. Behind all original thinking there is a veiled intuitive element which establishes a connection between the normal mind of a human being and the superior spirit-ranges. He maintains that the phenomenon of genius is simply such a penetration of the mind into these higher ranges and this is the field of mystic and spiritual experience which extends our consciousness beyond its present limits.¹⁵⁸

1.4.1. The question should be asked regarding the nature of intuition as used by Sri Aurobindo. Were his intuitions pure perceptions of truth in the absolute or do they only constitute mere claims that we have no way of either verifying or falsifying? Considering this vexing problem from the intellectual level, we would have to measure this by the four criteria mentioned above. I would argue that we should accept the apparently strange nature of intuition. In chapter 6 the interrelationship of different states of consciousness and specifically the relationship of intuition and the waking state according to Sri Aurobindo is commented on in greater depth. From the point of view of the waking state, it (intuition) differs from the intellect in that it seems not to arrive at knowledge through a reasoning process. Its nature is different, it operates in the advanced regions of consciousness which is above that of mind, as has been postulated by Sri Aurobindo, and it is a type of unitary reality, of which the true and final understanding for an individual can only come about through the development of the intuitive faculty in that individual. Therefore, if we cannot by definition analyse the intuitive faculty using the intellect, we should perhaps rather analyse the results of intuitive perception. Firstly, are the results coherent, consistent and logical? To this I would say yes, as is clear from the works of Sri Aurobindo. Secondly, does his work possess simplicity and an aesthetic nature? Again yes, for the same reason. Thirdly, the degree of integration with existing thinking on mysticism in his work is extensive; this has become clear in the parallel nature of what

¹⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 274.

he says and of the convictions and teachings of the mystics mentioned in chapter 1 as well as in the long tradition of mysticism in Hinduism. Lastly, does it cover the facts regarding mysticism by both extension and intention? I would say yes, again as is evident in Sri Aurobindo's writing. We will encounter detailed corroboration of these different statements in the later chapters of this thesis.

- 1.4.2. For Sri Aurobindo the intellect and the related thinking process are very important. It is important to see and understand the views of Sri Aurobindo on the subject of thought, firstly to pacify if possible the doubts that might exist as to the nature of his thinking and gaining knowledge, and secondly to understand the paradigm within which the ontology of his views on thought are cast.

We gain knowledge through having thoughts, and for him the type of knowledge that we wish to gain determines the way in which we should think. The status or quality of intuitive knowledge is based on a supramental realisation which "is prepared by mental representations through various mental principles in us and once attained again reflects itself more perfectly in all the members of the being."¹⁵⁹ This is a deep and thorough going exercise in that he views this "as a re-seeing and therefore a remoulding of our whole existence in the light of the Divine and One and Eternal free from subjection to the appearances of things and the externalities of our superficial being."¹⁶⁰ Thinking is therefore an evolutionary exercise that transcends the relative and remoulds and redirects life towards divinity. In this process there are two stages, firstly for the soul and its instruments, to prepare for such a change and the other is the actual illumination and realisation of this prepared soul. These two aspects proceed apace. The preparation stage is necessary for the purification of our whole being and especially relevant, in connection with the path of knowledge, is the purification of the understanding. Not only the mind is involved in this exercise, as other members such as the heart,

¹⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 308.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 308.

and other aspects such as life, can "confuse the understanding, disturb its data, distort its conclusions, darken its seeing, misapply its knowledge; an unpurified physical system clogs or chokes up its action."¹⁶¹ This results in the production of knowledge that is impure and of an inferior quality.

There is now a necessity for an integral purity in order to obtain pure knowledge. The meaning of understanding and its pure operation is tied to the Sanskrit philosophical term *buddhi* (the discriminating principle or the intellect). The initial aspect of this *buddhi* is that it initiates an action that is higher than is normal for the sense mind which normally only records perceptions, be they right or wrong, true or mere illusory phenomena. However useful this type of mental activity had been in the transition from animal to man, it is still an inferior mode of gaining knowledge. The type of understanding that Sri Aurobindo is striving for here is an understanding "which at once perceives, judges and discriminates, the true reason of the human being not subservient to the senses, to desire or to the blind force of habit, but working in its own right for mastery, for knowledge."¹⁶² In this process and to gain the purity it aspires to, one should be free of this lower mode of perception in order to perceive the pure aspects of an object, "and observe disinterestedly, put it in its right place in the whole by force of comparison, contrast, analogy, reason from its rightly observed data by deduction, induction, inference and holding all its gains in memory and supplementing them by a chastened and rightly-guided imagination view all in the light of a trained and disciplined judgment."¹⁶³ For Sri Aurobindo, this is the way in which the pure intellectual understanding should operate; to repeat, he mentions the somewhat reassuring qualities of amongst others "disinterested observation, judgment and reasoning" in his gaining his knowledge.

On a higher level, the *buddhi* is also at work. The initial intellectual understanding is only the operation of the lower *buddhi*; the "higher *buddhi*

¹⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 309.

¹⁶² Ibid, p. 310.

¹⁶³ Ibid, p. 310-311.

which is not intelligence but vision, is not understanding but rather an over-
 standing in knowledge, and does not seek knowledge and attain it in
 subjection to the data it observes but possesses already the truth and brings
 it out in the terms of a revelatory and intuitional thought."¹⁶⁴ For this to be
 attained, the evolution of the human being is essential. The human mind
 occasionally glimpses this truth-conscious knowledge imperfectly under
 unusual circumstances of great and unusual stress which then "admits a
 considerable instreaming from the intuitive and inspired faculty of
 knowledge."¹⁶⁵ This is possible because there is an intuitive mind in man
 which can receive these inflows from a supramental faculty. These
 experiences of intuition and inspiration are both imperfect and intermittent.
 For perfection we need a great deal more, as the intuitive experiences of an
 inferior nature are easily tainted. This is so because only extreme efforts of
 the heart or intellect will produce these initial intuitions. And because the
 desire comes from the heart or intellect, then, even before we experience it
 on a conscious level, the thought or aspiration put out to generate them
 renders them impure in that it (the thought) is changed to meet the needs of
 its originating impulse namely the heart or intellect. Furthermore, once
 received by the conscious mind, the intellectual understanding proceeds to
 break up the perception in order to fit it within our imperfect intellectual
 knowledge, or else it is remoulded by the heart to suit our blind emotional
 longings and preferences, or even worse, it is subjected to, and distorted by,
 the lower cravings for the use of our hungers and passions.

To give pure forms of the truth, it is necessary for this higher *buddhi* to act
 free from the lower aspects of being human. The result of this type of
 freedom of the *buddhi* is that vision would replace observation and thus
 moving away from the importance and dependence of the sense-mind and
 senses, the self-assured inspiration of the truth would replace imagination,
 and an intuition which will spontaneously perceive relations would
 supersede reasoning. The meaning of memory would under these more
 ideal circumstances again become the all-recording knowledge which holds

¹⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 311.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 311.

within itself and gives from itself everything that we now seem to acquire with difficulty. This for instance will include the ability to practice *Siddhis* (extraordinary or occult powers), such as to know the future in addition to the past. This is the potential that we have inherent in us and now, even though we have not yet realised it.

Our intuitive mind is part of the intuitive faculty or domain in the range of higher states of consciousness. They all form one holism whereas under the reality we created in our dualistic state, we view things as being 'out there' or as 'in here'.¹⁶⁶ The intellect is that body that deals with thoughts in its total variety, and on its different levels. The value of the intellect depends purely on its ability to deal with what it has, and this dealing is related to the extending of the aspects or components of the thought. The only extension possible is to relate that to other realities or, more accurately, to other thoughts of realities. This action is also the definition of intelligence, the ability to perceive relationships. The intellect does not create in any other way but by handling or manipulating what has already been created.

With growth we will be able to achieve this status, giving us an understanding that is a "perfectly flexible, entire and faultless instrument of intellectual thought and being free from the inferior sources of obstruction and distortion (which) would be capable of as true and complete a perception of the truths of the Self and the universe as the intellect can attain. But for real knowledge something more is necessary, since real knowledge is by our very definition of it supra-intellectual. In order that the understanding may not interfere with our attainment to real knowledge, we have to reach to that something more and cultivate a power exceedingly difficult for the active intellectual thinker and distasteful to his proclivities, the power of intellectual passivity."¹⁶⁷ This type of intellectual thinking is so because for Sri Aurobindo, intellectual thought is in itself not the highest thinking and therefore inadequate. This highest is something else which comes through the intuitive mind and from the supramental faculty. The

¹⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 23-24. [CWSA], p. 311.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 316.

lower intellectual processes that we are dominated by causes the messages which the intuitive mind sends us subconsciously, to be the subject of distortion to a greater or lesser extent before we receive it in the conscious mind. Very rarely is this sent consciously, and then it is done imperfectly. For a strong higher knowledge-faculty in us we have the difficult task to separate the intuitive and intellectual elements of our thought. The procedure "is to train first the intellect to recognise the true intuition, ... (and) when it arrives at an intellectual perception or conclusion, to attach no final value to it, but rather (to) look upward, refer all to the divine principle and wait in as complete a silence as it can command for the light from above. In this way it is possible to transmute a great part of our intellectual thinking into the luminous truth-conscious vision, — the ideal would be a complete transition, — or at least to increase greatly the frequency, purity and conscious force of the ideal knowledge working behind the intellect. The latter must learn to be subject and passive to the ideal faculty."¹⁶⁸

To gain the knowledge of the Self, we should develop the power of a complete intellectual passivity, which includes the ability to dismiss all thought. This "power of silence is a capacity and not an incapacity, a power and not a weakness. It is a profound and pregnant stillness. Only when the mind is thus entirely still, like clear, motionless and level water, in a perfect purity and peace of the whole being and the soul transcends thought, can the Self which exceeds and originates all activities and becomings, the Silence from which all words are born, the Absolute of which all relativities are partial reflections manifest itself in the pure essence of our being. In a complete silence only is the Silence heard; in a pure peace only is its Being revealed. Therefore to us the name of That is the Silence and the Peace."¹⁶⁹

1.4.3. The way the intellect operates is by manipulating existing and already created material. In order to explain his thinking he made the following

¹⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21 [SABCL], p. 316

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 316.

statement: "European metaphysical thought—even in those thinkers who try to prove or explain the existence and nature of God or of the Absolute—does not in its method and result go beyond the intellect. But the intellect is incapable of knowing the supreme Truth; it can only range about seeking for Truth, and catching fragmentary representations of it, not the thing itself, and trying to piece them together. Mind cannot arrive at Truth; it can only make some constructed figure that tries to represent it or a combination of figures."¹⁷⁰ It is not at all clear exactly which European metaphysical thought he is referring to, but I would certainly argue that his contention in this quotation is incorrect as it is not representative of the truth of 'European metaphysical thought'; we have already supplied an ample number of mystical thinkers in chapter 1 to which this statement could scarcely be applicable. However clumsy his method, the thrust of his thinking here is to make clear the limitations to which the logical thinking mind is subjected. This message could leave us in a quandary as we have only the mind to gain insight into these higher regions and now we are told that this mind is inadequate for that purpose. His response to that could well be that the only way out of this impasse is to develop these higher faculties, primarily the intuitive faculty.

1.5. We should now turn to the matter of his objectivity which for a number of reasons can be argued to be doubtful. In *The Life Divine* each chapter starts with quotes from the holy Hindu books. The names of the superior beings, for lack of a better term, that he uses are of Hindu origin, such as Brahman, Lord Krishna etc. Now, does he write as a universal man, as an Anglicised Indian, as an Indian, or as a Hindu? Is what he is saying Absolute, or to what degree was he influenced by the poise of a specific type of human being (Anglicised Indian etc.) that he represented? Can one seriously accept that despite these objections, he is a presenter of truth and not a sectarian spokesman or, worse, fanatic? What becomes clear in reading *The Life Divine* is his intense passion in expressing his thoughts and insights, and his apparent unconcern for acceptance. He writes in a complex way with the intention of conveying his

¹⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 157.

message. His prose appears as a harmonious convincing overwhelming flow of thought, with him often using complex sentences and several similar descriptive words grouped together to portray that what he wants to communicate. An arbitrary example will illustrate the point; this sentence was chosen by opening *The Life Divine* at random, but is strangely applicable to our work here to illustrate not only how he says things, but also what he says:

"For the essence of consciousness is the power to be aware of itself and its objects, and in its true nature this power must be direct, self-fulfilled and complete: if it is in us indirect, incomplete, unfulfilled in its workings, dependent on constructed instruments, it is because consciousness here is emerging from an original veiling Inconscience and is yet burdened and enveloped with the first Nescience proper to the Inconscient; but it must have the power to emerge completely, its destiny must be to evolve into its own perfection which is its true nature."¹⁷¹

One could possibly raise the criticism, in reading the above paragraph, that he did not want to communicate clearly in order to safeguard him from criticism or even from being understood. However, another reading or two of this paragraph reveals its clarity, its depth and its being wherewith our initial reservations are appeased.

Another remarkable point is that even though all his major works were all written over a period of eight years, there is a noteworthy internal coherence and consistency in the body of thought that he presents. Now, we could reflect on why his views did not change over that period. Did he *wish* to remain consistent, or could he not help it, was it in fact true that he did see the All originally and continued to access and mine that never-changing and multifarious source? One could argue that surely a person changes over time and so does his perception,

¹⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 1017.

yet in his case what was intimated in the first chapters of *The Life Divine* for instance, accords with the last chapters.

Based on this I would argue that it is quite possible that he did in fact experience what he said he did, and that he simply and truthfully recorded an integrated framework of knowledge in his writings. And this was done in a clear coherent fashion. Even so, caution could well be in order as more than one guru has before now made claims that could only be accepted or rejected. We are furthermore presented with the problem of "Truth for whom". From what I have read it appears that Sri Aurobindo seems to write in order to explain and not to convert. It is probably a situation of the truth for him; his audience receives information only, until such time as they internalise this and make it *their* truth. These different and difficult questions should be asked, even if we know it to be possibly futile, with no answers forthcoming. But by asking, dormant fields may become awake and insights can dawn from hitherto not thought-of sources or angles.

- 1.6. He stated that he wanted to establish the use of his concept of integral yoga, as that would allow an individual to evolve in the fastest most effortless manner back to his source, Brahman, and not to start a new religion, as the following quote indicates: "I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion, new or old, for humanity in the future."¹⁷² Such a knowledge base would simply be a framework for his philosophy and by establishing a religion, it would become corrupted in a short space of time. But is religion not exactly its core set of values, in his case that of integral yoga, and is it not a fact that those values have its original reality in the mind of the author thereof, and that never can the values of the author and the disciple become identical, except within varying approximate ranges? Should therefore his philosophy not be viewed as a religion? Are we perhaps dealing with a meta-religion, where the intentions are sublime and noble yet doomed to failure in achieving its high aspirations? Perhaps the reality is, as is the case with all other religions, that with some exceptional individuals he will achieve his high esoteric aspirations,

¹⁷² Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-23-24. [SABCL], p. 139.

but the mass of his followers will be identical to the mass of the adherents of any of the other religions, operating mainly on a superficial level.

1.7. I now must deal with my task of understanding him. Attaining a pretheoretical comprehension of Sri Aurobindo, I must understand him and his work.¹⁷³ It is my duty to understand him as best I can, and when I look at my intention to understand what he is telling me, I am thrown back upon myself and on my ability to understand. Understanding comes in varying degrees of depth and despite my best intentions, my understanding will be partial and unique to me. This is my personal understanding of him. In looking at his work in a scholarly way, one can gain a theoretical understanding of him and his philosophy based on the discipline of the academic approach. So, even though I believe that it is true that to understand another person perfectly is impossible, it is still possible to gain a great deal of understanding of such a person using the above approach. For perfect understanding, one should ideally become that person at the time when he wrote his philosophy. So now I understand him and his thinking. This is good for now, but then the problem arises with both him and his philosophy subtly changing continually, even if it is very little. My understanding of the present or the future him will thus be incomplete. However, that does not change my duty, I still have to see his world, his universe, however it shifts, to the best of my ability. I must therefore be aware of both my deliberate intentions that I can control and of the involuntary hidden facets of my being that can so powerfully influence my mode and degree of understanding. Apart from talking to him personally, I have the purest form of information available in that I can read the work of Sri Aurobindo in its original language, English, and it is thus not suffering from the possible drawbacks of translations and interpretations. In performing this task I am accepting the social responsibility of presenting and to a degree interpreting the work of Sri Aurobindo. It is therefore my human abilities or lack thereof that will determine the degree of my success. It will be coloured by the depth of the dialogue we can have and by my ability to understand his mystical existential reality.

1.7.1. We can distinguish three kinds of pretheoretical understanding:

¹⁷³ Krüger, J. S. *Along Edges*. Pretoria: University of South Africa. 1995, p. 90f.

1.7.1.1. Existential understanding, where there is a close relationship between me and the philosophy or philosopher I am dealing with. There is a commitment of "this is mine, this is how I think and feel". This of course is the ideal type of understanding, this is probably how all of life, all of this universe should be dealt with, as this is our life, this is our universe, we should just "realise". Despite this ideal state we strive for, I have to ask myself to what degree do I understand him? The standard set here is very high. To be successful at this, there should be a melding of two minds, and in real life this happens very seldom if at all. So, in fact, I know that to a degree I will be misrepresenting him.

1.7.1.2. The next kind is a weaker form of understanding, that of an insider or a participant where one has sufficient insight and knowledge of the subject to get around comfortably, one is accepted but not committed to, or a member of the group. Here one can play a role in the group and be accepted by the group as an interested and sympathetic outsider.

1.7.1.3. The last type is that of an outsider's understanding, where the words and concepts are read, heard, and understood, not their, but my way. To a degree, there is a lack of empathy and consequently a limitation on the degree of understanding one can attain under these circumstances.

As to the form applicable to me, however much I wish perfect understanding, it is fluid, and it probably ranges over all the above three with a leaning towards the first one. This is due to my own personal background in the field that Sri Aurobindo deals with. My qualification to be in the second group is due to the fact that I am not a member. Regarding the third group, because of my human nature to hear and interpret things my way, which is a relative and not an absolute way, I qualify for membership there as well.

2. Patterns generally are created by the connection of lines that are present within a situation or a system. Seeing of patterns is essential to understand a system and in the formulation and designing of a theory in science generally, and in religious

studies in particular. Here it is necessary to theorise in order to make sense of a world that has so many conflicting aspects, from the very positive to the extremes of negativity. Only then can one integrate all those aspects in a comprehensible class, enabling one to transcend those aspects that are unacceptable and negative. Sri Aurobindo does create such a theoretical framework which orders the data in a way that reveals the connections or patterns that otherwise would remain concealed. By doing that, what is inherent but either inaccessible or incomprehensible in a jumble of data can be decoded in such a way that understanding, which gives explanations of the field under study, is gained. He presents such a wealth of information with a vast range of aspects that one can get lost in the complexities of his work. However, by keeping in mind and integrating the different components present in his work, what eventually presents itself is a totally understandable and illuminating cosmology that not only presents previously unthought questions, but also answers them in an aesthetic and intellectually pleasing manner.

My reading of him revealed a disciplined framework of a coherent universal vision. Two questions come up here; why can I make that statement about the nature of his vision, and what is his vision? This is the work that will be dealt with in the further chapters of this thesis. I have indicated above some of the criteria to be used in dealing with his philosophy, and I am aware that there are or will be exceptions in the evaluation based on that criteria. I am also aware that the interpretation of his work by different people will differ from person to person. However, the ideal of having one full complete body of knowledge of any person or subject is not attainable for normal people using the arguably both different and limited intellectual capabilities that they have. Until this basic situation changes, we had to contend with the present realities of gaining knowledge that we live in.

Chapter 3

INVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

"The experiment of human life on an earth is not now for the first time enacted. It has been conducted a million times before and the long drama will again a million times be repeated."^{174,175}

1. OUTLINE OF THE INVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION PROCESS

For Sri Aurobindo, the dimensions of what is are contained within his philosophy. It is broad-based, detailed and comprehensive.¹⁷⁶ The importance of a philosophy, especially such a broad one, according to Dr Albert Schweitzer is that: '... all human progress depends on progress in its theory of the universe, whilst, conversely, decadence is conditioned by a similar decadence in this theory. Our loss of real civilization is due to our lack of a theory of the universe...'¹⁷⁷ Of course, we could have many theories of the universe but what is important is that these theories must be radical enough, basic and comprehensive enough to explain and to form the basis for an understanding that will be as complete as our intellects can comprehend. Even more is required of our theory: it must be ahead of our current understanding and as we develop must be able to remain a valid framework for deeper intuitive knowledge when we

¹⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 141.

¹⁷⁵ If this creation/emanation process has taken place before, the question is why does it keep on taking place? One answer is given in the principle of *Pralaya*. This "doctrine of *pralaya* (the end of the cycle of aeons; temporary disintegration of a universal form of existence and all the individual forms which move in its rounds) accepted by all the Hindu systems except the *Mimamsa*. According to the *Nyaya-Vaisesika* view *Isvara* wishing to give some respite or rest to all living beings desires to bring about dissolution. Simultaneously with it the *adrsta* (the unseen thing, fate) force residing in all the souls and forming bodies, senses, and the gross elements, ceases to act. As a result of this no further bodies, senses, or other products come into being. Then for the bringing about of the dissolution of all produced things (by the desire of *Isvara*) the separation of the atoms commences and thus all combinations as bodies or senses are disintegrated." From Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963.

¹⁷⁶ Throughout time there has been different ways in which the process of creation/emanation had been interpreted. In the Vedas the "creation of the world itself was even regarded as the fruit of a sacrifice performed by the supreme Being. It exists as Haug says 'as an invisible thing at all times and is like the latent power of electricity in an electrifying machine, requiring only the operation of a suitable apparatus in order to be elicited.'" From Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963.

¹⁷⁷ Schweitzer, Albert. *The Philosophy Of Civilisation*. London: A. & C. Black. 1950, p. xii.

transcend that limited intellectual understanding.¹⁷⁸ These are those haunting moments of understanding where we grasp the deeper more profound truth but not with the reasoning faculty. The quotes of Descartes, Popper, Einstein, Whitehead and Bergson in chapter two are examples of this insight.

For an understanding of the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, we should consider in outline the ontology of being and the hierarchical view of consciousness that he proposes. In his cosmology he deals with the origins and destiny of creation. He uses the word creation without necessarily the same accent with which this word is normally associated, but to correct that we can readily substitute the word emanation. Sri Aurobindo made out a case for an emanation process, which consists of a cycle of involution and evolution. In this paragraph we present an introductory outline of the different parts of this process, the details of which are dealt with more fully in later chapters. This cycle originates from "The One", which is the ultimate unnamable, the infinite causeless cause, and the unmanifest source of all. The cycle consists of two stages, that of the involution or downward phase and that of the evolution or the return phase to the origin. All the different levels blend into each other in a timeless and spaceless manner; it represents a holism at a certain high level. On a different more individual level, each level simply represents a particular emphasis of all that is, but on what one could call a localised level. What we encounter is not the whole, it has a separate being, characteristics, purpose, mode of operation, yet, by looking deeper we understand that what went before in a timeless way and what follows is also present in that one particular level.

The involution stage starts with "The One" which is in a non-dual state, and spawns firstly Sachchidananda and later different further and more 'tangible' facets of consciousness which then acts in slight but increasing levels of virtual duality.

¹⁷⁸ Whether he is correct or not is not relevant for the moment, but the way Kingsley interprets the fragments of the poem of Parmenides, weighing the apparent meaning of the words in his poem and when found wanting, ignoring them and substituting it with a deeper and more comprehensive insightful meaning gives an indication of what I mean. For Kingsley, Parmenides was the one philosopher who taught the original reality of logic. The word logic is based on the Greek logos and is thought of as constituting the controlling principle of the universe and as being manifested by speech. For Kingsley logic is not what he considers the limited present-day logic, it is a serious affair that one cannot approach in a superficial way: it is a means to supreme knowledge and for us to gain that, requires us to be committed not only with our intellect, but with the whole of our being. We will understand only to the degree that we have committed ourselves. And with that I concur. Kingsley, Peter. *Reality*. Inverness, CA.: The Golden Sufi Center. 2003.

The Involution/Evolution Cycle

"The One":

- The Ultimate Source of All

Sachchidananda:

- Facet separate from yet one with "The One"

Supermind:

- Knowledge and clarity of a non-dual nature, with no divisions or separations

Overmind:

- Site of the light of the supramental gnosis

Intuitive Mind:

- Akin to original knowledge by identity

Illumined Mind:

- Mainly involved with spiritual light and knowledge

Higher Mind:

- Spontaneous powerful clear knowledge

Mind:

- Knowledge through logic and reasoning

Life:

- Low consciousness animate stage

Matter:

- Most dense form of Involution and Evolution

Inconscious:

- Total Nihil filled with all the potential of Sachchidananda

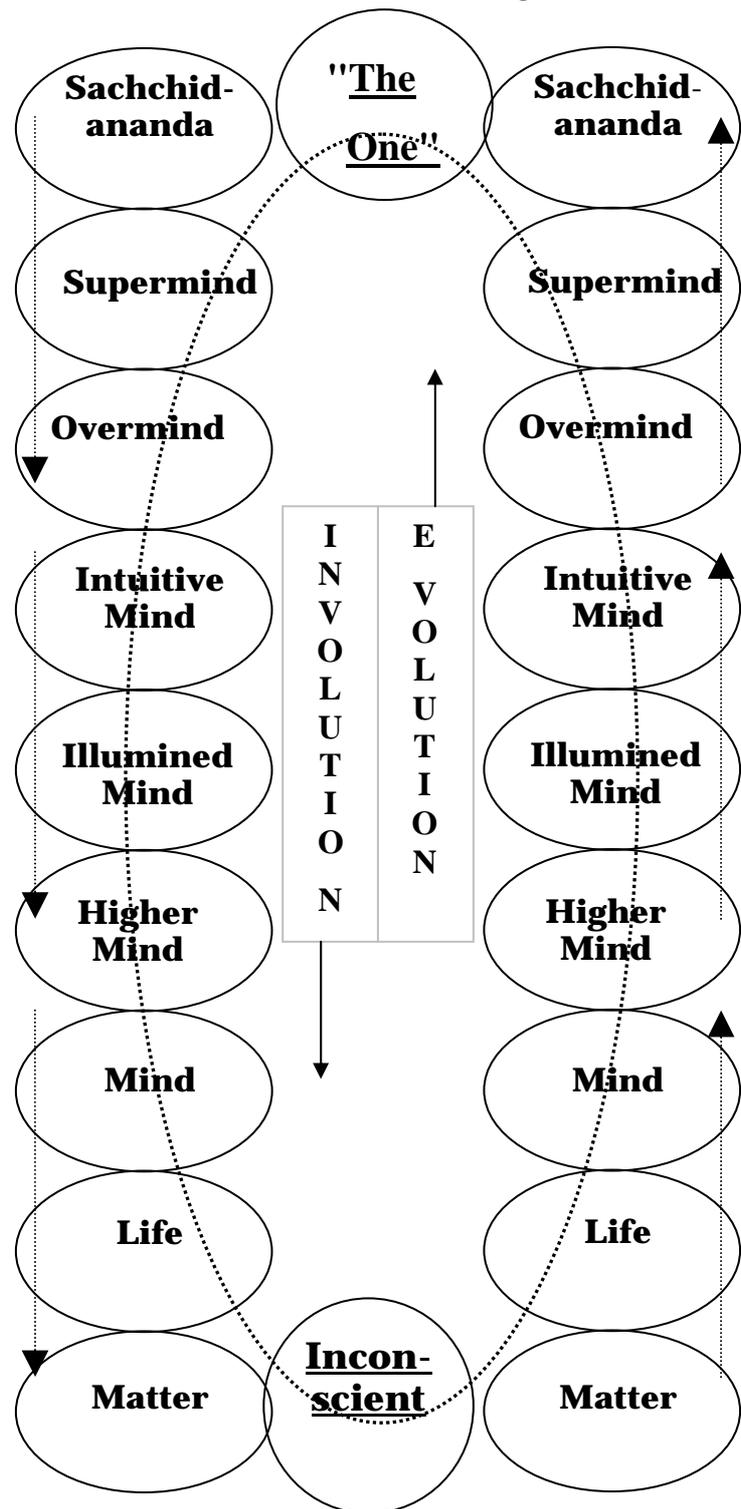


Figure 1

Virtual duality because it is not the complete original non-dual reality, and virtual because it is not yet the reality of the lower levels of evolution where complete duality exists. The salient characteristic of Sachchidananda¹⁷⁹ is that of unity with "The One", in the sense of a facet of a diamond being both a part and not a part of the diamond.¹⁸⁰ Sachchidananda is followed by Supermind which straddles the utter non-dual reality of the Absolute and the duality of the succeeding levels of being and of consciousness. Here the main feature is that of total spirituality and complete gnostic knowledge. This is followed by Overmind which is an ego-less state of spiritual knowledge. The next level is that of the Intuitive Mind where knowledge is sensed directly without the sanction of the intellectual faculty. Below that is the Illumined Mind which is a mind of spiritual light with higher vision, followed by Higher Mind which uses pure conceptual thought. The three planes of being that succeed this are familiar to humans; they are in descending order, Mind, Life and Matter. The final stage of involution is the Netherworld between that leg of the cycle and evolution. That is the Inconscient which is similar to the *avidya* of Sankara. Here, nothing is, it is completely dormant, utterly empty, without any feature whatsoever, and yet paradoxically filled with the totality of Sachchidananda. The completeness and fullness of Sachchidananda is present here in its utter Nescience. This is the starting point of the upward or ascending leg of the cycle namely that of evolution. Here all the stages found in the downward cycle are again revealed but in a reverse order. For Sri Aurobindo, the completion of the upward thrust of creation, back to "The One", towards infinite power and the principle of being, must be the destiny of all that is, of any world and of everything in it.

2. THE HISTORICAL ORIENTATION OF THE CYCLE

2.1. SRI AUROBINDO'S VIEW OF PHILOSOPHY¹⁸¹

The subjects of knowledge and philosophy are of great interest to Sri Aurobindo. He recognises the charm of the knowledge obtained by using the pure intellect. This

¹⁷⁹ Actually, it has no salient characteristic nor anything else, furthermore, at each level of existence, and this is from Sachchidananda right down to the Inconscient, there is nothing and yet everything. From a human intellectual point of view, this is the domain of paradox.

¹⁸⁰ The concept of Sachchidananda is well-known in the history of Indian philosophy and the idea goes back to the Upanishads; even if Sankara does not use the term, his pupil Suresvara does in extrapolation of Sankara's philosophy. This is a central concept in the pre-Sri Aurobindo Advaita Vedanta. Of course, when the Rishis that 'saw' the original realities found in the holy books, they apparently did so through an intuitive perception process. So, if Sri Aurobindo gained his knowledge through intuition, then he only verified an original historically observed fact; he is then a latter-day Rishi.

¹⁸¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 8-13.

knowledge is of an high purity, and its value is not discounted by the fact that, "when tested by the rude ordeal of life and experience, they go to pieces." He accepts that crude and sub ideal forces are at work in daily life. For him, life is for living and not only for "mere metaphysical, logical or scientific knowledge" when that knowledge does not enable a person to perform action, to love and to know, in his daily round of ordinary life. He specifically mentions these three aspects and says of them: action must be divine in order to transform a person into divinity, loving is to love not only God but all his beings, whether pure or impure, whether perfect or not, and knowledge is for knowing God "impartiality and (with) completeness in order that I may come to be like Him, perfect, pure and unlimited—that which all sons of Man must one day be." He extends the catching Cartesian phrase somewhat by stating "because I think, feel and act, and even while I am doing any or all of these things, can transcend the thought, feeling and action, therefore I am."

He analyses some representative examples of different types of people and their philosophies. The man of clear and pure intellect has a high and difficult role namely to teach people to think clearly and purely. He sees everything through the pure intellect which unfortunately causes him to denying the emotions because that faculty has the ability to bring feeling into the functioning reason which will then distort the purity of reason. For the same reason he avoids living life to the full in all its multifarious complexities where the ego is at work, which ego too will detract from the purity of his thinking. About the philosopher, he has to preserve his intellectual virtue to avoid worldly conditions which will disturb his thinking. In this way he cuts himself off from experience which is, according to Sri Aurobindo, essential for true knowledge because only the gods can know without experience. Next in line is the logician, who thinks that he can arrive at truth through logic, but when taken to its logical conclusion, he will find that "Truth¹⁸² is not logical; it contains logic, but is not contained by it."¹⁸³ In

¹⁸² In short, words will not convey the Truth. In speaking of Truth and speaking the Truth we are again dealing with two somewhat problematical entities. I initially wanted to use the word 'concepts', instead of 'entities' as the latter word is somehow inadequate for the purpose. However, 'concepts', even though possessing a reality of its own, is in fact a derived reality from an object: it is even less qualified to use than is the term 'entities' which stands (in the sense of representing) first-hand for itself. Whether we speak 'of the' or 'the' Truth, we speak. We are utilising a hermeneutic procedure to convey a particular reality or Truth. And we should be satisfied with whatever is produced in this effort. Some people would be. But the solution is not quite as simple as that. When we speak it is sequential, we talk about something but we do not talk something. We use concepts to convey a reality that is beyond concepts. To illustrate the nature of the problem I could suggest what a Derridianian approach conceivably could be. We would speak but not using the words the meaning of which we assume is normally associated with the

contradiction to the normal accepted procedure, Sri Aurobindo suggests that one should first arrive at a conclusion, then find another conclusion opposing the first, and from those two arrive at a synthesis.¹⁸⁴ This is in contrast to the normal way of logic which holds as a fundamental premise that two contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time, at the same place and under the same circumstances. The logician in dealing with metaphysical logic will find difficulty wiping out the reality of a God that is One and Many, Finite and Infinite. Moving to the metaphysician, he fares little better. He deals with the *tattwas* ("thatness", a fundamental cosmic principle) where surely the complete knowledge must be. Unfortunately the total understanding knowledge is not to be found here in the *tattwas* either, because of its infinity and its relationship with the infinite.

The basic defect the logician and the philosopher are subjected to, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that they use words. There is nothing wrong with that but then they should not forget that words, which are divorced from experience, would mislead. However enlightening the use of words can be, when used incorrectly they lead to darkness and obscurity. The sage preaching using words and not having had experience, is either deluded or a pretender, according to Sri Aurobindo. I believe the plea here is not to not use words, but to grow in awareness in order to use words correctly.

Another thinker, the scientist, in turn approaches knowledge from a superior position to that of the metaphysician as he will deal only within a narrow limited circle of facts;

object that we are discussing. Those words will not serve, as will none other. If we did resort to words, we are using an old reconstituted reality for this fresh object and then we go through the motions but we do not move the reality out of the object. And then we would not use the words truly; we convey what we convey and our hearer hear what he hears but in the process the Truth is absent. If we truly are serious, our deeper comprehension should prevent that and guard against this counterfeit substitution. We nearly would use the word but not quite, the trace would have to suffice but not fully. Only with the trace, but in truth only without the trace can we communicate Truth.

¹⁸³ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Human and Divine*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ He uses the word conclusion that is somewhat else or more or different than the meaning that we normally attached to that word. Here we are operating right at the border of the two countries, the one where thinking and logic is used and the other where that is extended from the basic and/or to an alternative and/and. Normally a conclusion is the end result of a process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. If one were to stand back and ignore temporality, we will find that all these components form one entity and in this state it is simply the attention that we place which determines which one is the prime element. From a certain point of view therefore, there is no conflict in reaching or choosing one conclusion and also of choosing a second conclusion, and then attaining the identity or union that they inevitably have, being then in a non-dual state. This is very similar to the two sides of a coin that are totally different and yet that constitute a one unitary coin.

beyond that is the field (for him) of hallucination and imagination. The defect in his approach is that he forgets the one fact that he really can be sure of, is his subjective knowledge of all his experiences of facts, and ideas of facts. This is his subjective knowledge and is not subject to the evaluation of any other person. This is so because nobody can know or tell him what he feels subjectively. Sri Aurobindo contends the scientist is selective in his acceptance of this subjectivity. My statement that I am hungry will be accepted by him because I told him so. But if I say "I am full of bliss from an immaterial source"; or 'By certain higher instruments repeatedly tested I know that I have wandered in regions illuminated by no material sun,' ... he (will) answer, 'You are only fit for the gaol or the lunatic asylum.' " He has not experienced what he rejects and yet he is convinced that he knows he is right. He simultaneously accepts his inconsistency because he holds the earth revolves around the sun despite the contrary evidence his senses supply him daily. Another person, the practical man prefers to entertain or subscribe to no philosophy at all. He acts to achieve pragmatic goals related to living and to the level of evolution that he has obtained, without considering any further or higher reality such as the possibility of a holistic universe, where action anywhere influences action everywhere. There is no need for him within his approach to look widely and to act responsibly. Those men that seek the truth through an imaginative perception also do not succeed. Like logic, when moved far enough this approach breaks down. Further, yet another category of humans are those that follow the route of fine judgment to arrive at a true balance, and they succeed in this effort until fashions change and a different, a higher or a lower standard is set. He says the next group, the religious, prefers inspiration and a certain light which is present within this mode. But this light is local like that of lightning, which will illumine the immediate surroundings, but leaving the darkness intact everywhere else. The terrain that we observed with our illumination is for us only; our truth is limited to us while the rest of infinity is beyond our reach. What we should also know and accept is that our illumination is not the illumination of any other person, our urging others to follow and accept our partial truth might well lead them astray, prevent them from discovering their own truth.

This Truth that we are seeking is an infinitely complex reality. To find it we must not be daunted by its total reality. Sri Aurobindo says "We must look at the whole thought-tangle, fact, emotion, idea, truth beyond idea, conclusion, contradiction, modification,

ideal, practice, possibility, impossibility (which must be yet attempted,) and keeping the soul calm and the eye clear in this mighty flux and gurge of the world, seek everywhere for some word of harmony, not forgetting immediate in ultimate truth, nor ultimate in immediate, but giving each its due place and portion in the Infinite Purpose. Some minds, like Plato, like Vivekananda, feel more than others this mighty complexity and give voice to it. They pour out thought in torrents or in rich and majestic streams. They are not logically careful of consistency, they cannot build up any coherent, yet comprehensive systems, but they quicken men's minds and liberate them from religious, philosophic and scientific dogma and tradition. They leave the world not surer, but freer than when they entered it."

Such is the thinking of Sri Aurobindo. He does not discount what is, he accepts that because that is what is, but he realises the gap that exists between the potential of this limited reality and the full realisation of it which is the infinite. He views all life here as simply a stage of the progressive evolution, which will unfold the spirit involved in Matter. It is true that matter is a reluctant substance, yet it still contains the spirit and it is from there the spirit must be released. This is the purpose of the earthly existence.¹⁸⁵

2.2. SRI AUROBINDO'S INTUITIVELY KNOWN REALITY

In gaining his knowledge, Sri Aurobindo proceeded in a particular and specific way which is essentially the way of the mystic.

To understand the views of Sri Aurobindo on the subject of mystics and on criticism on them, I quote extensively from his comments on a letter of a certain Leonard Woolf.¹⁸⁶

The first point made was that mysticism and mystics have always risen in times of decadence. Sri Aurobindo stated that this argument is absolutely untrue because in the East as well as in Greece, Rome, Italy, France and Spain it was when culture was at high tide that many great spiritual personalities of the mystics and the mysteries emerged.

¹⁸⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 165.

¹⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 185-189.

The second point dealt with spiritual experience which cannot be taken as true unless it is proved. His comment here was that a spiritual experience cannot be proved in the same way that a physical fact could possibly be proved, because it does not belong to the order of physical facts and is not physically visible or touchable. Woolf seems to suggest that only what is or can easily be obvious to everybody without any need of training, development, equipment or personal discovery is to be taken as true.

Acceptance of such a position would confine knowledge or truth within narrow limits. He quotes an example of a spiritual or mystical nature and said that a spiritual peace – the peace that passeth all understanding – is a common experience of the mystics all over the world. Sri Aurobindo contends that this spiritual fact is a fact of the invisible, and in experiencing it, one knows that it is a truth of existence and that it is there all the time behind life and visible things. He despaired of being able to prove these invisible facts to Mr Woolf.

Mr Woolf further contends that generalisations based on spiritual experience are irrational as well as unproven. For Sri Aurobindo, the comments about their experiences are the contention of the mystics themselves and it cannot be dismissed by merely saying that as these generalisations do not agree with the ordinary experience, therefore they are nonsense and false. He states that they certainly are inner realisation which surpasses phenomena as they appear to the external mind and senses but argues that their existence and validity cannot be rejected purely on the grounds of them being invisible to the external mind and senses. He contends that there can be a global view and consciousness of things which is not bound by the oppositions and divisions of a mere analytical and selective or dissecting intelligence.

The final point is that the plea of intuition is only a cover for its inability to explain or establish what is by the use of reason. His response to that is that the fact is that the mystic depends on an inner knowledge, an inner experience; but if he philosophises, he must try to explain to the reason, though not necessary always by the reason alone, what he has seen to be the Truth. He cannot but say, "I am explaining a truth which is beyond outer phenomena and the intelligence which depends on phenomena; it really depends on a certain kind of direct experience and the intuitive knowledge which arises from that experience, it cannot be adequately communicated by symbols appropriate to the world of outer phenomena, yet I am obliged to do as well as I can with these to help me

towards some statement which will be intellectually acceptable to you." He conveys the idea that the mystic finds himself in a difficult position. Here the mystic is not using a wicked or deceitful cunning technique if he uses metaphors and symbols with a cautionary "as it were" which is surely not intended as an argument but as a suggestive image. Even though only a small minority of the human race has experienced these things, there still has been a host of independent witnesses to them including some of the greatest intelligences of the past. Simply because these matters are beyond the understanding of the average man in the street as well as of many cultivated intellects, these possibilities cannot be immediately condemned as fiction. He concludes with a very persuasive argument and said that if there is any truth in them, is not this possibility opened by them worth pursuing as disclosing a highest range of self-discovery and world discovery by the human soul? At its best, taken as true, it must be that—at its lowest seen as only a possibility, as all things attained by man have been only a possibility in their earlier stages, it is a great and possibly a most fruitful adventure.

Sri Aurobindo explained the difference of the natures of the intellect with that of the supra-intellect. In making a statement about matters perceived supra-intellectually by using the intellect, does not mean that the rules of the intellect applies to the higher level. Whereas an important process of arriving at ideas using the intellect is by speculative thinking, arriving at spiritual knowledge is through experience and the consciousness or awareness of things which arises directly out of that experience. Knowledge of this nature is a result of the total awareness of stillness and silence, followed by an awareness of some Supreme Reality. The nature of this knowledge is that it is fundamentally a consciousness and not a thought or formulated idea. The things one knows here are known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind. There is therefore no need of concepts or words or names. This does not mean that there will not be thoughts, only the thoughts here will be less polarised, the nature of the thoughts will be more direct and of a non-dual fashion. Whenever one attempts to communicate this experience, one reverts to using thought within the domain of the intellect. He states that there is another kind of thought that could arise here which appears as if it were the body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved and it does not appear to be intellectual in its nature. He says that it has another light, another power in it, and a sense within the sense. These are thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them and that are of the nature

of a direct seeing in the consciousness, they have a kind of intimate sense or contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness. However, as soon as they turn into words they are back in the domain of the intellect.¹⁸⁷

Regarding his own personal development, he has explained in his writings that through experience he had developed different types of consciousness, initially the intellect and subsequently additional higher states of consciousness. When operating from the level of his intellect, he used his logical and reasoning abilities. This he did well. He had the ability to analyse and discriminate keenly, using whatever appropriate measure was required to gain and then to represent knowledge that he had obtained. In addition he used his intuitive faculty. The question that should be considered now relates to the existence of the intuitive faculty. If it does not exist, then no valid knowledge can come from such a non-existent source. However, if a case could be made out for at least the possibility of its existence, then obtaining valid knowledge from that source is possible. I believe that the proof that is required is this second lesser one and this I now deal with.

I will commence by mentioning three possible faculties namely the emotional faculty, the intellectual faculty and the intuitive faculty. I argue that a person that possesses a particular faculty, *and* which faculty had been developed to a degree, is aware of that faculty and accepts its existence, its mode of operation and its reality without any further ado.¹⁸⁸ In exploring the intuitive faculty in the context of this argument, we find that it is actually a relationship between a person and a faculty or an entity that goes by a certain name. We should bear in mind that the name is not the faculty; it tries to represent the faculty. My contention – whether true or not – is that every person has an intuitive faculty even though perhaps undeveloped, and when it is not developed, such a person is not in a position to know of the nature or existence of this faculty. He could accept that ignorance or alternatively he could deny its reality (for him), but he cannot logically (which is the level at which he would be arguing, the only other alternate open to him is that of the emotional level which I would advise him not to use: somehow it lacks the persuasive potential of the intellect) deny the possibility of it existing in him in

¹⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *On Himself*. Volume 26. [SABCL]. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 2000, p. 86.

¹⁸⁸ I restrict myself to arguing only about these three faculties but it is possible that we could well possess not only these three, but conceivably many more. What they are I do not know, but that does not render this statement untrue; my not knowing of their existence does not prevent the possibility of their existence.

some form, dormant or otherwise. In such a denial, he is actually stating that he knows what is not. Not knowing what is, is not the same as knowing what is not.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the relevant question to my contention above is: 'True or not' for whom? True for a person who did, and not for a person who did not yet, experience the workings of the intuition. I could therefore contend that the denial of the existence of the intuitive faculty is a form of ignorance not of its existence but the of knowledge of its existence. I want to make it clear that there is no conflict between the using the intuitive faculty and using the intellect. In fact, these two go hand in hand. By way of explanation I would postulate that they are on the same continuum of consciousness, the one only representing a more advanced level of awareness than the other, providing a more comprehensive knowledge than the other. The situation stated above is very similar to the reality of the coexistence of the emotional faculty and the intellectual faculty. I believe that the existence and nature of these two faculties – emotion and intellect – is not really in question and that it is generally accepted. In this instance therefore a person in an argument can use the intellectual faculty, the emotional faculty or a blend of the two. Using any other but a blend is, if not impossible, extremely rare. If a further faculty were to be added to these two, that faculty too would be used for understanding and communication. A person communicating using this blend will not be constantly explaining what he is doing – 'Now I am using the intellect or now I am using the intuitive faculty' – but there will be a seamless flow of knowledge from one person to another without reference to the source or the faculty used to produce this knowledge.¹⁹⁰

For a person who does not accept the existence of the intuition, and who does not accept the above-mentioned argument, the utilisation of the intuition as an information gathering methodology could raise resistance in the acceptance of the veracity of knowledge thus gained. The very reasonable question that is asked here is: Why should

¹⁸⁹ In this argument the 'Not knowing what is' is a gentler statement, it is a type of ignorance that leaves open the possibility of the existence of that 'what is'. 'Knowing what is not' is a definite knowledge of that 'what is not': it suggests a supreme type of knowledge, a knowledge of the non-existent. The confession of the possession of such knowledge should engender great awe in such understanding or else it should lead us to dismiss this presumption. Which of the two responses is the more correct, is the decision of the responder.

¹⁹⁰ Obviously it is possible that person can query the statement made in the flow or presentation of this knowledge. That question could relate to the source or the nature or the proof of what is said. The answer of the teacher will elucidate the material that he presented. This new material will be presented with the teacher still functioning from the same continuum of consciousness, again moving up and down on the scale of this continuum, enlivening the right tone at the right time, giving a greater harmony and completeness to this rhapsody of knowledge made possible by the existence, or rather the utilisation of the existence of the higher notes on this continuum.

I accept as truth something that I cannot verify utilising my own intellect? The reality is that this interaction between the intellect and the intuition need not take place. The focus of the discussion here should be on the knowledge that is produced and not on the mode in which it is produced. In doing so, and as the intellect is trained to separate what is into its apparent component parts, such a person can then gain insight and knowledge into what is by analysis and evaluation of those different parts. This then is the route that the sceptic should take.

The way that the intuition works is different to that of the intellect. Using the intuition, a holistic knowledge is perceived, without any form of analysis being present or being needed. It is the gaining of knowledge in a space beyond the field of duality. Whereas the intellect has as a major precondition for the acceptance of its knowledge the requirement of objective observation, the intuitive faculty gains knowledge through the process of identification. In this process, the observer becomes the observing object, there is a melding of the consciousness of the subject and the object which removes any distance between these two components; the reality of the one becomes and is accessible to the reality of the other. One can state the knowledge here is gained from the inside out. It is the very subtlety of the observer that melds with that level of subtlety also found in the observed that allows for the gaining of this complete and comprehensive knowledge.

In our human body we become aware of what is through thoughts and we use the mind to accomplish this.¹⁹¹ In our essence we are *Purusha*, soul or divinity. We are unaware of this reality when we are partaking of life and all its activities, including thinking of thoughts. As we grow, it is possible for us to stand back from these activities and to experience in our inner being the silent impersonal self. This is the *Purusha*. We have to realise the potential of the *Purusha* which is the knower and source, the master of all thought and action.¹⁹² This particular mental body, which we encounter on earth, has to operate and the mode in which and through which it operates is the mind. The mind acts

¹⁹¹ Regarding thoughts, Sri Aurobindo stated that in the early part of his life when Lele was teaching him to meditate, he observed thoughts entering his mind *from outside* and he found that he could control them in the sense of being able to refuse them entry. He stated that these thoughts come from the universal mind, either in completed form or in a form that he had to further shape himself. The main task of our mind is accepting or refusing not only thought waves but also vital waves and subtle physical energy waves and then to further giving a personal-mental form to thought-stuff which we receive from the Nature-Force. (*Sri Aurobindo on Himself*, p. 79-83.)

¹⁹² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 906.

by intellectual rule or device, by reasoned choice of will, by mental impulse or in obedience to life-impulse.¹⁹³ This is not inferior, but different to the way in which consciousness and the appreciation of knowledge in the supramental being works. Our mind acts in the domain of duality, the supramental being which is its eventual destination operates beyond the field of duality in a unitary state. The justification and existence of thought is to enable the mental being to function; the result of the creation of duality is that there is a separation between everything. To bridge that gap and to convey knowledge from the one individual facet of creation to another, the messenger thought is utilised. The process of thinking in a dualistic mode operates right up to the Overmind on a scale of overlapping degrees of subtlety. But it is not true that this 'lower' level of mind and its operation is inferior to the very highest. It is simply different, it is itself and it is the correct technology for the level at which it is operating. There are rules applicable to it such as the rules of logic and reason which are in some ways very superior.

We need to consider the views of Sri Aurobindo on the merits of the intellect and intuition. In the instance that is related below the value that the intellect has for Sri Aurobindo becomes clear. He was commenting on Theosophy and he stated that if that particular philosophy desired to survive it had to learn a "mental rectitude to which it is now a stranger and improve its moral basis. It must become clear, straightforward, rigidly self-searching, and sceptical in the nobler sense of the word. It must keep the Mahatmas in the background and put God and Truth in the front. Its Popes must dethrone themselves and enthrone the intellectual conscience of mankind. If they wish to be mystic and secret like our Yogins, then they must like our Yogins assert only to the initiate and the trained; but if they come out into the world to proclaim their mystic truths aloud and seek power, credit and influence on the strength of their assertions, then they must prove. It need not and ought not to be suddenly or by miracles; *but there must be a scientific development, we must be able to lay hold on the rationale and watch the process of the truths they proclaim.*"¹⁹⁴ (Cursive mine). This simply implies that, similar to the aeroplane journey of Whitehead already quoted, insights can quite conceivably be obtained in a different manner to that of using the intellect only, but once obtained these insights must be submitted to the scrutiny of the intellect.

¹⁹³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 965.

¹⁹⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 71.

Interestingly and perhaps paradoxically, even though the intellect is being used here, it is not the final arbiter as to the veracity of whatever had been perceived. The process of evaluation and validation becomes, if you wish, an art. The acquired skills in these two complementary fields cannot be applied by using the manual exclusively, simply because the purpose of the manual is to give information regarding the subject and guidelines as to the manner of utilising the information only.

2.3. A COMPARATIVE GLANCE AT SOME WESTERN PHILOSOPHERS

At face value the view of Sri Aurobindo would seem to invite a comparison with the religious metaphysics of other mystics who hailed from a totally different cultural continent altogether. A number of mystic philosophers developed cosmologies along strikingly similar lines to that of Sri Aurobindo. Parmenides, Plotinus, Nicholas of Cusanus, Jacob Böhme and Giordano Bruno immediately come to mind. The process active in the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo has been described above, therefore we will describe only little of the detail of his system and mainly point out the similarities, and where necessary differences, between the approach of Sri Aurobindo and these other mystics.

I experience a similarity in the teachings and in the way in which Parmenides and Sri Aurobindo teaches. Both deal with absolute truth, both illuminate their subject with a transcendental enthusiasm and both successfully reach beyond the words that they have to use. Parmenides wrote his truth in verse, millennia ago. Whatever the source of this truth; thought, inspiration, incubation or a Goddess, to this day it awes us. And well it should. He presents us with a road that exists for thinking. We follow this road. And some of us travel this road on the left-hand side, some on the right. Yet there is a case to be made out that both are right. But the analogy is apt. It culminates in the contradiction of the two ways of perceiving, that of the left- and of the right-brain truth. His message is that whatever is, is and what is not, is not. And what is not cannot be spoken of. If we do, then that is part of what is, and then we can speak of that. It is the subtlety of reality, the training ground for understanding, the road of transcendence that Parmenides taught. He left very little; one poem and dedicated researchers and scholars brought glimmers of the meaning of his teachings to the fore. Compared with Sri

Aurobindo he was a minimalist. Yet in dealing with both and in learning from them, you have the same reaction; you have to become quiet and be still. Despite their generosity, we have to earn our understanding; we have to do the work. We have to travel their roads and we have to think, but our thinking eventually needs be beyond words, beyond the duality of what is and what is not, to understand in a different way, in a way that we always knew of but never fully did. Sri Aurobindo gives us all the details; Parmenides supplies only distilled essence.^{195, 196} But they both teach, and they both teach well.

Regarding Plotinus, at the root of his doctrine concerning the origin of the world, in line with Sri Aurobindo, is emanationism. The original source is a primordial unity which he called "the One". This entity has a nature of all blessedness and operates in the state of repose, not from a "widespread activity (which) is dangerous to those who must go out from themselves to act."¹⁹⁷ This Being acts from its very non-action and "it produces mightily."¹⁹⁸ The basis of the "primal Kosmos is the Being of the Intellectual Principle and of the Veritable Existent. This contains within itself no spatial distinction, and has none of the feebleness of division, and even its parts bring no incompleteness to it since here the individual is not severed from the entire. In this Nature inheres all life and all intellect, a life living and having intellection as one act within a unity: every part that it gives forth is a whole; all its content is its very own, for there is here no separation of thing from thing, no part standing in isolated existence estranged from the rest, and therefore nowhere is there any wronging of any other, any opposition. Everywhere one and complete, it is at rest throughout and shows difference at no point; it does not make over any of its content into any new form; there can be no reason for changing what is everywhere perfect."¹⁹⁹ He continues his argument by saying that the "Intellectual Principle, then, in its unperturbed serenity has brought the universe into being, by communicating from its own store to Matter: and this gift is the Reason-Form flowing from it. For the Emanation of the Intellectual Principle is Reason, an emanation unailing as long as the Intellectual Principle continues to have place among beings."²⁰⁰ The activity of God is not one of chance but a reasoned plan to bring into being the telos

¹⁹⁵ Kingsley, Peter. *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd, 2001.

¹⁹⁶ Kingsley, Peter. *Reality*. Inverness, CA.: The Golden Sufi Center, 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Plotinus. *The Third Ennead*. 2nd Tractate, section 1. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

¹⁹⁸ Plotinus. *The Third Ennead*. 2nd Tractate, section 1. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Plotinus. *The Third Ennead*. 2nd Tractate, section 2. Downloaded from <http://www.gutenberg.net>.

of perfection, through providing a guidance utilising elements of what emanated in the form of a partial providence.

This presents a striking parallel to the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo, with for Plotinus the elements of the emanation being a process of the timeless and spaceless reality of "the One" from which emanated a hierarchy of what is starting with the Intelligence, resulting in the Soul which imposes intelligence on matter, which matter emanated from the soul. The whole process is effortless and well ordered, although through the reality and the nature of dualism which in essence is being non-one, in the future imperfections and errors could well result thereof. With such uncanny resemblances and similarities between these cosmologies, the reasonable question would be whether Plotinus influenced Sri Aurobindo. In my reading of him I only found one reference to Plotinus²⁰¹ where, in answer to a question that implied that Westerners could not have the same mystic experiences as does Indians, he used Plotinus as an example or representative of a mystic of a non-Indian background. He stated that the "approach and experiences of Plotinus and the European mystics who derived from him were identical ... with the approach and experiences of one type of Indian yoga. Especially, since the introduction of Christianity, Europeans have followed its mystic disciplines which were one in essence with those of Asia, however much they may have differed in forms, names and symbols." He added that "I do not see, either, why there should be any such unbridgeable gulf; for there is no essential difference between the spiritual life in the East and the spiritual life in the West; what difference there is has always been of names, forms and symbols..." It is obvious that he has a thorough understanding of the thinking of Plotinus as well as the mystic tradition of the West, but what we can also deduce here is the fact that, regardless of parallels in their descriptions and thinking, Plotinus does not appear to figure in his formulation of his overall philosophy. It is also obvious that he accepts the validity of the philosophy of Plotinus and that he in no way criticises or contradicts him. We have repeatedly encountered the fact that the way individual philosophers perceive the truth differs in form but not in substance, one from the other. I believe that this is yet another example of that fact.

²⁰¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 555.

Nicholas of Cusa was of the Christian Church, giving various directions to their thinking during the course of his life. These directions obviously are based on his perceptions and interpretations, which was a function of his spiritual growth. In 1438, returning from Constantinople, a fellow traveller, Truth, revealed to him the coincidences of opposites in the infinite. Opposites are what we perceive; their infinite unity is what they are. The reality of God is the reality and identity of whatever is. In this way, a thing is, and the perception of that thing is not it, but its image. Of course, the image in turn is, but the perception of the image is not its reality, it is *a* reality, separate if you wish and yet paradoxically one with both its ancestors and its offspring. And beyond that further upward-ranging family tree all is One. The message from Cusanus is that he is fully aware of the reality of what is, and furthermore that this reality is normally represented as an image of the original, the reality of this image (which is the result of what we have perceived) is on the whole accepted by people as the reality of the original object. Normally they give no consideration to the distance that separates an object and the derivative thereof. The universe is infinitely multifaceted. Realities abound. What Cusanus says is true namely that all is bound in one holistic reality, but *at a certain level* the rules of reality pertaining to *that particular level* are applicable. This dualism is part of the total of what is. This holism is also in essence the view of Sri Aurobindo. For him too, even where there is nothing, there is this ever-present fullness of the Supreme beyond space and time. And the knowledge of all of this is in the Absolute and is the Absolute; we have the ability to perceive this, but our perception of this knowledge is partial to the degree that our awareness is partial.

Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) and Sri Aurobindo could scarcely have had more differing backgrounds. Böhme was a relatively untutored late Renaissance cobbler. He had great difficulty in expressing himself clearly and he knew only his own language. Sri Aurobindo had a broad European and Indian academic background, he excelled at languages, was widely read and exceptionally erudite, writing with great clarity. Their differences aside, their cosmologies showed remarkable similarities. Böhme has at the core of his cosmology three principles namely the dark and the light principle and the principle of exteriorisation. Sri Aurobindo in his Sachchidananda mirrors this trinity. Both trinities are non-dual. Böhme^{202, 203} utilises a doctrine of seven circular nature

²⁰² Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg – editors. *Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium* - editor. London: Allen & Unwin. 1960, p.239.

forms which advances in a progressive evolutionary manner, resulting in the emanation of what is. This whole system is effectively magic, as far as Böhme is concerned. This echoes the view of Sri Aurobindo when he not only asks but also answers regarding this apparently impossible transformation, "Yet how can such contraries pass into each other? By what alchemy shall this lead of mortality be turned into that gold of divine Being? But if they are not in their essence contraries? If they are manifestations of one Reality, identical in substance? Then indeed a divine transmutation becomes conceivable."²⁰⁴ Whatever the process details of Böhme, regardless of the apparent "multiplicity and diversity within and between levels of reality, (all this is) essentially one, continuous and homogeneous."²⁰⁵ For both these mystics, the process they described is a process of emanation and is an ongoing one. Quite conceivably because of the religious and cultural background of Böhme, we find a different emphasis in the cause or motivation for the God-figure to manifest. There is mention of anger, struggle, terror, suffering and conflict, to mention only a few, inherent in the God-figure. This differs radically from the Supreme of Sri Aurobindo where we not only find one of the three basic constituent components of the universe is bliss, but also where the whole process taking place is for the purpose of experiencing Itself, and experiencing therefore, Bliss. Between the philosophies of these two, stunning similarities as well as incredible differences coexist. It is as if the same truth is filtered through them, the one representing a bright and sunny and the other a dark and gloomy instrument tainting the profile but not the essence of the truth.

Regarding Bruno, his cosmology had a different truth at heart compared with that of Cusanus, whose cosmology appears to have to a large degree the task of reinforcing his theology.²⁰⁶ Even so, both had the belief of the infinity of the universe²⁰⁷ as well as the doctrine of coincidence of contraries.²⁰⁸ He early on learnt that what appears to be, need not be what it appears to be. Appearances can be misleading. In his youth the distant Vesuvius appeared totally barren and lifeless. In growing older he visited this

²⁰³ Krüger, J S. *Tragic Theogony: The Origin and Nature of Suffering and Evil According to Jacob Böhme*. Article in process of publication, p. 7.

²⁰⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 49.

²⁰⁵ Krüger, J S. *Ibid*, p. 8.

²⁰⁶ Singer, D W. *Giordano Bruno, His Life and Thought - On The Infinite Universe and Worlds*. New York: Henry Schuman. 1950, p. 79.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 50.

²⁰⁸ Singer, D W. *Giordano Bruno, His Life and Thought - On The Infinite Universe and Worlds*. New York: Henry Schuman, 1950, p. 80.

mountain and found a different reality, a verdant and alive landscape. From this he concluded that clearer perception produces clearer results.²⁰⁹ The similarities between the views of Bruno²¹⁰ and the thinking of Sri Aurobindo is not so obvious as far as the structure of his cosmology is concerned, but the terms and meanings that are utilised are very similar, as will become clear in the discussion below. He distinguishes the terms cause and principle from each other. To him 'cause' means an ontological difference between two related things whereas 'principle' indicates a temporal sequence or ranking in value. Regarding divinity, he distinguishes between the approach of the theologian and the natural philosopher. He speaks as a philosopher, he has great faith in the capacity of reason even though he realises its limitations. He is aware of rational knowledge obtained through reasoned argument, as well as intuitive awareness beyond the reach of reason. His universe is an infinite one that intellectually cannot be understood perfectly, and which consists of an infinite number of worlds, each with its own life. For him there is a descending of the spirit emanating, more than manifesting in what is in the universe from the first and highest principle. He takes care not to appear a pantheist, with less than total success. The fact is, to him matter is divine. And the universe consists of matter. "This universe does not arise and is not destroyed, does not increase or diminish, is not affected by anything outside itself, and it is not subject to any kind of mutation. ... There is nothing external to it. ... (I)n it all contradictions, all relative quantitative differences coincide. The same applies to qualitative opposites such as health and sickness, hatred and love."²¹¹ These could well have been the words of Parmenides. Paradoxically, the universe for Bruno is not matter and it is not form, even though it is but in a strange way. Modern quantum science also of course is happy to view matter in different ways, in different layers of subtlety, where the reality of matter apparently differ at each layer. Viewed from a more subtle level, it is energy which is subtler still and which eventually becomes pure wave motion. But the reality of what it is, is not determined by our perception thereof but by its being. His view of evil and the accompanying concepts of death, corruption and defects lean more

²⁰⁹ Williams, L. *The Heroic Enthusiasts by Giordano Bruno*. London: George Redway, 1887, p. 2.

²¹⁰ Krüger, J S. *Divinity, universe, soul and matter in "De la causa, principio e uno of Giordano Bruno*. Journal for the Study of Religion, Vol.18, No. 1, 2005, p. 37-51.

²¹¹ Krüger, J S. *Divinity, universe, soul and matter in "De la causa, principio e uno of Giordano Bruno*. Journal for the Study of Religion, Vol.18, No. 1, 2005, p. 11.

towards that of Sri Aurobindo than towards Böhme. For him, these things are not substantial "but has the status of defect and impotence."²¹²

Bruno identifies trends that could have grave consequences to humanity in the future. This included the callous approach of the men, (and here he means the uncaring, abusive and cruel men in contradiction to the nurturing and supportive yet abused women) towards matter and towards specifically woman, which would in future cause untold suffering and ecological disasters. This is in line with Sri Aurobindo's holistic statement that everything, including matter, has consciousness and should be dealt with gently and respectfully.

3. MUTUALITY AND INTERPENETRATION

Within the complex cosmology of Sri Aurobindo, we encounter holism in its widest context possible. This is the natural result of the reality of Sachchidananda, the creative/emanative agent. The nature of Sachchidananda is encapsulated in the three components of its name: *Sat*, which is being, *Cit* which is consciousness-force and *Ananda* which is bliss. As will become clear in this thesis, these are very profound realities, as it should be if this constitutes the basis of all that is and of all that is not. These three entities are different in function but the same in essence; they are coexistent and mutually interdependent. Wherever the one is there the others are too. Being can exist only if there is a reason for its existence, and that reason is bliss, and only if there is a creative agency that 'caused' it, and that is consciousness-force.²¹³ Consciousness-force can only act if there is a reason for it to act and this reason is bliss, and the result of its action is the creation of something and this something is being. Bliss in its turn is the motive force for the being-there and being-created/emanated. So we analyse these components, whereas in truth they cannot be analysed, they cannot be separated, they cannot be conceived of, and it is not too far-fetched to say that whatever we say or think, it is not really true because of the partiality and relativity of our mode of communication. And yet it contains truth, again due to its nature it not only contains truth but it contains ultimate truth. Such is the all-encompassing nature of holism, yet

²¹² Krüger, J S. *Divinity, universe, soul and matter in "De la causa, principio e uno of Giordano Bruno.* Journal for the Study of Religion, Vol.18, No. 1, 2005, p. 12.

²¹³ I said 'caused' it, which implies the relative reality of time and consequent space. In this field of emanation, creation and of paradox there is no time, no space and no relativity. But we have to use words in our present reality to communicate, however clumsy and partial that methodology might be.

even if our understanding is limited and we cannot reach to a reality comprising an infinity of simultaneous interacting dimensions, the Jewel Net of Indra itself, we can glimpse a mirage of a different and strange reality. Whatever we have is insufficient for comprehension of this strangeness. Such is the problematic of attempting to communicate these supramental realities utilising our dualistically orientated minds.

4. DUALITY, UNITY AND NON-DUALITY

The cosmology of Sri Aurobindo is tasked to explain what is and why it is. It is up against daunting barriers. It has to deal with the field of an origin which is beyond space and time, which is the field of non-duality and of unity. Duality emanated because of the very nature of the original Supreme Being which is non-dual. In that unitary state it is not possible for the Supreme Being to experience itself; there is no contrast and it is everywhere and everything. I will attempt to describe the realities pertaining to non-duality. This subject and this particular paragraph falls within the field of paradox. In this and in the other paragraphs I wish to exercise extreme care in dealing with what Sri Aurobindo teaches. I say this because of the unstated assumptions, even unconscious coercion that communication is subject to. As a general rule, even though we can be extremely critical and incisive in our analyses and demands for accuracy and completeness in dealing with subjects that we examine, we do not know, or are not aware of, the components of the very process of communication and conceptualisation. In brief, our communication is subject to the following fallacies: words have clear meanings, the meaning that I attach to a word is the same meaning that you attach to the same word, we can communicate meaning utilising conceptualisation and words. The truth is that our normal communication works perfectly well in a pragmatic fashion but when stretched to incorporate subtler realities, it breaks down. What then happens is that the domain where concepts pertain which is the relative, has been left behind.

These three elements, Duality, Unity and Non-Duality, are mutually exclusive in a certain way and yet totally interrelated and integrated. Whatever the correct order of dealing with these matters, we will start with duality. Whenever we say that 'something exists', then we are operating in the field of duality. The implications are rather profound. 'Something' implies a form of individuality (it is something and not

something else), and if that is the case we have a separateness, we may not necessarily have only two but we certainly have more than one. However, in its true essence and in its true reality that is not possible because the essence and reality of what is (and this is the level of the Absolute), is non-dual and unitary. This is easily explained by looking at the reality of Sachchidananda. This particular reality, which has been accepted and used in the historical Vedanta, suggests a very elegant and comprehensive framework that underlies all that is. Here the being of one is the being of all, the consciousness-force and the causative bliss of one is that of all.²¹⁴ In analysing the one and creating two and more, we apparently lessen what is. It loses its unitary nature. What is infinite and a universal holism, we reduce to virtually nothing, we deprive it of its majestic splendour and imprison that infinitesimal newly created reality in the cage of the intellect.

Dualism kills the bird to find its life. And yet, for us, without dualism there is nothing – and everything. Everything because now we are looking at unity, which unity is the totality of all that was, is and ever will be (in a paradoxical timeless manner). Here the dead bird is alive, life is an inseparable continuum, it is not an element or a component: it is. It is in all that is, at the level of the least conscious of what can be namely the inconscient, there life is. And not only life but also the whole of Sachchidananda. There is a difference between the unity and the concept of unity. *Unity* is the reality of the nothing beyond dualism and beyond concepts. Unity is a reality beyond cognition, conception or description. The *concept of unity* is an attempt to relativise the absolute, to enable intellectual understanding, which attempt can never succeed fully. And yet, strangely enough, this is not true because even in the dead bird the totality of the universe and of all that is, is present. But it is present on its own terms, namely the

²¹⁴ The Trinity Sachchidananda underlies creation/emanation. It is this invisible omnipresent sea of holistic being, consciousness-force and bliss that is the true reality of all that is. Whatever is visible at any level of existence (such as the world) is an illusionary phenomenon as seen from advantage point of Sachchidananda or the Absolute. This is the general (but not exclusive) perception held in the Vedanta. From the perspective of the world it (the world) is real enough. The way to reconcile these two apparently conflicting perspectives is to always bear in mind *the level* from which perception takes place. From the perspective of the Absolute the world can be viewed as an illusion but from a relative perspective, this world is not an illusion, it has its own valid reality. This latter perception is the one Sri Aurobindo holds. To extend this argument one step further, perception is a function of consciousness. The level of awareness that you have evolved to, will determine what type of reality you can perceive. For that reason, intellectual perception is totally correct and complete, but *only* on the intellectual level. But by the same token, intuitive perception, which is a higher form of perception than that attainable by the intellect, allows a form of cognition that is superior to and beyond the abilities of that of the intellect and this type of cognition cannot be defined using the tools of the intellect. To sum up, the world is an illusion viewed from the Absolute and it is real viewed from the level of the world.

terms of the Absolute. From the Absolute point of view the essence of duality, the yes/no and the either/or are seen in its true light, it is reconciled as being One, and then not even that (One) because One is too much, One by being One retains traces of duality and in its truth it is all that is and is not. There is no conceiving the possibility of truly communicating on this level using the pragmatic intellectual tools and machinery that we of necessity do use. Even though on the face of it nondualism is a simple enough concept, the way in which it is viewed and applied differs according to individual schools of thought. According to Chaudhuri²¹⁵ there are different types of nondualism such as "naturalism, pantheism, voluntarism, vitalism, absolute idealism. Naturalism designates the essence of reality as Nature with her unconscious physical energy and blind mechanical causation, and seeks to explain mind, spirit, value, etc., as accidental by-products of the interaction of physical forces. Pantheism designates the essence of reality as a logically defined spiritual substance wholly immanent in the realm of Nature. Voluntarism designates the ultimate unifying principle of existence as universal Will. Vitalism conceives of the ultimate unifying principle as the cosmic life force (*élan vital*). Absolute idealism envisages the ultimate unifying principle as Absolute Idea or a unified thought structure, or some kind of cosmic mind. But according to the nondualistic philosophical outlook, unconscious nature and conscious spirit, matter and mind, cosmic will and absolute idea, universal life-force and cosmic mind, etc., are different interrelated factors in the creative self-expression of the indeterminable reality. Since reality is essentially indeterminable, it is not to be identified either with any one of them exclusively, or with all of them collectively." However well put, such a list and the clarified distinction between the different components on the list is simply another aspect of duality. We cannot touch non-duality. The incomplete and suggestive hints regarding the nature of non-duality by its very incompleteness is perhaps the best we can do. The only way in which we can understand this is by experiencing it. Our poets and mystics attest to that. They do not satisfy us because they used words that they then immediately negate again. Then they are, and leave us, frustrated. This is the field of expertise and of teaching of Sri Aurobindo. Our greater understanding of his cosmology depends on our appreciation for the subtlety, the difficulty and the otherworldly nature of this field, the field of consciousness.

²¹⁵ Haridas Chaudhuri and Frederic Spiegelberg, - editors. *The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo: A Commemorative Symposium*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1960, p. 25.

5. SRI AUROBINDO'S INVOLVEMENT WITH DIVINITY

Sri Aurobindo is involved with divinity and with God in every sense and meaning of the word. We desire clarity on his views of these entities. This however is not so easy. This God and this divinity are concepts, and yet also not. For him, they are realities that transcend concepts. If that is so, what does he really mean by that, by God? This is an extremely reasonable question, because this is what he deals with and this is what he is teaching. He should be able to answer that because that is his field of expertise. And as he is teaching, in writing his books he irrevocably committed himself to that activity of teaching. So we have a right to know what he, as a person who apparently knows God, means by what is God. Unfortunately it is not as simple as this. If we need knowledge we have to accept responsibility for attaining it. What he gives out is arguably true and supreme knowledge. What we receive is information. The reality of his being is the knowledge that he is giving out. The reality of what we receive is a function of our consciousness, of our ability to perceive. If we do not receive the fullness that was given out, it is our duty to change to the degree that we can receive that.

This vexing problem of communication and of reality and of perception of reality is here at the core of his teaching. We cannot truly say, "this is what Sri Aurobindo teaches", we can say "this is what I perceive what Sri Aurobindo teaches". Each person's perception is different. What I personally perceive that Sri Aurobindo teaches is a clear unitary reality. It is a complete form of holism that includes everything which implies both the absolute and relative. There is no undue importance granted any facet of the totality. The absolute is dealt with in extensive detail, and so is the relative. Humanity is dealt with in a very clear fashion, but the relationship between humanity and the divinity does not accord divinity any anthropomorphic qualities or a special or elevated relationship between the two parties. Man, inherently divine, is playing a role, is an actor in this vast production, in essence an integral and essential component of the entirety, spanning and transcending all that is. Normally, in our quest for knowledge and for understanding, we err in simplifying the very complex simply because we cannot deal with it in the other way. This is not the way to go, because that way we know less and we wish to know more. In that way we shift responsibility because we demand from others whereas we should be demanding from ourselves. We say to Sri Aurobindo, "You teach me", instead of "I will learn from you." In

hearing/seeing/feeling the meaning of God for Sri Aurobindo and for ourselves, we have to meditate his work. He unambiguously states that Godness is within us. He talks about God, but he also talks God. The first we can read, the second we must achieve ourselves. Therefore, whatever I say about Sri Aurobindo and his God perception or reality, will be true at that moment for me and for me only. Any other person that learns from, reads, communicates with, Sri Aurobindo will learn from him what she or he can, and that will be a function not only of Sri Aurobindo and his teaching, but of the consciousness of that person.

We can only get an idea as to his own personal relationship with God from his books. He says, "It is in our yoga the way to devotion and surrender—for it is the psychic movement that brings the constant and pure devotion and the removal of ego that makes it possible to surrender."²¹⁶ This appears to be not a devotion to an external anthropomorphic reality by a separate and inferior creation in the form of a human being. It is a process involving the psychic which is in us and which is our own essence, to remove the ego in order to facilitate a devotion creating a unity with the object of devotion. Here a 'surrender' is involved, and the process of surrender results in the unity of the psychic in us with its own true being which is the Supreme. The net result is that we 'realise' in the sense of both knowing and making real our own (psychic) basic reality with the basic reality that mostly seems separate and external. The purpose of this process is described as follows: "To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our yoga."²¹⁷ The Divinity to him is an internal reality which is not separate from his own being. His 'conversion' was simply a lessening of one aspect of his being, the ego, which effectively blinded and prevented him from perceiving what he in any case was namely an integral aspect of the holistic Supreme.

6. EMANATION AND CREATION

The question should be asked: is Sri Aurobindo suggesting a process of emanation or of creation? I believe that the answer is surprisingly simple. It lies in the understanding of the meaning of these two concepts. They do to a degree overlap in the sense that it is whatever is that we are examining and that we are asking questions about. The final

²¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24, [SABCL], p. 534.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 753.

what is, is the same from our point of view, it is the process that brought it to this point that interests us and that prompted us in asking this question. We will deal with that in a moment but for now, a more pertinent and radical question is: "What is?" This is a logical question because this will be the result of the activity of either of the causative processes or methodologies. But is it a logical question that we should be asking at this point? In asking a logical question, we full well know that we will receive a logical answer and we know also that logic does not encompass the totality of what is.

Kingsley in *Reality* argued that the teachings of Parmenides was that of the original logic, the logic that could encompass truth in its fullness and that could be the basis for our understanding of what is. If he is correct then it means that the logic that we have now is easier and more comprehensible but of a lesser quality to that taught by Parmenides. Even so, whatever form of logic we use now, it was necessary to have asked this question and the answer to that question, however complete or otherwise, is contained in the chapters that follow. From an anthropocentric point of view, 'what is' is certainly not what is. Whatever we say here must fit within our limited anthropocentric perception and reality and we have enough knowledge and experience and proof to know that this is very partial. We deserve credit for persisting in our search for knowledge even though we know that we suffer severe limitations in our efforts of obtaining knowledge. Humanity has a history of tenaciously pursuing every possible avenue that could lead to further insights into what is. In recorded history this has been the case with the knowledge that Parmenides gave out two and a half millennia ago.

Regarding the concept of creation, the word implies a creator or creatrix. It implies a beginning and consequently it implies time and space. It also implies a reality which is either original or more or less or different. And arguably, most importantly, whether considering a creator or an emanator it implies an anthropocentric approach to the reality and basis for knowledge.²¹⁸ Dealing with these matters in sequence we start with a creatrix. Logic demands that such an entity should have amongst others force and directionality. But to juxtapose creation with emanation we need not concern ourselves too much with the different qualities of the two (! Heavens forbid, do we now have *two* Supreme Beings?) entities required to produce the results. Bringing in qualities would

²¹⁸ This is so because we will be examining whatever is within our own personal human framework and standards of interpretation which, however wide it is, is restricted by our very humanness and to the degree that it is restricted, to that degree it falls short of the truth.

mean that we are really viewing the epistemology, the how, of this basic entity, whereas it is the inner working, the why, the ontology thereof that really concerns us. So, it is the why and not the how that we should be focusing on. The how here is viewed as the more superficial mechanical, and that is interesting, but the why is important. It is the why that is pursued to understand the ontology of the supreme to the degree that we can. To make this clearer, in dealing with the how of creation we will be dealing with results and with form and with relative realities. This includes, but is not limited to, different dimensions or planes, realities and time and space. In the process of creation there is a certain distance or uninvolved aspect between the creator and whatever he created. He stands outside of his creation as it were. This approach is not that which I picked up in the works of Sri Aurobindo.

When we consider the process of emanation, there is a certain seamlessness and a change in the direction of our attention. We are subtly drawn away from the creator/creatix and its creation, from a sense of duality and separation of what possibly logically but definitely intuitively cannot be separated, to an unnamed (this 'unnamed' is followed by a no-name, and definitely not the word 'emanator', which is simply a more fancy name for a creator/creatix) 'whatever'. This whatever actually stands for that personage or being or supreme that caused all that is. But I cannot name it, not even with the word whatever. Now however I am forced to compromise. If I am to continue with this argument, I will have to leave the no-name brands to the marketplace and use a word, and I will use the word 'emanator'. I believe that what becomes clear on a subtle feeling level is that this emanator has a closeness and an intimacy, an immediacy and an oneness with what is. There is an easy acceptance of the fact that whatever differences in what is are observed, is simply a function of focus of attention; it is simply to see the One in the many and the many in the One. Diversity is observed but the unity is perceived. In a reading of the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo, it is this particular reality that comes to the fore very strongly. It is so that he uses the word creation often but within the framework of the argument that I have raised about the two possibilities, and he is mostly talking about emanation. This has an important effect on his philosophy. It does not preclude the existence of a transcendent being or of a superior being with a transcendent reality or quality. The nature of such a being as becomes clear in reading Sri Aurobindo is a totally integrated, comprehensive holistic one composed of an infinite number of facets and components. This not only implies but also is stated

explicitly by Sri Aurobindo that man in his essence is divine and he will return to his divinity. The departure point of Sri Aurobindo in his cosmology is not man but the totality of what is. He produced a magnificent and comprehensive panoramic cosmology starting at the very beginning of nothingness, describing a process that eventually incorporated humanity on a very short leg of the overall journey. This is not the journey of humanity, it is the journey of infinity to itself. Wherever man is and whatever he does always has this return journey as telos.

7. MATTER, LIFE AND MIND

Cardinal to the human part of the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo are the subjects of matter, life and mind. His evolutionary part of the cycle begins with the inconscient and thereafter the first three stages or phrases are matter, life and mind.

7.1. MATTER ²¹⁹

For Sri Aurobindo, Matter is a pulsation of the divine. It possesses awareness which is on the level of the inconscient. It contains within it fixed grades or stages which exist each with its appropriate order of nature. As evolution of everything is inevitable, and as evolution proceeds step-by-step, whatever stages are encountered are necessary as firm steps for a progressive ascent of the souls embodied in these forms of matter. For him, all is one. Therefore, the reality is "that life is already involved in Matter and Mind in Life because in essence Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness."²²⁰ His perception of matter is of a holistic and empathetic nature and is very different to the norm as is seen in the following statement: "It is very true that physical things have a consciousness within them which feels and responds to care and is sensitive to careless touch and rough handling. To know or feel that and learn to be careful of them is a great progress of consciousness."²²¹

²¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo postulates matter as being the first tangible aspect on the evolutionary leg of his cosmological cycle. Prior to that is its origin, the Inconscient. Matter is there because of being, consciousness-force and bliss. Whatever the different descriptions and definitions of something as basic as matter, it seems to be generally accepted that nothing can come out of nothing. Therefore the Inconscient, even though being the supreme nothingness, must have involved in it all that can come after, starting with matter.

²²⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 3.

²²¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 717.

This holistic vision is in line with that of other mystics. It is similar to that of Bohm who postulated a system of creation that is based on holomovement and which consists of two fundamental aspects: the *explicate* and the *implicate* order. The explicate order is the world and matter that we see, and for Bohm, is the appearance of reality only; the true reality is the unseen implicate order. Bohm says that in terms of the implicate order one may say that everything is enfolded into everything. This contrasts with the dominance of the explicate order in physics in which things are unfolded in the sense that each thing lies only in its own particular region of space (and time) and outside of that are the regions belonging to other things.²²² So obviously, matter and its place and relationship with other components of creation are complex. Sri Aurobindo asserts that out of a particular Energy, a covert involved cosmic infinite Consciousness built the boundless finite of the material universe. There is in this universe an apparent inconscience which is immanent in all that is. This inconscience is a prerequisite for the evolution out of the material world-substance to the eventual supreme Consciousness. This process is possible because of the cosmic powers contained within all that is. This apparently mechanical process is actually due to the constant principle of intelligence in nature.²²³

There is an ignorance in matter, but for Sri Aurobindo this is not bland ignorance, but a powerful enlightened ignorance, namely the power of Brahman to create illusions and to be aware that they are illusions while Mind has at the same time the ability of taking these illusions for real. If Brahman can operate in this double or manifold fashion, it must be capable of a double action of consciousness, one being an ignorant consciousness and the other a superconscience. This seems logically impossible, and a supra-rational paradox. But if we do accept this supra-rational mystery, as Sri Aurobindo did, (because we cannot prescribe the limits of its powers to Brahman) then we can accept the reality of the One becoming or always being many and the Many being or becoming the One. The implication of this is that the Infinite and Eternal can by the infinite power of its consciousness create a movement of involution and evolution of itself. This suprarational view of the Infinite is therefore not really a paradox when viewed from a broader non-intellectual base.²²⁴

²²² Bohm, David. *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 225.

²²³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 303.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 495.

Sri Aurobindo's explanation of the evolution in Matter is that the universe is a self-creative process of a supreme Reality whose presence makes spirit the substance of things. The material universe is then the turning point at the lowest stage of a downward thrust of the involution containing or exhibiting no apparent consciousness, or alternatively with an Inconscient consciousness. The immense importance of the individual being, which increases as he rises in the scale, is the most remarkable and significant fact of a universe which started without consciousness and without individuality in an undifferentiated Nescience. Sri Aurobindo states that the central motive for an earth existence is a spiritual and consciousness evolution of Matter to the point where the indwelling Spirit can be exposed. Initially this inherent supreme Divine Reality is concealed behind a veil, in a dense material Inconscience caused by the involution of the Spirit, until the force of creation's Energy operating there as a vast occult Intelligence starts the return journey to Itself.

7.2. LIFE

Life is part of the evolutionary process, it is an interplay of the different components of Sachchidananda;²²⁵ Sri Aurobindo says that "(l)ife is a scale of the universal Energy in which the transition from inconscience to consciousness is managed; it is an intermediary power which is latent or submerged in Matter, delivered by its own force into submental being, delivered finally by the emergence of Mind into the full possibility of its dynamis."²²⁶ Sachchidananda is the precursor of the Supermind which is the real creative agency of universal Existence. "Life is universal Force working so as to create, energise, maintain and modify substantial forms with mutual play and interchange of an overtly or secretly conscious energy as its fundamental character."²²⁷ In the energy of Force and in Matter there is a subconscious Mind at work, which materialises itself, creating life as part of the evolution process. Sri Aurobindo states that "(o)ut of this Matter, apparent Life manifests and it delivers out of itself by means of the living body the Mind it contains imprisoned within it."²²⁸ This means that the interaction between the components is as follows. Life is involved in subconscious Matter; Mind is involved and subconscious in Life, just as Supermind is involved and

²²⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 173-213.

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 184.

²²⁷ Ibid, p. 188.

²²⁸ Ibid, p. 188.

subconscious in Mind. Subconscious Mind or Intelligence is therefore the basis of amongst others life. Despite the fact that on our planet the evolutionary progression is matter, life and then mind, different alternatives can exist. If the involution stage followed a different route to the Mind, Life and Matter one, then the evolution stage need not follow the terrestrial evolutionary process but it must follow its own unique type embedded in its form of involution. He says "wherever Cosmos is, there, even if only one principle be initially apparent, even if at first that seems to be the sole principle of things and everything else that may appear afterwards in the world seem to be no more than its forms and results and not in themselves indispensable to cosmic existence, such a front presented by being can only be an illusory mask or appearance of its real truth. ... In any given world its scale and harmony of being may be openly in possession of all seven (stages as outlined in the involution phase) at a higher or lower degree of activity; in another they may be all involved in one which becomes the initial or fundamental principle of evolution in that world, but evolution of the involved there must be."²²⁹ In this alternate level or world, the Mind is not involved at the start but consciously uses its innate energy to create original forms of substance which is not, as here on earth, only subconscious in the beginning. This is possible because any one principle has involved in it every other principle necessary for being, consciousness-force and bliss. Then the way in which involution (and evolution) would take place would simply depend on the laws of nature of that planet. Still, though the working of such a world would be quite different from ours, the intermediate vehicle of operation of that energy would always be Life. But that life could be different to what we define or conceptualise life. As an example, I can conceive of a Mental, and not Material, world in this regard, where the 'planet' would be of a mental construct. The life form, the beings populating this planet would initially be either energy or evolving thought, which aspires to a state of pure thought. The involution/evolution cycle itself would be the same, even if the process were entirely reversed.²³⁰ "It follows that wherever Cosmos is, there, even if it seems to have only one basic principle of creation, and whatever manifests in that world seems to be no more than the forms and results of that principle and not in themselves indispensable to cosmic existence, such a front presented by being can only be an illusory mask of its real truth. Where one principle is

²²⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 269.

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 189.

manifest in Cosmos, there all the rest must be not merely present and passively latent, but secretly at work."²³¹

7.3. MIND

Sri Aurobindo refers to mind as the lower mind to distinguish it from the higher forms of mind which are dealt with in the chapter on the Higher States of Consciousness. He says that because man is a mental being, he naturally imagines that mind is the prime indispensable agent in the universe for true knowledge, but the reality is that mind is not the only or the best possible instrument; it is merely a clumsy interlude between Nature's vast and precise subconscious action and the vaster infallible superconscious action of the Godhead.²³² Mind has had great success using the incredible power contained in logic and reason, but Sri Aurobindo contends that man suffered a certain loss as "the age of intuitive knowledge, represented by the early Vedantic thinking of the Upanishads, had to give place to the age of rational knowledge; inspired Scripture made room for metaphysical philosophy, even as afterwards metaphysical philosophy had to give place to experimental Science. Intuitive thought which is a messenger from the superconscious and therefore our highest faculty, was supplanted by the pure reason which is only a sort of deputy and belongs to the middle heights of our being; pure reason in its turn was supplanted for a time by the mixed action of the reason which lives on our plains and lower elevations and does not in its view exceed the horizon of the experience that the physical mind and senses or such aids as we can invent for them can bring to us."²³³ This loss was to man a retardation of the development of the intuitive faculty and of his evolution, the establishment of the deemed certainty of logic replacing a supramental freedom of possibilities.

Sri Aurobindo says Mind as an individual entity is only part of Supermind. Its basis is an aspect of Supermind namely Consciousness-Force which is that which creates or causes, and which alone can cause created things to act and to be. Sri Aurobindo is of the opinion that thought and the mind do not attain to the essence of Truth. It is possible, and it happens, that there can be a thought-body of Truth, the spontaneous supramental Thought and Word that appears fully formed out of the Source, but that is

²³¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 269.

²³² Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 30. [SABCL], p. 268.

²³³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 68.

the exception. If the mind is not silent, it cannot receive this subtle and powerful aspect of the supernal Truth, nor can it utilise Truth in the relative life. It is at best a half-enlightened Ignorance seeking for truth, using the data and postulates of Ignorance. True knowledge is gained by the development of Quietness, resulting in an utilisation of a mind that can operate only in that Quietness. This quietness in its nature is a profound creative silence, and is a full precondition for perceiving true knowledge. Here, reason and logic are still useful but in itself are merely intellectual seekers that are unable to transcend the intellect. Mind precedes the instrument of perfect knowledge but can never be that instrument itself.²³⁴ The office of the intellect is not to fathom reality, but to fabricate and preside over action; however, intellect cannot comprehend life and reality. Intellect with its logic goes round the object, intuition enters into the object; one stops at the superficial and the appearance, the other enters into the absolute reality of the object.²³⁵

Every stage of existence has a form of consciousness. In our evolution prior to the development of mind, consciousness was of a low order. It is in our present mind-state that in our completed evolutionary trail we are most conscious. This is the first stage where we can question and ponder. In using our mind, we understand most things partially. Essential matters confound us. Sri Aurobindo states that in our evolution a triple enigma confronts us. It is existence, consciousness and the significance of our conscious being. We do not know what existence is or how it came to be at all. Whether it is an eternal fact or a temporary phenomenon, an appearance or something real, or how or why it came into being we are ignorant of. Consciousness of existence is a premier fact and without it, being would not know of its own existence. Things might exist, but consciousness makes being self-aware and gives it significance. But then also, we do not know what is consciousness, or to whom it belongs. The significance of our conscious being in an inconscient material world is the last and worst enigma. We can have questions regarding its sense and justification and whether our individuality is real or apparent, temporary or permanent, or whether it has a meaning in the universe or in something beyond the universe. Sri Aurobindo further says that it is interesting that all these problems arise in our consciousness and it is in our consciousness alone, or perhaps in a greater consciousness, can the solution be found. On the nature and validity

²³⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 30. [SABCL], p. 267.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 257.

of our consciousness depends the nature and validity of the discoveries we shall make or the conclusions to which we can come. On the power of our consciousness depends the possibility or impossibility of putting into the terms of life the solutions our knowledge discovers. But most of all the appearance and development of consciousness in the inconscient world is the decisive factor, the one thing that gives its existence a light of meaning, a possibility of purpose, a hope of fulfilment and the soul's self-finding. To know, then, the nature of consciousness, its process, its birth, growth and destiny is for us a study of supreme importance. All the problems of existence turn around three things, the nature of being, the nature of consciousness and the secret of the energy of existence by which being and consciousness find each other and manifest what is within them. If we can discover these three things, all is known which we fundamentally need to know; the rest is application and process and consequence.²³⁶

Sri Aurobindo conceives the possibility that man in his mental evolution could operate not exclusively on the reasoning and reflecting intellectual intelligence but by an intuitive mentality. This could be the pathway to the next level which is the Supermind or the divine Gnosis, and which is beyond his present intellectual level.²³⁷ We are presently at a halfway station and further evolution of the mind therefore still lies ahead. The vehicle that the mind and the higher aspects of a human such as the soul utilise for its evolution is the present form of the human. The goal is a perfected spiritual being. This will take place, whether on the earth and in this or another cycle of Time.²³⁸ It is the choice of Man to be this vehicle and there is a route to becoming a conscious and active partner of the Cosmic Spirit. That way is to grow from our present state of being to a state of Supernature.²³⁹ If the human does not accept the challenge, another life form will. Intuitive intelligence is clear and efficient enough to penetrate and modify this other logical reasoning mind, but not sufficient in itself to abolish and transform the mass of the Ignorance and Inconscience.²⁴⁰ Regardless, even in our present state, a participation of a kind is there and our normal intelligence is sufficiently developed for

²³⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 30. [SABCL], p. 271.

²³⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 922.

²³⁸ Ibid, p. 269.

²³⁹ Ibid, p. 924.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 925.

the universal Conscious-Force to work through it.²⁴¹ What is required is a development of a mastery and knowledge, and an opening to a higher being and a higher nature.²⁴²

8. EVOLUTION

Sri Aurobindo accepts the principle of evolution. We can consider this in one of two ways, the micro- and the macro-timeframe of evolution. The micro-timeframe accepts the possibility of a multitude of previous stages of civilisations that existed in the past on earth. The fact that we might not have tangible evidence in for instance the form of ruins does not rule out this particular possibility. He mentions as one of the reasons for the existence of previous civilisations, the fact that man has brought into being in an incredibly short space of time, the present civilisation that we live in. The fact that for a million years or longer we had the potential to operate as homo sapiens, seeing we had the apparatus namely a large brain cage which presumably would have been filled with gray matter very similar to our own, at least leaves open the possibility for a previous civilisation. Regarding the macro-timeframe of evolution, the fate of the human is here not so much the issue, but rather that of the entire universe. He does refer to multiple universes and the very nature of his cosmology with the cycles of involution and evolution, results in an eternally recurring and continuous process.

In forming a theory of evolution we attempt to understand how things came to be and what the interrelationship between things are. From our normal human perspective, things here relate only to life forms. The popular perception, virtually unchallenged, is that prior to life there can be no evolution. This is as true now as it was in the previous two centuries. The subject of evolution in the 19th century was a popular one. Chambers²⁴³ and others thought and wrote extensively on the subject. But it was Darwin that popularised the subject in a particular way that caused him to become the recognised name in the theory of evolution. He accepts that many and serious objections may be advanced against "the theory of descent with modification through natural selection".²⁴⁴ However, in essence the fact is that for him there is an explanation

²⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 925.

²⁴² Ibid, p. 923.

²⁴³ Chambers, Robert. *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation and Other Evolutionary Writings*, pub. anonymously Edinburgh, 1845. ed. James A. Secord (Chicago, 1994). Quoted in Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. xi.

²⁴⁴ Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 371.

as to how things evolved and that is through the accumulation of innumerable slight variations, each good for the individual possessor. Equally important is the fact that he, as well as most other authors, viewed only one facet, namely life, in this process of evolution. Watson²⁴⁵ moved back one step from the direction of life in considering evolution by postulating the possibility that a virus, coming from outer space, could be the origin of life. The virus is considered to be not alive but an object between animate and inanimate matter. He produced an elegant overview as to how evolution could have taken place. We still do not however find him starting at the beginning, explaining life itself. He postulates the virus to be a transitional entity between non-life and life. If that is so, the focus must be at that point where life started. There life is on the cusp, and that is the important point that should be dealt with. Why this is important is because the fact that the origin of life is not explained in the approach of Watson and that is what we ideally need from his theory. Capra perhaps moved into a more basic and radical space by viewing what is not from a material point of view, but perceiving a more elementary or more subtle basis for what is. For in this more subtle basis was the reality of "cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy."²⁴⁶ All these authors are presenting theories, the reality and accuracy of which is still subject to the already mentioned caprices of understanding and ontology of reality. They have their value because they examine very acutely what is and the different possibilities that are. But somehow they don't quite get to grips with the basic essential question, namely what is life. They approach the problem from a somewhat limited anthropocentric angle. For them the things must be explained from the immediate perspective which is that of the human, and then of the human at his present point of evolution which is only a transient stage. Sri Aurobindo comments on that and observes that the views and theories of present-day thinkers on the subject of evolution are in the main descriptive and not explanatory. They deal with the more superficial apparent and not with the radical essential.

The cosmology of Sri Aurobindo is arguably one of the most complete I have encountered; he views evolution from a very broad canvas. He holds that Life is

²⁴⁵ Watson, Lyall. *Lifetide*. New York: Bantam Books, 1980, p. 9.

²⁴⁶ Capra, Fritjof. *The Tao of Physics*. Oxford: Fontana. 1982, p. 9.

already involved in Matter and therefore Life should be able to evolve out of material elements. In essence, Matter is a form of veiled Life, Life a form of veiled Consciousness. He does not end there. This evolution continues on to that of a mental consciousness which in itself may be only a form of higher states which are beyond Mind. This results in the unconquerable impulse of man towards the higher which incorporates all the different concepts such as God, Light, Bliss, Freedom and Immortality. This process did not start with man but with the basic Inconscient. This basic reality contains the totality of Sachchidananda. This is the start of the evolutionary process for Sri Aurobindo.²⁴⁷ But even prior to the evolution, there was the involution which is really the basic motive force for the evolutionary process. This basis is as complete as it can be, seeing it incorporates everything from the very highest unnamable unknowable reality right down to the very lowest unimaginable nothingness, the Inconscient. It is interesting that both life and humans occupy only a small portion on his spectrum of evolution. Man himself for Sri Aurobindo could quite conceivably be only a thinking and living laboratory in whom, and with his co-operation, nature intends to produce or manifest the superman, the god. On the face of that, from our present perspective this is a fairly improbable goal. From a broader perspective however, and if it is true that "Spirit is involved in Matter and apparent Nature is secret God, then the manifestation of the divine in himself and the realisation of God within and without are the highest and most legitimate aim possible to man upon earth."²⁴⁸

He concedes that it is difficult for man to share such a wide perspective. He equates our present position to that of the original Ape of the Darwinian theory in that it might have had a tad of difficulty in accepting the possibility of the evolution that subsequently did in fact take place according to Darwin. He (the ape, that is), as has most of present-day man, simply did not have the necessary apparatus for such a view and vision.

9. BEING AND NOTHINGNESS, TOTALITY AND INCONSCIENCE

For Sri Aurobindo, nothing can arise from Nothing. This of course is also the contention of the Goddess of Parmenides. Nothingness is a creation of the mind when the mind cannot see or conceive something beyond its grasp and it then calls that state by the

²⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 3.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

word nothingness or nothing. That is the point where we create zero. This zero is in fact an incalculable infinite. By its very nature it is beyond the conception and the ability of humans to understand. In this subtle beyond for instance there is all the light that can be conceived and more. This is much more than the light of all the Suns which is only localised concentrations of light. For Sri Aurobindo, light was not created by the Sun, it is the essence of God and God is omnipresent. Therefore there is light everywhere. We know of this from the outside and from a limited perspective. Whenever we perceive the innermost, what we see is only an inner external. Wherever we ever could be, whatever we ever could see, is partial; there is always yet a further depth and a further dimension to everything. Not that the eternal or the infinite or the 'thatness' is beyond our reach, it is part of us and we are part of it. It is just that whatever we know and possess by the mind, even the higher aspects of the mind, is partial. The mind as such cannot penetrate the spirit truly. When the mind becomes spiritualised, only then can it conceive of itself as spirit. At this point of our evolution we might imagine that we have left mind behind because we are in the spiritual realms with its intense wonderful realities. But in comparison with That Intensity and Wonder which is the Truth, our highest conceptions are something thin and inadequate.

The existence of the mind and the senses is a manifestation of an Eternal and Infinite which the mind cannot know. There is always yet another beyond; the very highest has the Unmanifest behind it. This is the region beyond all affirmations and denials, beyond shape or form, and certainly beyond the mind in all its aspects. The mind gets glimpses of this but it never gets It. Despite the impossibility of the task, the mind attempts to name this; Self, Nihil, Tao, Sunya, Absolute, Whatever. It names something but it does not name It. The words associated with this field such as the Eternal and Infinite are always inadequate. The reality of Being is not *Parabrahman* (the Supreme Unknowable; the Divine) nor is it Non-Being *Parabrahman*. These are only terms. All this is beyond knowledge which cannot comprehend anything exterior to itself. This can however be known in the Wisdom which is beyond knowledge and which is the renunciation of the attempt to know the Unknowable.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 188.

Sri Aurobindo deals with the Absolute, whatever Absolute means, and these different concepts are necessary and comprehensively central to his cosmology. Regarding being, this is as has already been explained, one facet of three of Sachchidananda. Being cannot exist independently, it always is combined with the other two components of Sachchidananda, whenever it is. This is even found in nothingness, which is not the nothingness that the Goddess preached to Parmenides about. This is the nothingness of the inconscience. Here the absolute totality of the very highest, of Sachchidananda is present but in its most dormant and primitive form possible. Apart from its absolute nothingness, it is also the true totality of everything. In examining the different statements of Sri Aurobindo in the elucidation of his cosmology, it becomes clear that complete in-depth understanding what he says is virtually impossible on an intellectual level. The material that he deals with is just too far removed from the level on which we understand things, which normally is that of the intellect, but often also on the emotional level. The understanding of the emotional level is lower than that of the intellect and is based on feeling. It should not be confused with the intuitive level where the possibility of understanding to a degree the ontology of Sri Aurobindo's reality exists. The knowledge and insight that he deals with, despite the fact that he is a human and is still operating on a human level, is not so much anthropocentric knowledge; it can better be described as universal knowledge. Even though on the face of it, space and time with its absolute basis come into this argument, it is in fact the dealing with the very essence of knowledge that we are concerned with here. Knowledge here is not on the relative level with its three elements namely the observer, the observed and the process of observation. It is more holistic. Knowledge is attained through the existence of and the reality of consciousness, and that reality of consciousness has as one salient element the fact that it is universal, it pervades the totality of the universe and it is one holistic state. This implies that there is not one consciousness that is separate from another. If therefore one operates on the level of consciousness, then the reality is that everything in the universe, being based in its essence on consciousness, is knowable by any one entity, which is part of this vast consciousness. This implies that an ant can know the totality of the universe, including Einstein's theories. This certainly sounds far-fetched from a human point of view, but what do we truly know of an ant or of anything else? We have a totally ingrained anthropocentric basis for all of our reality, it is extremely difficult to conceive of any other form of reality to what we personally experience. Any conception of ours, except

realisations obtained in higher states of consciousness, is anthropocentrically based. Sri Aurobindo, in page after page in his various books, paints pictures that strive to transcend this limitedness of our humanity.

10. EVIL

His position on the reality of Brahman is that it is indivisible in all things and the Brahman ultimately wills everything. This includes the phenomena of evil, ignorance and pain in the cosmos and it is only our uncomprehending relative consciousness that does not understand this and therefore creates an opposite principle of Maya as an existent principle of evil. There is one basic principle namely the Self and whatever manifests, originates from him.²⁵⁰ The human reality is based on the human perception. This reality is therefore a constantly changing one, as humans are constantly changing. If therefore we talk about pain or evil, that reality is partial, it is created by the human mind and is not absolute. Sri Aurobindo maintains "(g)ood and evil come in with the development of mental consciousness; they exist in their rudimentary elements in the animal and primitive human mind, they develop with the human development. Good and evil are things which arrive in the process of the evolution; there is then the possibility that they will disappear in the process of the evolution. If indeed they are essential to its highest possible point of culmination, then they will remain; or if one of them be essential and the other non-essential, then that one will remain and its opposite will disappear."²⁵¹ Further, "the values of good and evil which we give to things is not their divine or universal value, they are only their practical value created by us in our psychological and dynamic dealings with life."²⁵² Sri Aurobindo says that everywhere, "in the world, in himself, and around himself, he is met always by the opposites of his affirmation (whether suffering or enjoyment). Death is ever with him, limitation invests his being and his experience, error, inconstancy, weakness, inertia, grief, pain, evil are constant oppressors of his effort."²⁵³

This is a very definite affirmation that in these things evil does exist. This is in line with the thinking of Böhme whose cosmology and whose God had these negative elements as an integral part of His being. This certainly is his reality, but it is not *the*

²⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 31.

²⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human*. Volume 12. [CWSA], p. 149.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 148.

²⁵³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 47.

reality. There is great value attached to identifying the different concepts of whatever exists. This definitely includes the negative aspect, but the value thereof is to come to understand what the nature of the negative is. Once it has been identified as one of two poles of the dualistic existence, we know that it's perceived reality is partial, it is due more to our perception or lack thereof; this partial view of humanity is subject to change with the growth of consciousness.

Sri Aurobindo acknowledges that the problem of evil has always been a problem which gave rise to various and conflicting solutions. For the rationalist who accepts only what is material, the problem does not exist. For him this results in evolution from a blind and unintelligent Nature that has no conception of good or evil. It is in the human mind and its social sense that the ideas of pleasure and pain developed in human beings. The question as to why evil come into existence and what its purpose is, and the unwillingness man of to admit that evil can have its existence in God, led to the concept of God and Satan. If God is the source and creator of all, we must admit that both evil and good exists and came from Him. This is because He is omnipotent and what happens is his wish. If He does not create it and He permits it, it must be for some wise and perfect purpose.

Understanding God is impossible. His is an infinite wisdom, ours a finite, His perfect, ours undeveloped. Sri Aurobindo says that experience must always be the basis of true knowledge, but it must be experience illuminated by true perception, not experience dominated by surface impressions. The mind that feels grief and thinks emotionally, cannot arrive at complete and perfect truth. Emotion is for the heart, not the intellect; the intellect is to observe and understand and not to prejudge. Ideally one should look closely at every experience to ascertain its deeper or infinite purpose. He says that "omniscient Providence reveals itself in the fall of the sparrow and the death of the ant as well as in the earthquake that destroys great cities and the floods that make thousands destitute and homeless."²⁵⁴ God is in all things, all beings and all events such as floods and earthquakes. The existence of evil could be to change good into a higher good. Evil comes into existence in order that men may reject evil and rise to good. The problem of why creation is subject to pain remains. Pain can only be to prepare a higher

²⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*. Volume 13. [CWSA], p. 60.

race which shall rise above pain to a higher capacity for pleasure and happiness. Sri Aurobindo asks whether it is not possible that pain has to exist for a limited time in order for it to be worked out of the Cosmos. Another question is whether pain is real or a shadow. The Vedantist belief that the soul is one with God Himself, is knowledge for which mankind is not ready. He feels his pain too acutely. Possibly the answer is that man has to develop equanimity regarding pain and pleasure, good or evil, in order for him to see the transcendent whole.²⁵⁵

Sri Aurobindo was not uninvolved with nor untouched by evil. As with all other aspects of his philosophy, the reality of evil is a factor of our perception thereof. He tended to focus on solutions rather than on the problem. There is however a responsibility on people to change because he maintains, "Suffering cannot go as long as ignorance remains."²⁵⁶ From his side he acted in whichever way he could to deal with what he considered was not right. An example relates to "important world-issues, which shows distinctly that renunciation of life is not a part of his yoga. (During) the second world-war, at the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene."²⁵⁷ This he did from the level of quietness and in consciousness. He said that he operated on a subtle level during the Second World War and gave three examples of his attention having positive results. The first one was when "I had fixed the 15th August and 15th September as the dates on which Germany would have defeat and both the days they go the defeat (August I believe over London and September--the 'invasion idea' and 'preparation')," the second was about his desire for De Gaulle to become the chief of the Free French armies in North Africa and the third one was about the Tunisian campaign.²⁵⁸

He states that those were his intentions and that he did act from the subtle level to achieve what he thought was right. I think we have to accept that he did act and that he had those intentions as being true, but is it possible that one can operate in that way and achieve what he said he did? Does this work in this hard real world of man-made wars

²⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*. Volume 13. [CWSA], p. 60-63.

²⁵⁶ Purani, A B. Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo. Downloaded from http://members.tripod.com/~neuro_net/evetlksa.htm, p. 64.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 318.

and natural disasters such as tsunamis? This leads to the question of morality, the morality of Sri Aurobindo to decide that Hitler is wrong and England is right. But yesterday England was occupying India, committing all sorts of atrocities. Does Sri Aurobindo operate from the relative level in his judgments or is this from the Absolute? Who is to say that he is right, that his particular view which favours the lesser evil – England – against the greater namely Germany? Should he not do as Lord Krishna did and allow the combatants to destroy each other completely? Or is he acting now in the role that he envisages humanity to act once they have achieved the ultimate which is union with the supreme, after which they continue acting on earth fulfilling whatever role they have to fulfill? Or is this whole life simply the play of Maya, not really real, we are actors on the stage and the spilt blood is tomato sauce? I have looked for answers in his writings and I have found them to be partial. But are they truly partial or is that merely a reflection of my perception? Yet another question, is that not how life should be? Are we not now assembled on the battlefield of Dharma, and should we not follow the instruction of Lord Krishna where we are not to grieve for the dead or for the living?²⁵⁹ Also, why should Sri Aurobindo not ask us: What standard of morality will you accept? How safe and secure do you wish to be, what vision of yours do you wish to impose on the totality of the universe? How flexible and convenient is your morality? How should life be lived and how do you live your life? Can we say and can we then answer him? A final question, whose evil am I talking about, his or mine?

11. OVERVIEW

The cosmology of Sri Aurobindo is based on a cycle of involution and evolution. In an analysis of his cycle we found that even though his views are of cosmic proportions, he did consider and incorporate into his cycle the realities of humanity. However, in doing so we also discovered that the true nature of humanity is identical to that of the cosmos. It is effectively the point of view from which we view things that determines their reality. Each insight we gain represents an aspect of the truth; that part of the truth is simply that part where our attention is focused on at that particular moment. And as we proceed we find that we are always dealing with absolute truth and depending on our point of view, absolute from a relative point or from a relative perspective. We eventually realise that the absolute is absolute and it is simply our perspective thereof

²⁵⁹ Mascaro, Juan. *The Bhagavad-Gita*. London: Penquin. 1962, p. 49.

that we always deal with, we do not deal with the absolute. We can, but not yet. That is in the future and is based on our larger potential, on our evolutionary growth towards the higher. For that an understanding of ourselves is required, we must be aware of and develop our different facets and abilities which at present are only potential. I refer to our psychic being, knowledge about our ordinary states of consciousness and knowledge of the region beyond that which is the supramental domain. These subjects will be dealt with in the following three chapters.

Chapter 4

THE PSYCHIC BEING

Understanding the Psychic Being is cardinal to understanding the role of the Supreme in the life of humanity. It becomes clear in the reading of his works that this is a central aspect of Sri Aurobindo's teaching and of his understanding of the link between humanity and the Supreme. Here he deals with the human being, with divinity and the vast complex of actual and potential interrelationships that exist between the two. It is therefore worthy of thorough examination. In this chapter we will analyse the nature, the mode of functioning, the development of the Psychic Being, spiritual practice, as well as the effect of death and rebirth and somewhat of the emotional aspect as regards the Psychic Being.²⁶⁰ Because of the subtle nature of the psychic being and the different overlapping aspects thereof, especially as it operates within a human body, it is not possible to treat the different aspects in watertight compartments. However, the outline mentioned in this paragraph and used in this chapter is an attempt at preventing unnecessary complexity in presenting the subject. For humankind, one of the most important facets of the evolutionary process is to reach and develop, after experiencing Matter, Life and Mind, the Psychic Being. This is not a simplistic matter, still, in expounding on matters relating to the Psychic Being and the soul in various sections of his books, Sri Aurobindo's explanations at times are complex yet clear and he does succeed in giving an in-depth and comprehensive insight into the subject. However, in an analogy where we desire to know what the body of a human being is, by the body being presented as having a trunk, a head, arms and legs, and by being given a few details of these elements such as an arm with its hand and fingers, some mention of the fingerprints and nails, etc. we still arrive at a functional if imperfect overview. This analogy is applicable to the analysis of the Psychic Being in this chapter.

Why the psychic being and the evolution thereof is important, is due to the equally important but thus far partially developed abilities of the mental faculty. Sri Aurobindo states, "For mind itself is not enough; even its largest play of intelligence creates only a qualified half-light. A surface mental knowledge of the physical universe is a still more

²⁶⁰ This arrangement is in line with that of a compilation of Sri Aurobindo's work in: Sri Aurobindo. *The Psychic Being*, Twin Lakes: Lotus Press, 1999.

imperfect guide; for the thinking animal it might be enough, but not for a race of mental beings in labour of a spiritual evolution. Even the truth of physical things cannot be entirely known, nor can the right use of our material existence be discovered by physical Science and an outward knowledge alone or made possible by the mastery of physical and mechanical processes alone: to know, to use rightly we must go beyond the truth of physical phenomenon and process, we must know what is within and behind it. For we are not merely embodied minds; there is a spiritual being, a spiritual principle, a spiritual plane of Nature."²⁶¹ This truth of physical things that cannot be entirely known does exist. But simultaneously there exists a space between that physical thing and the would-be comprehending implement namely our mind. In reality there is no such space, it is only possible within the state of duality but there it is very real. If we truly understood the very basis of our ontology, we would not have this problem because then we would experience that object as ourself. But that is a function of our evolution and the state cannot be true until it has actually been reached and lived.

1. THE NATURE OF THE PSYCHIC BEING

To understand the nature of the Psychic Being, we have to briefly look again at the broad schema of Sri Aurobindo as developed in the previous chapter, where we have the cosmology of involution and evolution, with the creative aspect of 'what is', starting from Sachchidananda. In the upward phase which started at the end of the involutory phase, Matter, Life and Mind evolved. Even though each of these levels has its own type of consciousness, upon reaching the level of the Mind, it is the development of the human consciousness that is the defining aspect of Mind. Here consciousness operates mainly through the use of the intellect. We are forced to use one word, consciousness, for various applications, using descriptive adjectives when necessary. It is at this stage of our development that an additional new reality, namely the Psychic Being, becomes pertinent. It is the spark of the divine or the soul that is present in every living creature, in a plant and in an animal, which 'nonhuman' soul is not entirely dormant but which cannot express itself as well as the soul in a human. Sri Aurobindo says that because animals have a soul, they can respond readily to the psychic²⁶² in man.²⁶³ I would

²⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 731.

²⁶² Sri Aurobindo in his works used the terms physical, vital, mental and psychic as nouns denoting matter, life, mind and spirit. He also used these terms as adjectives as in for instance vital energy, or vital consciousness or vital habits.

²⁶³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 294.

presume that the same goes for plants and also that the process would be reciprocal in both plants and animals, which implies that man too through his psychic being can respond to animals and plants. This contention could conceivably be backed up by the findings of Bird in his *The Secret Life of Plants* and the seemingly miraculous way in which Luther Burbank selected superior mutated seeds simply by walking through a cornfield.

The contrast between the mind and the soul is shown in Sri Aurobindo's contention: "The intellect tells us simply that there is a Brahman higher than the highest, an Unknowable that knows itself in another fashion than that of our knowledge; but the intellect cannot bring us into its presence. The divine soul living in the Truth of things would, on the contrary, always have the conscious sense of itself as a manifestation of the Absolute."²⁶⁴ It is only at this stage of our development of consciousness that we can "form a precise instead of a vague idea of divinity and the divine life, (and) also to give these ideas a firm basis of philosophical reasoning, (resulting in) the inevitable future of our evolution."²⁶⁵ "Only then can we intellectually grasp what is the Divine, the Eternal Reality and understand how out of it the world has come."²⁶⁶ Even though the psychic being was present in all the previous stages of our being, it is at this phase of our evolution that we can become aware thereof through our subtler consciousness. This results in a profound change in this life and in our relationships in our present temporal estate. Sri Aurobindo explains what is now happening: "what we ourselves actually are is the Divine in the individual ascending back out of limited Nature to its own proper divinity."²⁶⁷ This could only have taken place after having gone through the whole past range of evolutionary activity, that is after having experienced matter and life, and in the more immediate past, mind. It is the quality of awareness that determines how conscious we are of our soul or psychic being; more accurately, it is the quality of the vessel that the psychic being finds itself in that determines how and to what degree the presence of the psychic being is being felt and is influencing the human being. This striving towards divinity takes place in man who has "known the fall and the life of man redeemed, conqueror of the lost godhead and bearing within him the experience ...

²⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 152.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 150.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 150.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 150.

(and) his acceptance of the utter descent."²⁶⁸ This means that man's origin was the Divine, that his essence is Divine. He possesses a Divine immortal soul and he is now moving out of the ignorance back to himself which is the Divine.²⁶⁹ Our connection with the Divine is through the psychic part of us. Due to that reality, the divine possibilities that it (the psychic being) represent gained support and influence in the initial phases of evolution, namely the body, life and mind. Whatever the type of life or the quality of consciousness in that life, it is through this that the divine is present in initially, an undeveloped fashion. Its mode of operation and expression is restricted by the imperfection of the type of manifestation it finds itself in namely the human body. Its impulse, task and reality is to constantly grow in consciousness towards the divine, eventually developing a powerful psychic individuality at which stage Sri Aurobindo calls it the Psychic Being. The presence of the Psychic Being is the motivation or reason for man searching for the spiritual life. The nature of the psychic being is different from the mind or the vital, the vital being life. It stands behind them and supports them and is found in the heart. Sri Aurobindo talks about it being behind the heart rather than in the heart.²⁷⁰ This is a strange idea in a way, equating something as intangible as the soul with space and obviously then with time. The question here could then be whether the soul operates within spatiality, and the obvious answer must be yes.

Sri Aurobindo has described a variety of aspects of the soul in the lines below, each line full of meaning and covering a wide range of characteristics, including aspects of its growth. He starts by describing it as a mother in the following way:

"She puts forth a small portion of herself,
 A being no bigger than the thumb of man
 Into a hidden region of the heart
 To face the pang and to forget the bliss,
 To share the suffering and endure earth's wounds
 And labour mid the labour of the stars.
 This in us laughs and weeps, suffers the stroke,
 Exults in victory, struggles for the crown;

²⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 151.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 151.

²⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 288-289.

Identified with the mind and body and life,
 It takes on itself their anguish and defeat,
 Bleeds with Fate's whips and hangs upon the cross,
 Yet is the unwounded and immortal self
 Supporting the actor in the human scene."²⁷¹

Obviously this psychic being is many-faceted, it exercises powerful influences on a person and it is described as a mostly secret power which can act upon the mind, life and body. It has a purifying influence on thoughts, perceptions and emotions. This allows for further evolution using this vehicle namely the Psychic Being. Sri Aurobindo stated that the evolutionary task of humanity is more than just reaching a spiritual level of existence. He said that it was not the intention of Nature for man to evolve to the level of spirituality and then to lounge there for infinity. Rather, there is a further objective, that of a radical and integral transformation of Nature. That will reveal Nature as being the luminous Consciousness-Force carrying in her the eternal Existence and its universal Delight of being. This is the trinity of Sachchidananda whose Nature is also in man, and this revelation still has to be accomplished. This will be the self-affirmation of the Spirit of the supramental being who shall thereafter be the leader of that Nature in the material universe. This all will come later, because at present the principle of spirituality has yet to affirm itself in its own complete right and sovereignty. Up till now it has been on the lower evolutionary level of a mentally created reality, and not the self-affirmation of the next level of evolution, which is the domain of the Spirit and which is free from the mind's limitations. It must now become the normal nature of a new type of being. Until now, Mind was established here on a basis of Ignorance seeking for Knowledge and growing into Knowledge, but in its place, Supermind must be established on a basis of Knowledge growing into its own greater Light. For this, the spiritual-mental being must rise to Supermind and bring down its powers into terrestrial existence to bridge the gulf between Mind and Supermind. This can only be actualised by a triple transformation which, according to Sri Aurobindo, consists firstly of a psychic change where our present nature is converted into a soul-instrumentation, then of a spiritual change where a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss and Purity descends into the whole being, right down into the darkness of our subconscious and

²⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Savitri - A Legend and a Symbol*. Volume 33-34. [CWSA], p. 526-526.

thirdly, there must be the supramental transmutation, which is the ascent into the Supermind and a descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.²⁷²

Sri Aurobindo examined the reality of the Psychic Being from a variety of angles, giving us insight into his views regarding the purpose, significance and nature thereof. To the question what is meant by a soul, Sri Aurobindo explained that there is no existence which does not have the support of something of the Divine behind it. That part of the existence is the divine soul. However, a problem enters here because the word soul has various meanings according to the context in which it is used. It may mean the *Purusha* (*Purusha* is the essential being supporting the play of *Prakriti*, and *Prakriti* is Nature-Force or Natural Powers) which we call a being, though the proper word would be rather a becoming. On the other hand it may mean specifically the Psychic Being in an evolutionary creature like man, it may also mean the spark of the Divine which has been put into Matter by the descent of the Divine into the material world and which upholds all evolving formations here.²⁷³

There is another unusual type of being found in man but which is not the soul, namely the denizens of the tygal worlds. Sri Aurobindo explains that if any being of the tygal worlds (where evolution does not take place) wants to evolve, it is done by coming down to earth and taking a human body, in this way receiving the benefit of evolution. They follow this route because they do not want to accept the responsibility and the hardship of evolution. For them the easy route is to possess the bodies of men. Then they may enjoy the material aspect of physical life without having the burden of the evolution or the process of conversion in which it culminates. Tygal worlds are different in nature compared to the world that we know.²⁷⁴ "The other worlds which are tygal worlds, are each fixed in its own kind and type and law. Evolution takes place on the earth and therefore the earth is the proper field for progression. The beings of the other worlds do not progress from one world to another. They remain fixed to their own type."²⁷⁵

²⁷² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 889-891.

²⁷³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 386.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 386.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 11.

The two complementary concepts namely the soul in its essence and the psychic being should be distinguished. It has already been mentioned that supporting each living thing is the soul, the spark of the divine, which on earth is the absolute prerequisite for life. According to Sri Aurobindo it is quite possible to have a vital and a physical being without a clearly evolved psychic being supporting it. The inner being is not the psychic being; the inner being consists of the inner mental, the inner vital, and the inner physical. The relationship between the two main components here is that the psychic being supports all of the inner being. Normally the role that the psychic being plays is less than its potential. It has to operate within a human body and it is the nature and the level of development of this human body that determines the contribution that the psychic being can render. It is these surface or more superficial aspects of the human that hides the psychic being and prevents it from beneficially influencing a human.²⁷⁶

In considering the spiritual aspect of a human being, it is perhaps appropriate to mention the word ghost. The ghost or ghosts are vestigial remains but it is not the soul. Sri Aurobindo says that it is either a man which appears in his vital body or it is a portion of his vital that is appropriated by some other vital force or being. The vital part of the human normally remains for some time after the body has dissolved, or returned to dust as the saying goes. This vital part moves on to the vital plane where it remains until the dissolution of the vital sheath. Then, if it is mentally evolved, the mental sheath moves to a mental world where the psychic finally leaves the mental sheath and goes to some place of rest. If the mental facet of our being is strongly developed then, as can the vital, it can remain as long as it is organised by, and centered around the true psychic being. When this is the case then it can share the immortality of the psychic but "otherwise the psychic draws mind and life into itself and enters into an internatal quiescence."²⁷⁷

Sri Aurobindo uses the word is *Purusha* and *Prakriti* often. A few words about their origin would be in order. It derives from the six systems of Indian philosophy which are intended to aid a person in arriving at true knowledge. *Sankhya* is the third of these systems. This is the psychological basis of the Vedanta and figures in the Upanishads, in the Yoga literature, in works by Patanjali and the word means 'related to number'.

²⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 293.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 295.

This system teaches that knowledge of an object is only complete when knowledge of its components is obtained. In the analysis of creation and of life, *Sankhya* found 25 essential categories as the basis of what is and regarding the process of the evolution of the Cosmos. These teachings can be verified through personal experience. This is a mental, or rather a supramental exercise. We will only examine the first two, but the 25 categories can be reduced to eight under the following few headings: *Purusha*, *Prakriti*, *Mahat* (the primal unitary substance moves towards manifestation), *Ahamkara* (causes individual aspect of *Mahat*), *Manas* (the cosmic mind for the future creation), the *Indriyas* (the different senses and organs), the *Tanmatras* (the essences and the senses of perception), and the *Mahabhutas* (the constituent elements of creation – space, air, fire, water and earth. *Purusha* is the cosmic spirit or the basic essential underlying reality of consciousness within, amongst others, a human being. This is the basis of the subjective aspect of life and is the Eternal Silent Witness. *Prakriti* is nature or the primal substance at the base of the entire creation. This is the realm of the three *gunas* (the three modes of nature) namely *sattva* (the mode of light and poise of peace; the force of equilibrium resulting in harmony and happiness), *rajas* (the mode of action, desire and passion resulting in the struggle and effect) and *tamas* (the mode of ignorance and inertia resulting in incapacity and inaction). *Guna* has three meanings, namely quality, character and property which are substances and not mere qualities. In the *Sankhya* philosophy each and every unit of quality is but a unit of substance. The *gunas* were ultimate entities which by their various modifications manifest themselves as qualities.^{278, 279}

These different concepts are the same concepts that are used by Sri Aurobindo. All these different principles have a long history and they originate from the Veda; they have been generally accepted and used in the Indian religio-philosophical world for a long time. To prevent a possible misunderstanding I want to make clear that at no point in time did Sri Aurobindo even suggest that he had discovered these principles. He is simply using what is available in his cultural tradition. These principles simply tied in with what Sri Aurobindo had verified through personal experience and subsequently taught.

²⁷⁸ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963.

²⁷⁹ Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. *The Bhagavad-Gita*. New York: Penguin books. 1969, p. 480-483.

One of the techniques that we could utilise for our evolution would be the practice of *yoga*. *Yoga* (to yoke, joining in the sense of unification, the union of the soul with the immortal being and consciousness and delight of the divine)²⁸⁰ and the practice thereof are intended to achieve union with the Supreme. In the experience of being one is in essence one with Himself and with the Supreme or Divine, and one then has contact with all, and access to all the divine potentialities. The manifestation of the divine is represented in its two aspects, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. The situation then is that the Divine here in nature is veiled from the individual but it acts on the individual from the lower *Prakriti*, through a force of Ignorance or *Avidya*. It is so that the *Purusha* is in itself divine, but when it moves externally into the ignorance of nature, "it is the individual apparent being imperfect with her imperfection."²⁸¹ We therefore find that the soul or psychic essence is the *Purusha* taking part in the evolutionary process through creating as it were the individual psychic being as its representative. This individual psychic being takes on the imperfection of nature and evolves to the point of regaining its full psychic reality and reuniting with the Self. This takes place in the state of duality. This is the reality that is present on all the planes of its being, the planes here being the psychic, the mental, the vital and the physical *Purushas*. Even though the being is a unitary reality throughout, it is present in a form proper to the plane on which it operates; the mental *Purusha* in the mental plane, etc. There is a multiplicity of planes, and we should bear that in mind in order to be aware of the richness and fullness of what is but what is not known yet.²⁸²

Sri Aurobindo makes use of the concepts or words *Atman*, *Jivatman* and the Psychic. There are subtle differences to take note of. The evolving soul is the psychic being whereas the pure *Atman* is the pure self or spirit. He states this as lucidly and completely as we could perhaps desire: "The pure self is unborn, does not pass through death or birth, is independent of birth or body, mind or life or this manifested Nature. It is not bound by these things, not limited, not affected, even though it assumes and supports them. The soul, on the contrary, is something that comes down into birth and passes through death—although it does not itself die, for it is immortal—from one state to another, from the earth plane to other planes and back again to the earth-existence. It

²⁸⁰ *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms in Integral Yoga Literature*. Compiled and published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, India.

²⁸¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 284.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p. 285.

goes on with this progression from life to life through an evolution which leads it up to the human state and evolves through it all a being of itself which we call the psychic being that supports the evolution and develops a physical, a vital, a mental human consciousness as its instruments of world-experience and of a disguised, imperfect, but growing self-expression. All this it does from behind a veil showing something of its divine self only in so far as the imperfection of the instrumental being will allow it. But a time comes when it is able to prepare to come out from behind the veil, to take command and turn all the instrumental nature towards a divine fulfilment. This is the beginning of the true spiritual life. The soul is able now to make itself ready for a higher evolution of manifested consciousness than the mental human—it can pass from the mental to the spiritual and through degrees of the spiritual to the supramental state. Till then there is no reason why it should cease from birth, it cannot in fact do so. In having reached the spiritual state, if it wills to pass out of the terrestrial manifestation, it may indeed do so—but there is also possible a higher manifestation, in the Knowledge and not in the Ignorance."²⁸³ This higher manifestation is that of the gnostic human living on earth.

He tends to repeat himself but in the repetition a slightly different emphasis is placed on aspects of his subject, resulting in a greater clarity of understanding thereof. It becomes clear that for him, in reality, all in the Cosmos is one, but in this oneness it is very apparent that a hierarchy exists in whatever is. In his elucidation of the relationship between humans and Brahman, Sri Aurobindo again uses the terms *Atman*, *Jivatman*, and the Psychic. He defines *Atman* as Self, Spirit, the original and essential nature of our existence, the true and highest Self. *Jivatman* is the individual self, central being, the multiple Divine manifested here as the individualised self or spirit of the created being. The concept 'central being' in turn is further developed. He says it is usually applied to that portion of the Divine in us which supports all the rest and survives through death and birth. It has two forms namely something that is above, and that would be *Jivatman*, our true being, and another that is below, which is the Psychic Being and which stands behind and supports mind, body and life through whichever aspect is dominant, either through the mental being and will or through the psychic. From the higher, the *Jivatman*, we become aware when the higher self-knowledge

²⁸³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 438-439.

comes. The *Jivatman* is above the manifestation in life and presides over it; the Psychic Being stands behind the manifestation in life and supports it. The Psychic Being feels itself as a portion of the Divine, one in essence, but the dynamics of manifestation determines that even in identity there is a difference. The *Jivatman*, on the contrary, lives in the essence and can merge itself in identity with the Divine. All the same, the moment it presides over the dynamics of the manifestation, it knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, and not as the *Parameshwara* (supreme Lord). In this state, there is no egoism.²⁸⁴

The assistance that the psychic being gives a human is immense, but it is so that different other aspects apart from the psychic being assists in the functioning of a human. Often the psychic being will give intimations as to necessary knowledge, but it could also be other subtle aspects of a human that performs this duty. The psychic being can alert you through an intuition of the existence of certain things or it can present a warning regarding the results of certain actions, but the same functions could also be performed by a different aspect of our being; it could be there in the mental, or the inner vital or the inner subtle physical *Purusha*. Whatever insights we gain here, emanates from the inner being which knows a great deal which is totally unknown to the outer mind, the outer vital, and the outer physical simply because of the fact that that inner being has a more direct relationship and contact with the secret forces of nature. The psychic does not relegate its responsibility in our being and evolution but is still present at all times, also when these intuitions and perceptions are presented us. The arena that it mainly deals with is that of the Divine, through that we obtain a perception of truth inherent in and based on the deepest facet of consciousness, presenting a flavour of the good, true and the beautiful.²⁸⁵

The central being, which is itself the birthless and deathless *Jivatman*, presides over the individual birth and evolution. It is present on each of the many planes of the consciousness. "Each being, therefore is, so long as the Ignorance lasts, centred round his mental, vital or physical *Purusha*, according to the plane on which he predominantly lives, and that is to him his central being. But the true representative all the time is concealed behind the mind, vital and physical—it is the psychic, our inmost being.

²⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 265-270.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 269.

When the inmost knowledge begins to come, we become aware of the psychic being within us and it comes forward and leads the *sadhana* (the practice by which perfection is attained). We become aware also of the *Jivatman*, the undivided Self or Spirit above the manifestation of which the psychic is the representative here."²⁸⁶

The psychic has a desire to express itself in full for it to perform its function but so long as it is veiled, it must express itself through the mind and vital and that expression is coloured by the realities of the vital and mental. In the mind there is a desire for the knowledge of the Divine. In the vital it may be a craving or wish for the Divine. This craving can take many forms because of the nature, unquiet passions, and troubled emotions of the vital. This however is ostensibly the only route to the Divine, as the pure psychic way is initially simply not available.²⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo explains certain further subtle aspects and interrelationships of the psychic with other components of a human. He deals with the psychic-mental, psychic-vital and the psychic-physical. These are the components of the mental, vital and the physical which can be, or is, influenced by the psychic. The influence extended depends on the personality or to the degree of evolution that a person has attained. The greater the evolution attained, the greater the possibility and the actual influence of the psychic on a human. Each of these levels, the mind, vital or physical, modify the manner in which the psychic can express itself. The psychic-vital seeks after the Divine, but it has a demand in its self-giving, desire, vital eagerness and reduces the effectiveness of the psychics influence. Here the nature of the psychic itself is different from the psychic vital in that it is instead pure self-giving, aspiration, intensity of psychic fire. The psychic-vital is subject to pain and suffering, which state cannot be applicable to the psychic proper.²⁸⁸

When we think about or consider our soul, we mean the psychic principle which is not the life or the mind, or the body, but that which could be considered the essence of all these, that which brings the joy and beauty in us to light. But there is more to it than that. In us there is a double soul or psychic term, which is not really surprising as every other cosmic principle in us is also double. Sri Aurobindo presents a complete and comprehensive description of the nature of these different double facets present in our

²⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 270.

²⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 547.

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 1111.

being and says that we have two minds, the surface mind has a superficial mentality mainly because of our emergence out of matter. This is related to our evolutionary ego. The other mind is the subliminal mind which is a large and powerful mind of light. In a similar way we have two lives with the one involved in the physical body and tied to our physical evolution and the other being a subliminal force of light which is our true vital being behind our superficial life. In a similar way our being has a duality; we have the physical body and behind that is our real body supporting the physical body as well as supplying the subtler material which is the substance of our physical, vital and mental sheaths. In addition we have a double psychic entity which is the surface desire soul attending to our physical, emotional and mental cravings and beyond that is our subliminal psychic entity which is a pure power of light, love and joy. These more subtle facets of our being are the components of our true reality.²⁸⁹

Further, all these different aspects of ours that are double are related to the functions that they have. The external forms of our being are those of our small egoistic existence whereas the subliminal are the formations of our larger true individuality. In the concealed part of our being in which our individuality is close to our universality, there is a constant contact, communication and relationship between the more superficial and the deeper aspect of our being. The subliminal mind has direct contact with the universal knowledge of the cosmic Mind, the subliminal life is in touch with the universal force of the cosmic Life, and the subliminal physical aspect in us is associated with the universal force-formation of cosmic Matter. There is a separating veil dividing our surface mind, life and body from the subliminal aspect of our being. This also applies to the subliminal soul in us which is open to the universal delight of the cosmic soul. In contrast, the surface soul is hemmed in by thick egoistic walls separating it from the divine cosmic Delight. This aspect of the soul also desires more but it seeks unsuccessfully for the essence of being, the essence of power, the essence of consciousness and the essence of delight.²⁹⁰

In a certain way, the soul of a human can be a source of knowledge. From the normal point of view of a human, intellectual knowledge offers him a wide power of consciousness to free and illuminate what is. Normally a person is not sure whether

²⁸⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 220-221.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 221-222.

knowledge obtained from the heart can be valid. This is because the heart operates on the level of emotion and does not present knowledge with the same degree of clarity and certainty if compared with knowledge received from the intellect. But this perception regarding the ability of the heart centre to produce quality knowledge is not necessarily correct. Sri Aurobindo says that present in the heart or behind it is a more profound mystic light which is not intuition, as intuition actually descends through the mind from outside. This mystic light has a direct contact with Truth. The ancients thought that the locus of the immanent Divine, the hidden *Purusha*, is in this mystic heart. It is from there that true knowledge is gained. To clarify the types of emotional knowledge, we have to consider the emotional component of man which has a double character. The lower type of emotion is governed by egoistic passion and blind instinctive affections which is fairly animal-like. The combination of the emotive heart and the crude vital results in the creation of a false soul of desire which the reason has every right to distrust and control. It is however not very successful in this attempt. This is not where the true soul of man is; it is in the true invisible heart hidden in some luminous cave of the nature of which few are even aware. "It is as this psychic being in him grows and the movements of the heart reflect its divinations and impulsions that man becomes more and more aware of his soul, ceases to be a superior animal and, awakening to glimpses of the godhead within him, admits more and more its intimations of a deeper life and consciousness and an impulse towards things divine. It is one of the decisive moments of the integral Yoga when this psychic being, liberated, brought out from the veil to the front, can pour the full flood of its divinations, seeings and impulsions on the mind, life and body of man and begins to prepare the upbuilding of divinity in the earthly nature."²⁹¹

The nature of the psychic being is to seek the Divine Truth. Initially the soul is a small spark of divinity and yet this grows. For this, it relies on the mind, the life-force and the physical consciousness in order to express itself. Under normal circumstances the most it can do is to supply a little bit of inner light, resulting in a less coarse human. It is up against a petty physical consciousness, a mistaken arrogant mind and an impetuous fierce vital nature. All these aspects the soul has to accept. Even though against its inclination, it also has to accept wrong action, feeling and associations of its human

²⁹¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 150.

counterpart. Part of its divine nature allows for its potential to guide more surely than can either reason or desire. Wisdom dictates that this guidance is what should be followed, even if the route of the reason and the outward moral mentor appears the shortest. With time the human turns towards the Divine at which time all the possible available support is rendered by the soul.²⁹² It is when this point of evolution has been reached, where a human is not primarily or totally reliant on the mental faculty, when the vital has ceased to insist on its way of desire, and when the physical has been changed sufficiently not to be bound by its obscurity or inertia, that the hidden inmost being emerges and leads the evolutionary process. Its actions are subtle and plastic, its movements are gentle, and it moves towards the Truth with a supple sureness. It automatically distinguishes right from wrong and frees the evolving being from the clinging impurities. Sri Aurobindo says that it is an alchemic transmutation of all the inner and outer existence that is taking place. Here the soul is aware of the ever-present divine essence and it rejects what is less than that. Its insistence is on truth, joy, love and beauty. Its truth is a lasting truth and not a pragmatic temporary truth of the ignorance. "Its will is for the divinisation of life, the expression through it of a higher Truth, its dedication to the Divine and the Eternal."²⁹³ This transformation takes place through the *action* of the psychic being and not through the *being* of the psychic being. In its activity it becomes involved with, and positively affects, the physical, vital and mental aspects of a person. In summing up, the working and the nature of the psychic is different from the mental which watches, observes and passes judgment on all that transpires in a person. The psychic, because of its purity of nature and divine instinct within, feels and knows spontaneously in a direct and clear way. On the occasions that it does come to the fore, it reveals immediately what is the right and wrong action.²⁹⁴

2. THE TASK AND FUNCTIONING OF THE PSYCHIC BEING

The function of the psychic is to work on each plane in order to raise each to the level of truth and the Divine Reality.²⁹⁵ Initially the psychic entity or the soul whose task is to unfold as the first step towards a spiritual change, is an entirely veiled part of us, even though it is that by which we exist and persist as individual beings in Nature. This is the aspect of our being that persists eternally. In contrast to the psychic entity in us

²⁹² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 225.

²⁹³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-2.1 [SABCL], p. 146.

²⁹⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 301.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 297.

which persists, the other parts of our natural composition are subject to destruction. The psychic entity harbours all the essential possibilities of our manifestation but is not constituted by them. It is more than what it manifests, and it is untouched by incomplete forms or qualities of what is manifested, untarnished by imperfections, impurities, defects and depravations of the surface being. It is of a different reality, with an ever-pure flame of the divinity in things and nothing that it encounters, nothing that we experience, can pollute its purity or extinguish the flame. This spiritual stuff is completely pure and luminous. Because of its perfect luminosity, it is directly, instantaneously and intimately aware of truth of being and truth of nature. It is deeply conscious of truth and good and beauty because these are the characteristics of its own native being, it is in total accord with its own substance. It is aware also of all that contradicts these things, of all that deviates from its own native character, of falsehood and evil and the ugly and the unseemly; but it does not become these things nor is it touched or changed by these opposites of itself which so powerfully affect its outer instrumentation of mind, life and body. For the soul, the permanent being in us, influences and uses mind, life and body as its instruments, undergoes the envelopment of their conditions, but it is other and greater than its members.

If the psychic entity had from the start been unveiled, the human evolution would have been an easy and fast process, compared with the difficult route it has taken. But the way the psychic entity had to follow was that of secrecy and it had to operate from behind a thick veil. All the same, it is filled with a secret Light within us. At our surface level we have glimpses of illumination, which derives from the psyche, but our mind cannot determine their origin and in ignorance assumes that it is its own activities. This is because when they arrive on the surface, it is as a mental substance and the mind deals with that as it does with any other thought, to the mind it *is* just another thought. In the early material and vital stages of the evolution of being there are psychic activities but no awareness of the existence of the soul. On this ignorant mental surface we can become aware of something that is different or distinct from mind, life or body, which we cannot necessarily entirely place but we feel its effect and perceive it as a mental idea or vague instinct of ourselves, we experience a sensible influence in our life and character and action. The feeling that we have is one that is related to what is true and good and beautiful, fine and pure and noble, and because of the elevated qualities, there is a desire to possess that, there is a compelling influence on mind and life to

accept it and to make it a part of our own feelings, conduct and character. Our response to this is one of recognition in ourselves of a finer or even a diviner part in us, with a desire to move or grow towards that perfection in our nature.

The psychic influence moves towards the surface but as it approaches the surface it loses a degree of purity. What happens is that the occult mental and vital and subtle-physical action influences it and attempts to use it. It lessens its divinity and distorts the way in which it expresses itself. After having reached the surface, it is diminished, and the surface nature takes hold of it and changes it into a degree of ignorance. A series of wrong twists, directions and applications cause yet further deviation and mixture in the appearance of the psychic. Even though in essence the psychic entity is itself totally free from blemishes or defects, what eventuates through the migration to the surface results in this apparent lesser entity.

The psychic being or the soul personality slowly passes through an evolutionary process, causing it to at first be fairly weak and indistinct but its basis remains the power of the soul which will continue assisting in the growth towards perfection and against Ignorance and Inconscience. This is only yet another piece of evolution in the big jigsaw puzzle of nature. The resistance towards growth especially from the mind is there. The mind readily views the true psychic light as a mere idea or opinion, the psychic feeling in the heart as a mere sentiment, or the psychic will or desire or compunction to action in the life-parts as a blind vital enthusiasm: these partial and limited conceptions are accepted as the truth of the mind. This is what the mind has available to work with and it tries to fulfil itself through them. And this is acceptable to the psychic, as it is part of the work of the soul to influence the mind and heart and vital being and turn their ideas, feelings, enthusiasms and activities in the direction of what is divine and luminous, accepting the slow pace and the initial imperfection of these vehicles. As the surface psychic personality grows stronger however, it begins to increase its communion with the psychic entity behind it. There is an improved set of communications and messages to the mind and heart and life is transported with a greater purity and force, as it is more able to exercise a strong control and resist incorrect influences. Now it increasingly becomes a power in nature exerting a positive

influence.²⁹⁶ This is different to its original mode of operation when the consciousness of the mind was dull and not awakened and where the psychic still acted through the consciousness, but only in accordance with the laws of the ignorance.²⁹⁷ It is neither fortunate nor unfortunate, it is simply a fact that initially, even though the psychic being is present in all life, it cannot influence that life towards the spiritual life until a great deal of evolutionary activity had taken place.

Sri Aurobindo makes an interesting statement and said "When someone is destined for the Path, all circumstances through all the deviations of mind and life help in one way or another to lead him to it. It is his own psychic being within him and Divine Power above that use to that end the vicissitudes both of mind and outward circumstance."²⁹⁸ It is reassuring to know that whatever happens is for the better, is there to aid us in our evolutionary growth. However, the statement starts with a conditional word: 'When'. Does this imply that all people are not guaranteed to evolve? Or is it merely a temporal reality, along the lines of – 'when someone is destined for the path here and now'? Presumably this does not invalidate the grand scheme of the eternal involution and evolution. It is true that Sri Aurobindo mentioned the fact that it is the choice of a person to evolve, choice in the sense of the speed of evolution and the vehicle of evolution, vehicle here in the sense of the human body.

3. DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH OF THE PSYCHIC BEING

The evolutionary process taking place on earth on an ascending curve from matter up to mind and beyond, is of a double nature. The outer is the physical evolution which is possible through birth and death and rebirth. Simultaneously, there is "an invisible process of the soul evolution with rebirth into ascending grades of form and consciousness as its machinery".²⁹⁹ The first mentioned type of evolution by itself would imply only a cosmic evolution. Here the individual would perish and the race would be the vehicle for the progressive manifestation of the Supreme Spirit. Alternatively, with the process of rebirth it is possible for the individual human to evolve over a period of time. "Each grade of cosmic manifestation, each type of form that can house the indwelling Spirit, is turned by rebirth into a means for the individual

²⁹⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 891-895.

²⁹⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 297.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 550.

²⁹⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 825.

soul, the psychic entity, to manifest more and more of its concealed consciousness; each life becomes a step in a victory over Matter by a greater progression of consciousness in it which shall make eventually Matter itself a means for the full manifestation of the Spirit."³⁰⁰

Initially evolutionary nature directed her efforts at the physical organisation or body as this was the best vehicle for a change of consciousness. This was so because that consciousness in place in the body had to be raised to affect evolution, in its original state it was insufficient to change that body. In man an interesting development takes place. Here it is possible, more accurately inevitable, for his consciousness, through its transmutation to affect changes towards higher states of consciousness. This implies that there is no requirement for a new type of body for that evolution to occur. A change of consciousness is an inner reality of great spiritual significance; the corresponding physical change is only a pragmatic reality to affect such change. This relationship was initially not obvious, it was concealed by the Inconscience overriding the importance of the spiritual element, the conscious being. With time and evolution this changed and it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness but conversely, the consciousness itself by changes taking place, will affect the necessary mutation of the body. This is interesting in that Sri Aurobindo here again implies that consciousness is primary and the physical or body is secondary.

The human mind has the capacity to aid Nature in the evolution of plants and animals and it is possible to assist nature in his own spiritual and physical evolution and transformation. At this point that desire exists although it is incompletely understood and accepted by the surface mind. This might change and mind eventually can go "deeper within itself and discover the means, the secret energy, the intended operation of the Consciousness-Force within which is the hidden reality of what we call Nature."³⁰¹ This however is not the end of the working of nature because the other invisible factor, rebirth, allows the progress and evolution of the soul by ascent from grade to grade moving to higher and higher types of bodily and mental instrumentation. Here the psychic entity is still veiled due to the effect of the mind and life and body but this psychic part of the personality has the ability to develop much faster than other

³⁰⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 826.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p. 843.

inferior creations. In time it can emerge from behind the veil into the open and become the master, then the secret indwelling spirit or the Godhead within can emerge at which time the inner psychic influence will cause a more spiritual existence. On earth the Mind is an instrument of the Ignorance, and for this to change, a change of consciousness is required which will result in a transition from a basis in Ignorance to a basis in Knowledge, from the mental to a supramental consciousness.³⁰²

This evolutionary impulse towards truth, good and beauty is caused by the presence of the soul in us. This does not deny the existence of what is not true, good and beautiful but the experience thereof is a necessary part of evolution which part the evolving entity outgrows in time. Of greater importance is the fact that the psychic entity in us possesses the quality of bliss and sees that and all other experience as necessary instruments for the progressive manifestation of the spirit. In this way the psychic entity takes out of its experiences the secret divine sense and essence, using that for the growth from Inconscience towards the supreme consciousness. The growth of the soul is from the darkness into light, eventually reaching its own supreme and universal Ananda. The way the mind perceives good in the evil might not be the same of that of the soul, but the soul has a deeper insight and a sure discrimination as to what is higher Light. Sri Aurobindo makes an interesting observation when he states that "(i)t is true that as the inferior light is below good and evil, so the superior spiritual light is beyond good and evil; but this is not in the sense of admitting all things with an impartial neutrality or of obeying equally the impulses of good and evil, but in the sense that a higher law of being intervenes in which there is no longer any place or utility for these values."³⁰³ It offers an insight into his non-dual perception of the higher law he refers to. Often his statements are somewhat obscure, teasing our minds to extend beyond its normal logical operation. It is also obvious that there is not a single simple formula for evolution or for the description of the evolutionary process. It depends for a particular individual as to what had happened in his lives in the past as to how easily he can conceive of, and reach, the Divine.³⁰⁴

³⁰² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 843.

³⁰³ Ibid, p. 610.

³⁰⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 62.

4. SPIRITUAL PRACTICE AND THE PSYCHIC BEING

The psychic being has to evolve and according to Sri Aurobindo, there are three steps involved for a human in this process of self-achievement. The first is the discovery of the soul in the sense of the secret psychic entity or the divine element within us. This is an awareness or a reality that we have to experience in such a tangible way that it is superior or dominant over nature, resulting in us being consciously the soul, with the body, life and mind functioning as the instruments of the soul. Here the soul becomes the guide towards what is true and good and beautiful and it controls the heart and the intellect with a superior law which eventually leads towards the spiritual completeness. In this process the soul replaces the ego. The next step is to develop the realisation that the eternal self is in us and yet is also present in all else. Even if we proceed to act utilising mechanisms that has its origin in the ignorance, we are no longer misled or bound by our actions because of the fact that we operate from the light of self-knowledge. This leads to the third step where we gain the knowledge of the Divine Being as being our own supreme transcendent Self, of which our psychic being is a part, a spark of this Divinity.³⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo is not dogmatic at all about what particular spiritual path one follows, he accepts that there are thousands of different ways but what is important is that the way we do choose, we should follow diligently. In his own particular integral yoga he says that one can realise the psychic being as portion of the divine and through this practice it turns the whole being to the Truth or the Divine which results in the physical, mental and vital consciousness being transformed. We become aware and we internalise the one Self. This Self "manifests as a transcending Light, Knowledge, Power, Purity, Peace, Ananda of which we become aware and which descends into the being and progressively replaces the ordinary consciousness itself by its own movements."³⁰⁶ There is a corresponding upward movement of consciousness in us. The route is through many planes starting with our normal three planes of existence and moving beyond the mental to the overmental, supramental and beyond to the Ananda planes. Whether this is the particular and specific sequence in which things happen depends on the psychic being but what is important is the fact that this type of transformation can and does take place. A prerequisite is the development of the psychic in order for a perfect and unhampered spiritual descent to take place, and which

³⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 630-631.

³⁰⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 114-115.

descent must coincide with the upward movement of consciousness for the bringing about of the supramental change.³⁰⁷

It is obvious that the awareness of the psychic being only comes later after some degree of evolution had taken place in consciousness. This does however not mean that the psychic being was not always there, only that it was covered by the more immediate mind and vital. Only once it had moved through these constraining and more dense aspects of being could it start affecting the being of which it was an integral part. Only then could it express itself in its true colours namely that of the inner soul.³⁰⁸ There is a change or a conversion which is required to maintain the direction that consciousness is taking towards the light. This conversion causes consciousness to be equipped with the right attitude in a spontaneous and natural fashion. This results in the moving away from the level on which man normally lives namely his vital, body and mind to the deeper spiritual of the psychic being which becomes the basis of operating on the mentioned three lower levels.³⁰⁹ These changes take place as a result of a virtual partnership between a human and the psychic being. There is a movement away from the external things and towards the Divine. It is the result of a two-way activity, a touch from within and from above. It could also result from a long period of aspiration or of devotion. Whatever the cause, the psychic being becomes prominent and prepares the nature of the human for the realisation of its potential.³¹⁰ It is quite possible for the soul, or the psychic being then, to effect the changes towards spirituality because of its being in direct touch with the divine. Whatever powers and abilities one manifests, if the psychic being itself does not manifest and come to the fore then nothing lasting has been achieved. It is only when the psychic being had opened the way for the rest of the person to experience the true supramental light that the true experience and realisation of the supreme can come about. For that change more than mind is required, the inmost soul must become active and prominent.³¹¹

Changing from one state to another which is what takes place during evolution, can involve danger. An example is the intermediate zone which Sri Aurobindo warns

³⁰⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 115.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 1096.

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 1105.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 564-565.

³¹¹ Ibid, p. 1095.

about. His advice is for the psychic first to be conscious and active before the veil between the individual and the universal consciousness is removed. That is the safer route.³¹²

He further states that everything in the *Sadhana* (spiritual self-training or exercise) is or can be dangerous, except the psychic change.³¹³ He said that the two essentials for *Sadhana* are purification and consecration. This is for the sake of safety, if one has experiences before purification there is a risk from many quarters or regions that a person might not even know about. When the soul is prominent in evolution, it secures safety through giving the vital guidance as to which actions to perform or to avoid. The purer the state of consciousness the greater the degree of this knowledge.³¹⁴ It is through this process that the descent of higher consciousness and the accompanying spiritual transformation is easy and safe.³¹⁵

Inherent in man is his true central being. It is not truly dormant but appears to be so in that it remains in the background, it only acts as a secret witness. This remains the case until such time as the psychic entity is developed sufficiently for the inner entity to impose itself through it on to the nature of the human partner that he has. From that point on he controls what happens and the result is a state of harmony. This emergence of the soul is possible when the surface being makes direct contact with the spiritual Reality. It is because of this that the psychic element in us spontaneously reaches out and moves towards what seems to it to belong to a higher Reality. Intuitively we know that such a transformative contact is only possible with the supreme Reality, as all else will fail to effect this foundational change. This does not deny the value that mental and emotional activities and representations can have but even that can be enhanced immeasurably through the contact with the spiritual essence.³¹⁶ According to Sri Aurobindo, it is so that the soul contains all possible strength but all that is contained and hidden behind a veil. Only that part which comes to the fore can make a difference. People themselves differ, some with stronger and others with weaker developed psychic elements. In some the mind is strong and governs and in others the vital is strong and

³¹² Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 1054.

³¹³ Ibid, p. 1095.

³¹⁴ Ibid, p. 902-903.

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 1095.

³¹⁶ Ibid, p. 900-901.

leads the way. But one cannot rely on the mind or the vital for evolution and therefore the development of the psychic being is necessary. It is this dominant psychic being that eventually will use the mind and the vital and anything else available for the effortless growth of the total human being towards perfection.³¹⁷ To clarify the concept of the psychic coming to the front, the following. Ordinarily the psychic is deep within a person and few people are aware thereof. It is from this hidden situation that the psychic acts marginally on the mind, vital and physical faculties whenever it can. The influence of the psychic therefore is marginal because of the dense veil separating it from the consciousness of the human. By saying that it is coming forward, it means that it appears from behind the veil and its presence is felt readily in the daily waking consciousness and it influences the mind, the vital and the physical and their movements on every level. At this stage one becomes aware of one's soul and feels that one's psychic is really one's true being with the mind and the rest of one's being only performing the role of instruments of this inmost within us.³¹⁸ This change or emergence of the psychic being however is slow because of the fact that so much has to change and be adjusted in the mind and the vital. It is only with spiritual discipline that eventually the veil will be lifted to at last present the peace that comes from the liberation of the mental and vital being.³¹⁹ Then life is lived inwardly in a state of peace and fullness beyond the ties and cares of the outward ignorant existence.³²⁰

Restrictive and non-evolutionary traits such as anger, jealousy and desire are characteristic of the human vital consciousness. It is not possible to change these if there did not exist another deeper consciousness which has a different nature. This change can be effected through a spiritual discipline and by using the mental will to reject wrong desires and movements of the vital. Sri Aurobindo describes somewhat of the technique required to achieve this. It is done through concentration with the object or intention to quiet the surface mind in order to transform the individual nature. In this way a superior consciousness is developed which according to Sri Aurobindo has two main centres, one in the heart and one in the head. The concentration in the heart allows one to become aware of the psychic being which then starts to come forward in order to govern the nature of the human. This results in the psychic transformation. There is a

³¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 1109-1110.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 1097.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1098.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 1001.

turning towards the divine and a descent of the greater Force and Consciousness which is waiting above us. This makes the spiritual path easy and safe. The concentration in the head brings about the silence of the surface mind and it opens up an inner, larger and deeper mind within which is capable of receiving spiritual experience and knowledge. This results in the spiritual transformation. When this has been achieved, the silent mental consciousness must be opened to what is above the mind. Here too one eventually experiences the consciousness rising upward beyond what tied it to the body in the past and from where it is liberated into the Infinite. Then it makes contact with the universal Self, the Divine Peace, Light, Power, Knowledge, Bliss and enters into that and becomes that. These different qualities then descend downwards into it. The third element that is involved in the spiritual practice has to do with the combined activities of the three elements of the human. One should remain integrated in order to prevent the division into different discordant parts. What Sri Aurobindo suggests is that all the activities are offered to the divine and a request is made for inner guidance from the Higher Power. One could also be detached from all the activities and not become involved in evaluating such activities. He also suggests that in case of difficulties that cannot be solved by the person himself, the assistance of the Teacher should be sought.³²¹ Sri Aurobindo spoke about the power of concentration in the eyebrows which will open the centre there and liberate the inner mind and vision. From here one can act both upwards and in the lower centres but he says that it is a dangerous route because one may get caught up in "one's mental spiritual formations and not come out of them into the free and integral spiritual experience and knowledge and integral change of the being and nature."³²² It seems that what he refers to here as the teacher, is the teacher that is available in human form, in this instance probably Sri Aurobindo himself. However, he has also said before that inherent in every person is a teacher in the form of his higher being which can be accessed and utilised. He did not however outline the details of such a procedure.

5. DEATH AND REBIRTH

The evolution of the human being involves the cycle of birth and death. In the process of death it is the body that dies and not the soul. It is the soul that takes birth each time and with each birth the mind, life and body are formed out of the universal materials

³²¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 517-519.

³²² *Ibid*, p. 725.

and of nature. This new body (complete with life and mind) is closely related to the soul's past evolution and its needs for the future. This makes it very clear that the processes of evolution are not primarily that of the body or of the human as we then call it, but that of the soul. At the time of death the body dissolves. The general course of events now is as follows, subject to differences and variations according to the nature of the individual and to his development. In this process of death the vital goes into the vital plane and stays there for some period of time until the vital sheath disappears. The same procedure applies to the mental body. Sri Aurobindo states that for these different sheaths, apart from the physical sheath which disappears quickly, to disintegrate could take up to three years. The soul or psychic being itself goes to the psychic world and rests there until a new birth is close. A variation to the above procedure could result if the mental or the vital faculties are strongly developed. Then the mental or vital aspect will not dissolve, provided that they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being. They then share the immortality of the psychic. "The soul gathers the essential elements of its experiences in life and makes that its basis of growth in the evolution; when it returns to birth it takes up with its mental, vital, physical sheaths so much of its *Karma* (the power by which its continuity and development as a subjective and objective force determines the nature and eventuality of the soul's repeated existences) as is useful to it in the new life for further experience. It is really for the vital part of the being that *sraddha* (certain ceremonies held in honour of and for the benefit of dead relatives) and rites are done—to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace."³²³

He also gave some elucidation to students in his *Letters on Yoga* as to the nature of certain aspects or components of humans in the following extract:

1. "The Psychic Being stands behind mind, life and body, supporting them. The psychic world is not one world in the scale like the mental, vital or physical worlds, but stands behind all these and it is there that the souls evolving here retire for the time between life and life. If the psychic were only one principle in the rising order of body, life and mind on a par with the others and placed somewhere in the scale on the same footing as the others, it could not be the soul

³²³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 433.

of all the rest, the divine element making the evolution of the others possible and using them as instruments for a growth through cosmic experience towards the Divine. So also the psychic world cannot be one among the other worlds to which the evolutionary being goes for supraphysical experience; it is a plane where it retires into itself for rest, for a spiritual assimilation of what it has experienced and for a reentering into its own fundamental consciousness and psychic nature.

2. For the few who go out of the Ignorance and enter into *Nirvana*, there is no question of their going straight up into higher worlds of manifestation. *Nirvana* (extinction of ego, desire and egoistic action and mentality) or *Moksha* (release, liberation; spiritual liberation) is a liberated condition of the being; it is not a world but a withdrawal from the worlds and the manifestation.
3. The condition of the souls that retire into the psychic world is entirely static and each withdraws into himself and is not interacting with the others. When they come out of their trance, they are ready to go down into a new life, but meanwhile they do not act upon the earth life. There are other beings in this domain and they are the guardians of the psychic world, but they are concerned only with the psychic world itself and the return of the souls to reincarnation, not with the earth.
4. A being of a psychic world cannot get fused into the soul of a human being on earth. What happens in some cases is that a very advanced Psychic Being sometimes sends down an emanation which resides in a human being and prepares it until it is ready for the Psychic Being itself to enter into the life. This happens when some special work has to be done and the human vehicle prepared. Such a descent produces a remarkable change of a sudden character in the personality and the nature.
5. Usually, a soul follows continuously the same line of sex. If there are changes of sex, it is, as a rule, a matter of parts of the personality which are not central.
6. As regards the stage at which the soul returning for rebirth enters the new body no rule can be laid down, for the circumstances vary with the individual. Some Psychic Beings get into relation with the birth-environment and with the parents from the time of conception and determine the preparation of the personality and future in the embryo, others join only at the time of delivery, others even later on in the life and in these cases it is some emanation of the Psychic Being which

upholds the life. It should be noted that the conditions of the future birth are determined fundamentally not during the stay in the psychic world but at the time of death which is when the Psychic Being chooses what it should work out in the next terrestrial appearance. Thereafter the conditions for the next life arrange themselves accordingly.³²⁴

Sri Aurobindo is clear about the fact that "the idea that rebirth and the circumstances of the new life as a reward or punishment of *punya* (good, virtue, merit) or *papa* (sin, demerit), is a crude human idea of "justice" which is quite unphilosophical and unspiritual and distorts the true intention of life. Life here is an evolution and the soul grows by experience, working out this or that in the nature, and if there is suffering, it is for the purpose of that working out, not as a judgment inflicted by God or Cosmic Law on the errors or failures which are inevitable in the Ignorance."³²⁵

As stated, it is the soul that survives death. Sri Aurobindo critically analyses this concept of soul and makes the following observations. At death there is certainly some element that survives that process and that element is the soul. The soul however does not remain the same unchanging personality throughout eternity. It is involved in an evolutionary process which implies change. The soul must change, and the soul changes through the experiences and the interactions with the different bodies it is given throughout its evolutionary career. Through this change and loss of a certain type of identity, it becomes "something else, something greater, better, more luminous in knowledge, more moulded in the image of the eternal inner beauty, more and more progressive towards the divinity of the secret Spirit."³²⁶ Now, what is imperishable is that secret Spirit within us. It is that which is unborn and eternal. The psychic entity within is its representative. It is the spiritual individual in us all which in reality is the Person that we are. Here we have an "I" of this moment, but this "I" is only a formation or a temporary personality of this inner Person, this bigger entity that is permanent and eternal. This "I" at any particular time represents one step of many in our career of evolutionary change, "and it serves its true purpose only when we pass beyond it to a farther step leading nearer to a higher degree of consciousness and being. It is the inner

³²⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 439-441.

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 441.

³²⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 821.

Person that survives death, even as it pre-exists before birth; for this constant survival is a rendering of the eternity of our timeless Spirit into the terms of Time."³²⁷ It is clear therefore that the soul comes here into birth for experience, growth and evolution with the purpose of eventually bringing the Divine into Matter. During the process of its repeated births, the evolving being certainly develops and becomes more rich and complex, it has the benefit too of the different personalities it had experienced and lived with. This can produce a multifaceted and interesting individual. A person never really completely takes leave of whatever it had ever experienced. If it exhibits the trait of a personality of yore, it would be not to repeat that previous life but perhaps to complete a lesson not well learnt. But generally we are given new opportunities and new fields of learning in gaining new bodies. At this point we should note that the importance of rebirth is focused on the psychic being and not on a personality, present or past. The emphasis is on the psychic being which stands behind the evolution of the nature and evolve with it. At death the psychic being departs with the essence or the heart of its experiences but not the physical events or the vital movements nor any of the mental edifices, but rather something essential, something that has been gathered and learnt from all of these. These cumulative experiences are required for growth towards the Divine. This could explain why there normally are no memories of past lives because they are not really essential for the evolutionary process. The essence certainly remains, for instance in a warrior the divine element is that which expressed itself in his loyalty, nobility and high courage. Literally every life has the purpose of evolution and each life can aid one in one's future evolution.³²⁸ It is so that the influence of the past can cause what appears to be retrograde movements in a new life, but this could simply be returning to something not worked out in order to proceed afterwards. Furthermore, the soul does not go back to the animal condition but it is possible for a part of the vital personality to join in an animal to work out its animal inclinations or tendencies.³²⁹ Sri Aurobindo also mentions the fact that if some part of the vital energy is strongly attached to anything in the earth life, it might cause an immediate rebirth with full memory of its last life on Earth.³³⁰

³²⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 821.

³²⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 451-452.

³²⁹ Ibid, p. 434.

³³⁰ Ibid, p. 445.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the psychic being at the time of death already chooses what lessons it will learn and what it will work out in the next life. That determines the character and conditions of the new personality. He says that Life is for the evolutionary growth by experience in the conditions of the Ignorance till one is ready for the higher Light.³³¹ It has little to do with the temporary and perishing personality of a person, and therefore the dying wish of that person is only a surface inconsequential matter. The psychic being's choice which is from behind the veil, is not the choice of the outer superficial consciousness. It is the other way around.³³²

In making a choice at the time of death, the psychic being fixes the formation of the personality in the next life. It enters the psychic world and starts the task of assimilating the essence of its past experience and by that assimilation is formed the future psychic personality in accordance with what had already happened in the past. Integrating the past experiences take a while but when it is completed, it is ready for a new life. If the psychic being is of a lesser-developed nature, they do not work out the whole thing for themselves as there is help on hand from other beings and forces of the higher world whose task it is to perform this duty. When the time of rebirth comes, it is not a certainty that the psychic being will in fact achieve what it had contracted to do. The new instrumentation or body may not be strong enough or quite suitable for that purpose. Here we find an interaction between the forces of the new body and those of the cosmic nature, which forces might be at odds with each other. Anything can happen because of the frustration or diversion or partial working out of what has to be done through a working out of complex forces. Experienced psychic beings will take this in their stride. They are much more conscious in this transition and with their experience they will work around whatever difficulties they encounter. It appears that the more experienced and involved the psychic being becomes, the more latitude it has in its return cycles. It could return immediately or it could take centuries for the next incarnation. It has freedom of choice and operates according to its own rhythm.³³³

³³¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 443.

³³² Ibid, p. 443-444.

³³³ Ibid, p. 444-445.

Some contemporary knowledge about the nature and task of the soul is supplied by Newton.^{334, 335} He is a psychologist and by his own admission is not a new-ager nor subject to flights of fancy. He treated patients mainly by hypnosis and early in his career, at which time he certainly did not belong to a school of thought that accepted anything like reincarnation nor anything that was not scientific, he encountered cases where people spontaneously went back into previous lives and gave him information of those lives which he could subsequently verify independently. He is a scientifically oriented and very methodical scientist that has treated many thousands of patients, keeping meticulous records. What he found was an entirely new dimension of insight and knowledge into the subjects that related to all the aspects of death, life in between lives, the purpose of lives, the interaction and interrelationships of people, evolution, and rebirth. It is interesting that often these very details and descriptions of Sri Aurobindo are completely parallel to that of Newton. When we deal with matters that are strange and new and beyond our ken, it is always comforting to start off on a solid footing. That supplies the security that allows us the freedom to investigate what normally we would not involve ourselves with. I believe that this is the case with this particular subject of reincarnation. Whether we find our security in the fact that Newton is an academically trained PhD and therefore we can examine the possibility of reincarnation, or whether Sri Aurobindo embraces reincarnation and therefore we can consider such views, is immaterial. What we are dealing with is knowledge of a kind and about matters that we normally do not encounter. In this regard, just a thought, is Newton backing up Sri Aurobindo or is it the other way around? Regarding Western authors on the subject of reincarnation, Newton is not alone in that there are a number of other similar practitioners such as Moody and others.

The subject of previous lives is interesting but in the main irrelevant. We are not really to concern ourselves with what is past, but with the task in hand which is to live our lives now in furtherance of our evolution. The purpose of attaining new lives is to gain new experiences for the process of evolution. In this instance it is the decisions regarding living in the present that will form the future and that will determine the direction and rate of evolution. Sri Aurobindo says that if one has any persistent or complete memory of past lives, it might be a serious obstacle in that it would tend to

³³⁴ Newton, Michael. *Journey of Souls*. St Paul MN: Llewelyn Publications, 1998.

³³⁵ Newton, Michael. *Destiny of Souls*. St Paul MN: Llewelyn Publications, 2000.

prolong the personality of the old life and hamper the free development of the new personality and its formulation of new experience.³³⁶ It is the now that is important, all things of this life are there in the consciousness but the memory of past lives, which is not of import now, is wrapped up and involved elsewhere.³³⁷ This memory is not lost, it is available forever and the exact memory of past lives can be recovered by yogic development or by clairvoyance.³³⁸ Sri Aurobindo says that the "memory of past lives is not something that is active anywhere in the being—if by memory is meant the memory of details. That memory of details is quiescent and untraceable except in so far as certain constituent personalities taken over from the past retain the memories of the particular life in which they were manifest. ... But usually it is only the essence of past lives that is activated in the being, not any particular memories. So it is impossible to say that the memory is located in a particular part of the consciousness or in a particular plane."³³⁹ By and large it is better to dismiss the various ideas about the past lives. It can happen that the memory of past personalities comes of itself and that could be important, be relevant to something in the present development. What is necessary then is to know the nature of that personality and its immediate importance. The rest is of little use.³⁴⁰

6. EMOTION AND THE PSYCHIC BEING

To understand some of the phrases that are used regarding subtle aspects of a human being, it is useful to think in terms of these aspects or entities as fields of energy. We are less likely to try to localise the field of energy than a tangible organ like a heart or a liver. This concept would apply for instance to chakras and to the psychic being.

In an interview with a disciple, Sri Aurobindo spoke about the nature and type of emotion found in the psychic being. The vital element of the human it is that part where emotional warmth and love is normally found. However, there is also psychic love which is of a different nature to the normal human love. In the nature of human love, there are external elements that desire to use this love and overshadow its goodness. The psychic love is like an intense flame of pure fire which is not dependent on the ego-

³³⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 818.

³³⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 333.

³³⁸ Ibid, p. 445.

³³⁹ Ibid, p. 454.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 457.

desire or on the object of love. He calls it a white and not a red flame. This type of full and ecstatic love is found outside human relations and human nature and is directed more towards the divine and in the human only rarely finds an outlet for its intense nature. Normally it is present only as a small element of the total human but even so it contributes all the important and fine things of love such as "sweetness, tenderness, fidelity, self-giving, self-sacrifice, reachings of soul to soul, idealising sublimations that lift up human love beyond itself."³⁴¹ If this psychic love could overshadow and control and change the other elements subject to love of the human namely the mental, vital, physical, in the earthly love would reflect or prepare the human for the ultimate of loving which is an integral union of the soul and its instruments in a life on Earth. Sri Aurobindo says that even some imperfect appearance of such a situation is rare.³⁴²

He describes where the psychic being is situated and said that "the psychic being is in the heart centre in the middle of the chest (not in the physical heart, for all the centres are in the middle of the body), but it is deep behind. When one is going away from the vital into the psychic, it is felt as if one is going deep deep down till one reaches that central place of the psychic. The surface of the heart centre is the place of the emotional being; from there one goes deep to find the psychic. The more one goes, the more intense becomes the psychic happiness which you describe."³⁴³

7. REMARKS ABOUT THE NORMAL SOUL

The concept of the soul is present and relevant in both (from our point of view) the East and the West. Generally in the East there is a greater understanding and more detailed descriptions about this entity. This work of Sri Aurobindo on the psychic being is formidable in many respects and is representative of Eastern religious culture. When we hear talk about the soul in the Western religious philosophies, it is normally a very abstract and undefined entity that is referred to. In religious terminology it is some aspect of us that must be saved and it must be specifically saved within one or another religious denomination. It is inconclusively and very generally defined and its origin, its present nature, its function and its future are not dealt with in any coherent fashion.

³⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 817.

³⁴² Ibid, p. 817-818.

³⁴³ Ibid, p. 1115.

In considering the depth of information that Sri Aurobindo gave about the psychic being and the soul, these entities have come to the fore as the true reality of a human: the rest of what we consider to be the human is transient and will fade away. But for perspective, regardless of this transience, we have not lost anything; all is as it was before with the exception that now we have knowledge of a nature that can prepare us for the rest of our journey. It is not so much as losing anything as gaining something else as we have been doing right through our whole life, having experienced the life of a baby, a child, a young person etc. So we are in fact used to change and the message is that we have one choice and that is to grow. This growth will be in consciousness and knowledge about that starts in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

ORDINARY STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1. INTRODUCTION

The cosmology of Sri Aurobindo is based on the reality of Sachchidananda. The origin of Sachchidananda is "The One" or Brahman or the ineffable Supreme Being. Its essence is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, which form an inseparable One in a state of unity beyond dualism. It is totally integrated within everything in creation. Consciousness is one of the component parts of this triune reality and it is consciousness as experienced by human beings in their ordinary life that we will consider in this chapter.

As a brief overview, Sachchidananda is the first step in the involutionary phrase of creation and even though other different planes are created, every successive plane is saturated with these constituents of Sachchidananda (*sat, chit, ananda*). In this downward involutionary phrase of creation, nothing was created as such, but different domains or planes of consciousness were established.³⁴⁴ Because of the constituent reality of Sachchidananda, it implies that consciousness is always omnipresent in different guises in everything that is. Sri Aurobindo asserts that the *sat* or being element always has a *chit* or Consciousness-Force (as well as *Ananda* or bliss) component. For the purpose of this study, however, the bliss aspect which is the basic motive force for creation will be left in abeyance. The equation is as follows: *Sat* ⇔ *Chit*, or rephrased, consciousness *in the domain of the relative* does not exist in abstraction; it is always a consciousness of something: **Object** ⇔ **Consciousness**, and conversely an object is never without consciousness. This is so because these two elements are totally integrated and a reflection of each other. As a consequence of this, the type of *sat* will

³⁴⁴ I used the word 'established' rather than 'created' because that word has a softer feel to it. The field that we find ourselves in here is beyond duality and is so subtle that the use of words, which establishes the presence of something rather than a trace which is removed even before it is established, to use the terminology of Derrida, is quite inadequate. As best we can only get a feel of what Sri Aurobindo's reality is here.

determine the type of *chit*. This leads us to the different possible states of consciousness that are manifest on the evolutionary leg of creation, or perhaps more accurately, the different modes that consciousness can assume from a human perspective, namely nescience, inconscience, subconsciousness, intraconscience, circumconscience, superconscience, sleep, dream, and waking state, samadhi and cosmic consciousness. The general reality is that of a sea of consciousness, and the various components that we have identified above are illusionary waves, waves that look and act different one from the other but are in essence all of the same stuff. These states dealt with here are lower states of consciousness, whereas superconscience, which is the name of a part of the higher states of consciousness, is dealt with in chapter 6.

2. CONSCIOUSNESS

The term or reality Consciousness or Consciousness-Force (*chit*) itself denotes one of the three characteristics or components or elements of Sachchidananda, the others are Being (*Sat*) and Bliss or *Ananda*. The reality of Being extended itself to become Consciousness-Force, which means that it became conscious of its own existence, and this self-consciousness contains a Force. This sets the stage for the possibility of creation or manifestation, as Consciousness-Force is that aspect of the triune reality of Sachchidananda that actually effects this creation.³⁴⁵ Sachchidananda is itself still in the Absolute and beyond the relative and therefore cannot deal with anything related to dualism. To enable relative activity to take place, it spawned Supermind (Truth-Consciousness), which straddles both sides, namely the absolute and the relative. Sachchidananda in the guise of Supermind is present in the field of dualism which is the cornerstone and the major prerequisite for the process of creation. It is in this field that Supermind is enabled to create by virtue of splitting Consciousness-Force into its two components of consciousness and force. It proceeds by dividing the Force element into its two components namely Knowledge and Will. Knowledge now can and does operate on Will resulting in the creation of a plane of energy. This created energy is at rest and

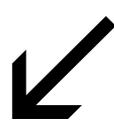
³⁴⁵ Manifestation is probably another good word, it has a more neutral ring about it, but the subtle conflicting associations of the words creation, emanation, manifestation or whatever, makes it fairly difficult to deal with. The main issue is to convey (alternatively to describe, but that is too definite a word) the result of a certain activity without having to deal with the subtlety of the entity or the intention of the entity that caused that activity. We cannot accurately define these three concepts in order to place them in their correct position, when they appear it simply implies that something had been produced and that the emphasis is on this object that has been produced and not on the process of production, which process deals with Absolute Reality.

Sachchidananda

is comprised of

Being Consciousness-Force Bliss

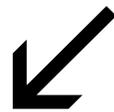
Consciousness-Force component splits into



Consciousness

Force

which splits into



Knowledge

Will



which is involved in
the **Inconscient**

Figure 2.

is dormant. Now follows a movement where Will is drained of Knowledge, leaving something that is basic, inert and ignorant but which still contains in seed form all that Brahman is. It is still Will but it is dormant, directionless and only potential. Only at this point of total ignorance does a change of direction take place when this energy eventually starts moving and does Matter come forth and does creation starts. Up till that point, all this took place on planes or in domains existing prior to creation in the form of something intangible, as we understand it.³⁴⁶ Up till now there was no creation. Only when this dormant Inconscient energy started moving did creation take place resulting in the formation of matter. The immediate result was that the Matter that was formed was imbued with all the potential of Sachchidananda, but with none of that potential manifested. Here the Supreme is in a state of complete inconscience. The qualities in matter are determined by the Real-Idea (Supermind, Truth-consciousness) concealed in the involved consciousness which dwells in Matter. All qualities, properties and features that then or later exist are powers of conscious being as has been put forth from itself by the Absolute: it contains everything that is within It. Matter here is on the cusp of the absolute and the relative. The truth of Reality is that it is part of an Infinite, which is free from all limitations such as qualities, properties and features, and yet on the other hand it is also an Infinite brimful with innumerable characteristics. We then realise that the Infinite is exactly that; infinite in quality, feature, power, but indescribably the Infinite.³⁴⁷ This leaves Matter free with an infinite potential of which none at this stage has yet materialised. The consciousness of matter too is here Inconscient.

From the human perspective, consciousness could range from what is much above or below to what is visible and audible to man. Despite our normal experience, Sri Aurobindo says that all we ever have is other-consciousness whether we are stunned, alive or dead; there is no one state of consciousness that is *the* human consciousness. There is simply consciousness in the universe and we share this consciousness. With growth, we can become that; there is a consciousness in the plant, in metal, in the atom,

³⁴⁶ When dealing with the subtler aspects of the cosmology of Sri Aurobindo, we constantly find ourselves beyond the field of duality and the descriptive words and concepts that we use are by and large not accurate or correct. In this particular instance we look at the reality of the type of consciousness. The question here is: is consciousness tangible or intangible? A case can be made out for it being either, for it being only one of these possibilities, or it could be none. I do not wish to do more here than to explain the kind of problematic we encounter in dealing with the field of consciousness.

³⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 334.

in electricity, in short, in everything in physical nature. "We shall find even that it is not really in all respects a lower or more limited mode than the mental; on the contrary, it is in many "inanimate" forms more intense, rapid, poignant, though less evolved towards the surface."³⁴⁸

It is through consciousness that we become aware of things. It is consciousness that is operating through us, virtually as its tool, that allows us to live. Sri Aurobindo says that "we do not think, will or act but thought occurs in us, will occurs in us, impulse and act occur in us; our ego-sense gathers around itself, refers to itself all this flow of natural activities. It is cosmic Force, it is Nature that forms the thought, imposes the will, imparts the impulse. Our body, mind and ego are a wave of that sea of force in action and do not govern it, but by it are governed and directed."³⁴⁹ A person can argue as to how accurate these different and new views that Sri Aurobindo holds on virtually every subject are, but to me it seems virtually impossible to ignore what he says. Literally every facet of our normal knowledge about what is, is turned upside down and is reinterpreted in a radical way. A complete acceptance of what he teaches can, I believe, only take place once we have experienced these new ideas.

3. NESCIENCE

The creator of the worlds is a Consciousness-Force. This is an occult secret of Nature which is concealed but everywhere inherent in Existence. After creation and in our material world and in our own being consciousness has a double aspect namely a force of Knowledge and of Ignorance. As the basic components of all that are everywhere present, we would expect that in this infinite consciousness there is an infinite knowledge operative everywhere. Yet we see here at the beginning of creation (more accurately the beginning of evolution) and as the first composed element of the tangible Cosmos, an Inconscience, or more accurately, a state or a consciousness that is even less than that namely a total Nescience. This is the level of consciousness available to the material universe at the very beginning. From this point on little consciousness and knowledge emerge and then only in minute parcels. The Nescience remains dominant. Still, there appears to be a seeking Ignorance which tries to know and to grow into knowledge. With time Matter evolves into Life, still with a dearth of knowledge but

³⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 387.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 203.

with a growing if precarious light in the darkness of an original Nescience and a universal Ignorance.³⁵⁰ Here, from this deep level of ignorance the power of the divine Consciousness presents limited knowledge if not outright ignorance as a guide for our working out our evolution. This is the inconspicuous origin of evolution, all the combined ignorances of all created Matter operate together to form harmonious operational and functional wholes that are found on the different levels of the evolutionary ladder. Sri Aurobindo maintains that viewed from a very broad perspective, we probably have to acknowledge that this apparent ignorance or nescience is no real ignorance, but a proof of an omniscient self-knowledge and all-knowledge. According to him, confirmation of this deeper reality of the nescience can be found in our own higher perceptions in the evolutionary world of the spirit.³⁵¹ It is an interesting *mélange* of consciousness components, at the one extreme the basic reality of an eternal and universal self-aware consciousness and at the other pole the total nescience which is an effective, dynamic, creative Inconscience of which we are informed to be a merely surface appearance of the Divine Knowledge working within that framework. Between these extremes the Consciousness is working with a superficial, partial and limited self-awareness, but again with the divine All-Knowledge behind it and acting through it. Here is not total knowledge of the supreme Consciousness, nor complete ignorance of the Nescience, but a compromise partial knowledge which we consider to be ignorance. He also states "(t)hat to know, we have always to dissolve the rigid constructions of the ignorant and self-willed intellect and look freely and flexibly at the facts of existence."³⁵² Furthermore, "(f)rom all this we become aware that the very nature of our mind is Ignorance; not an absolute nescience, but a limited and conditioned knowledge of being, limited by a realisation of its present, a memory of its past, an inference of its future, conditioned therefore by a temporal and successive view of itself and its experiences. If real existence is a temporal eternity, then the mind has not the knowledge of real being for even its own past it loses in the vague of oblivion except for the little that memory holds. It has no possession of its future which is withheld from it in a great blank of ignorance, and it has only a knowledge of its present changing from moment to moment in a helpless succession of names, forms and happenings which is too vast for its control or its comprehension. On the other hand, if real existence is a

³⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 295-296.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 403.

³⁵² *Ibid*, p. 498.

time-transcending eternity, the mind is still more ignorant of it as it only knows the little that it can itself seize from moment to moment by fragmentary experience of its surface self-manifestation in Time and Space."³⁵³ This is our reality on this particular level of limited consciousness.

4. INCONSCIENCE

Sri Aurobindo explains inconscience as follows: "The inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity."³⁵⁴ The existence of the universe is upheld by powerful but subtle components and factors which are invisible to us, and Sri Aurobindo mentions that the most basic and least conscious of those is the Inconscient. Creation is a complex manifestation with components and various aspects of realities on different levels. Everything in nature since creation has at its basis a form of consciousness called the inconscience. This guides its being and operations by an immanent wisdom. Even though we are not conscious of this, it is not Inconscient to itself. It is in fact concealed knowledge by identity. This inconscience is profoundly and universally conscient, it carries in it the awareness of all the truths of existence hidden in its dark infinite. The inconscience is an inverse reflection of the Supreme superconscience as it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action but only in a total trance. It is lost in itself, lost in its own void of ignorant infinity. Its acts and creation are according to a precision and a perfection of an intrinsic knowledge of the involved Real-Idea.³⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo says it has "a substantial and self-effective intuition, a blind but exact perception, an automatic intelligence working out its unexpressed conceptions, a blindly seeing sureness of sight, a dumb infallible sureness of suppressed feeling coated in insensibility, which effectuate all that has to be effected."³⁵⁶ The guidance it supplies seems to do the works of intelligence, even without possessing intelligence, and this is because at its root it is a part of the divine Supermind within it. The intelligence it possesses is not a mental Intelligence but a divine self-aware Truth of being in which self-knowledge is inseparable from self-existence. The operation of nature seems to take place automatically whereas in fact it is the divine creator that maintains whatever is.

³⁵³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 504.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 550.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 550.

³⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 550.

This is an original intelligence which is different to Mental intelligence; this latter type of intelligence strives to work things out but instead can only reflect what is and cannot create anything original.³⁵⁷

Starting from the atom, the Inconscient or subconscious consciousness are present in everything that is. These two components are different but very similar in that the latter is somewhat more conscious than the former. The basis of all Matter is a Force which builds up and constitutes the atom and which is the inherent consciousness-force in the plant, in the primary animal forms, in the developing animal, and as mental will and knowledge in man. This consciousness-force is universal and is everywhere the same. The life form that develops is a reflection of the underlying consciousness creating that life form. Where the Consciousness is infinite as is the case of the consciousness of Sachchidananda, so too will be the corresponding Force be infinite, that is, infinite in its scope and self-knowledge. However, when the Consciousness is like that of material Nature which is submerged and self-oblivious, so will the corresponding Force be limited. So everything is ruled and controlled by consciousness in some form or another. Paradoxically, it is exactly because of the true nature of this very strange state of the Inconscient consciousness (which true nature is Sachchidananda) that Nature and life operates faultlessly.³⁵⁸

The components of creation interact dynamically. From our present state of consciousness, we cannot understand these radically fundamental components intellectually. The constituent parts are being, consciousness-force, bliss, and Supermind but in the being of Sachchidananda they are all one. For the material universe to exist Sachchidananda had to deny Himself to enable the creation of duality, which allowed him to experience Himself. Because of this denial, the creation of the lowest point of the involution with its apparent utter separation of Force from Consciousness becomes possible. This also allowed the existence and rule of the infallible Inconscient and the start of the evolutionary leg of creation. Evolution proceeded, and above matter the poise of Life emerged. Again, the life that appears here still has the omnipotent Inconscience of the material universe as its base as an incomplete conscient being. The rest of the poises of higher states of consciousness up

³⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 136.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 209.

to that of Supermind follow. It is here in the state of its fulfilled existence where the complex problem created by the partial affirmation emerging out of the total denial will eventually be understood. This progress will take place because the Inconscient within us has as its destination the Supermind. And strangely, Sri Aurobindo says it is this very Inconscient that is the causative agent in the creation of the prophets, mystics and seers of humanity.³⁵⁹ This implies that in the inconscience there is a spiritual aspect and through the evolution of consciousness in matter and higher, the spirit eventually materialises in its true form due to the divine reality which had originally become involved into a dense material inconscience which hid its universal consciousness force. The energy of this force which is the first form in which it manifests, also appears Inconscient, and yet it does the work of a vast occult intelligence. The route of this evolution is twofold; the outwardly visible process of physical evolution with birth as its mechanism, and an invisible process of soul evolution, with consciousness expanding with successive rebirths. Through this cycle of the physical evolution, the individual dies but consciousness and the race proceed to evolve to its full potential.

The Inconscient is a subtle but dominant facet of man's being. Man does not know what his underlying reality is. The difficulties, which arise from the imperfect poise of Consciousness and Force in man, reflect as his present status of mind and life. They are principally three. First, he is aware only of his surface mentality and life which constitutes only a small part of what he truly is. Below that mind is a hidden domain namely his subconscious and subliminal mind, the subconscious and subliminal life-impulses, the subconscious corporeality. This unknown part guides and governs him. This is because the real power we have over our existence is defined by whatever self-awareness we have, leaving the rest to be governed by a consciousness which is subliminal to our surface mind and life and body. These components operate together with the dominant facet in charge and give direction to our evolution. This implies that in our conscious existence we are governed by the subconscious and subliminal: the Inconscient within us determines our control and direction.³⁶⁰

Sri Aurobindo is optimistic about the development of man because he can see that all the different components are present to reach the quest of spiritual perfection, starting

³⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 212.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 212.

with the Inconscient. An evolution of consciousness and spirit in man is the reason for his terrestrial existence. This is not apparent at first glance and its significance is initially concealed by the involution of the Spirit in a dense material Inconscience. The first form that the Force of creation assumes in the physical universe namely Energy, appears to be Inconscient and yet does the works of an immense occult Intelligence. This changes from the initial forms of apparently unconscious Matter, then to the living stage in Matter and on to the eventual imperfectly conscious animal. Even though this consciousness is at first only partial, it eventually does develop to a high level in man. But the development of his reasoning mental being takes place whilst retaining his original animality. He remains limited by the original Inertia and Nescience whilst his conscious evolution has not reached its potential. This results in the struggle towards knowledge out of its seeming fundamental nature of Ignorance. The way this terrestrial evolutionary working of Nature from Matter to Mind and beyond takes place is through an outwardly visible process of physical evolution through birth and death, as well as an invisible process of soul evolution with rebirth into ascending grades of form and consciousness. Only the temporary transient individual would benefit through the physical evolution whereas it is the race, a more enduring entity, which is more important and which evolves due to the rebirth of the individual being in the earth-existence. In this manner the experience of life manifests progressively its concealed consciousness which eventually results in the full manifestation of the Spirit in Matter.³⁶¹

The components of the omnipresent Reality are based on the fundamental truth in the Supreme Existence. This includes the power of Inconscience. Immersing the consciousness into a trance of self-involution results in the evolution eventually taking place. Sri Aurobindo states that this state of cosmic or infinite trance-sleep appears to the person that can observe this as the two opposing aspects of Superconscience; it has the Spirit's potency of presenting to itself the opposites of its own truths. Here is present the Infinite and the Inconscience and Ignorance in the material universe. It is the reality of the infinite and eternal Existence.³⁶²

Sri Aurobindo states that an evolution from the Inconscient need not be a painful one if

³⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 824-825.

³⁶² Ibid, p. 318.

there is no resistance; it can be a deliberately slow and beautiful flowering of the Divine in matter. One ought to be able to see how beautiful outward Nature can be and usually is, although it is itself apparently 'Inconscient'. The growth of consciousness in the hidden aspect of Nature sometimes appears ugly due to ignorance. But experiencing even that portion of all the possibilities that exists even though it manifested in a perverse form due to inconscience, was the desire of the Supreme. This was to give even that undesirable aspect an opportunity to exist. These aspects are eliminated if better alternatives are present. When this stage pass, then the Divine Manifestation in Matter will be greater because of that apparently negative stage.³⁶³

5. SUBCONSCIENCE

Different states of consciousness occupy different relative spaces. Two such states, the subliminal and the subconscious, share a superficial resemblance but they do differ and Sri Aurobindo explains the differences as follows. The "subliminal state is a general term used for all parts of the being which are not on the waking surface ... (whereas the subconscious) ... means always what is below the ordinary physical consciousness, not what is behind it. The inner mental, vital, physical, and the psychic are not subconscious in this sense, but they can be spoken of as subliminal."³⁶⁴ He further stated that "(t)he subconscious in us is the extreme border of our secret inner existence where it meets the Inconscient, it is a degree of our being in which the inconscience struggles into a half-consciousness."³⁶⁵ The multiplicity of states of consciousness is further explained by the fact that throughout our being, wherever there is consciousness, that consciousness is of a dual nature namely an inner and an outer.

As mentioned above, the subcontinent is below the waking physical consciousness and it is a dark unconscious realm of obscurity and incoherence. It is a submental base of the being filled with impressions, instincts and activity of habit. This has a profound affect on ordinary normal living because the elements stored in it influence our outer lives. The only way to negate that influence in a human life is for that person to establish higher states of consciousness in his being and then to go down into the subcontinent and to change that state by clearing out the debris.

³⁶³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 23.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 354.

³⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 422.

Consciousness in its various configurations is a constant in the universe. This is present in its correct and applicable format at all levels of creation. In material objects it is present as a universal subconscious mind. It is not different from the outer mentality, but it acts below the surface and is unknown to the waking man. This subconscious mind may be unable to act or communicate itself to its surfaces for want of organs, but it has this profound state of consciousness all the same.³⁶⁶ Another aspect of the subconscious constituent is the fact that it is a small but important part in the play of *Lila* (the cosmic play). When delight of being seeks to realise itself as delight of becoming, it moves and experiences different forms of movement of which pleasure and pain are positive and negative currents. In this mode it is Subconscious in Matter and yet Superconscious beyond Mind. It seeks to realise itself by the increasing self-consciousness of the movement of becoming.³⁶⁷ The subconscious that is also in us is, in a way, a more profound sense of consciousness than the waking consciousness where we do not perceive the deeper but rather the superficial vibrations of pain, pleasure and indifference. Behind that there must be a more complete consciousness which delights in all experiences. This delight aspect is actually the motivation for creation and it is that delight which secretly supports the superficial mental being and enables it to persevere through all the hardships in the evolutionary movement of the Becoming. That which we call ourselves is only a tiny speck on the surface with our true reality behind that apparent reality in the vast subconscious. In the process of our living and thinking, the vast Superconscious gains by all these surface experiences. This is returned to us in the form of strength, character and knowledge of a strange nature because it comes from deep within us, from a region we do not know.³⁶⁸

We talk about the Superconscious and subconscious, but these are only relative terms, the meaning of which we can only fully appreciate if we were to rise to the level of the Superconscious. Only then can we experience and understand what is incomprehensible and inaccessible to us in our present normal state. Once we are in that Superconscious state we can easily return to the normally inaccessible subconscious. As already stated, the Inconscious itself is only an involved state of consciousness, which is lower or more basic than the subconscious, but which has infinite potential in that it contains all

³⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 86.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 99.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 104.

potentialities of Brahman within it. In understanding consciousness, we must realise that the gradations of consciousness are universal states which are not dependent on the outlook of the subjective personality; rather the outlook of the subjective personality is determined by the grade of consciousness in which it is organised according to its typical nature or its evolutionary stage.³⁶⁹ This seems to imply that the primary aspect of our being or reality is our consciousness and not our subjective personality.

Sri Aurobindo says that the subconscious is a degree of our being in which the Inconscient struggles into a half consciousness; the surface physical consciousness, when it moves away from the waking level towards the Inconscient, goes into this intermediate subconscience. It is from this subconscious state that the Inconscient arise into our waking or our subliminal being.³⁷⁰ There is growth and evolution required for an upgrading of our consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo, "the subconscious in the ordinary man includes the larger part of the vital being and the physical mind and also the secret body-consciousness."³⁷¹ The level of our evolution determines the level of consciousness that we can access. As each level has its purpose, we have to experience that level but after having served its purpose we have to ascend to the next states of consciousness. It is part of our purpose on earth to move from lower to higher states of consciousness through evolution, and to succeed in that we have to effect a complete transformation. In this process we reject these states as and when they have served their purpose in the evolution of our personal existence. These states may well desire to come back from the surrounding universal forces and it is only when no part of the consciousness makes any response to these forces of the lower plane when they attempt to return that the transformation in us is absolutely complete.

Although the subconscious is a quite submerged part of our being in which there is no waking conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling, what it registers will include everything that took place in both dreams and the waking state. In this way we can experience both in dreams and in the waking state old thoughts or old mental, vital and physical habits which do not originate in or from our conscious thought or will and which either are or are not opposed to its perceptions, choices or dictates. The

³⁶⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24 [SABCL], p. 235.

³⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 422.

³⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24 [SABCL], p. 898.

subconscious retains the reactions formed by our past, which experiences affect the condition of the body. Sri Aurobindo says that in this state the subcontinent can affect the body in many ways including suffering repeated illnesses due to the memory thereof retained in the subconscious.³⁷²

A further insight into the subconscious is that it is composed of two parts namely the universal and the individual. In both these aspects there are yet further parts or planes of the subconscious. All upon earth is based on this suppressed or involved consciousness, the Inconscient; in this consciousness everything is but nothing is formulated or expressed. The subconscious lies between the Inconscient and the conscious mind, and also between the life and body. Even though primitive, it is an extraordinary complete state of consciousness in that it contains the potentiality of, and anticipates all the primitive reactions to, life which struggles out to the surface from Matter and slowly evolves a self-formulating consciousness. This evolving consciousness perceives only the fluid substance of what it encounters and not the details. From our subjective perspective it seems that these elements meld and are one.³⁷³

To sum up, even though it is filled with the reality of Brahman, in the mode in which it operates the subconscious is not the whole foundation of our nature; it is only the lower basis of the Ignorance and affects mostly the lower vital and physical exterior consciousness which in turn affect the higher parts of the nature. While it is well to see what it is and how it acts, one must not be too preoccupied with this aspect of our being. One should rather regard it as something other than oneself, something which is covering our true being by the Ignorance. The true inner being has the possibility of reaching and expressing the pure divine which in essence is all that is good and true and beautiful. The outward being has to be changed into a vehicle which transforms from the ignorant subconscious Nature to the Divine. One should be open to the Divine Consciousness to enable that to descend from above into the whole of existence, both inner and outer and including mental, vital, physical, the subconscious, and the subliminal. This is our main task. One has to keep a right balance and stress the positive side most, but in addition we should recognise this other side or aspect also with the

³⁷² Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 353.

³⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 354.

express purpose only of rejecting and changing it.³⁷⁴

6. INTRACONSCIENCE

Sri Aurobindo mentions the intraconscient in connection with the subliminal in that it is yet another dimension of consciousness that works behind a veil. This is one more subtle state associated with or involved in consciousness which triggers a number of questions which I pose at the end of this quote. These questions are relevant to a greater or lesser degree to every one of the different states that he has mentioned. He describes the role and nature of the intraconscient as follows: "The part of us that we have characterised as intraconscient and circumconscient is a still more potent and much more valuable element in the constitution of our being. It includes the large action of an inner intelligence and inner sense-mind, of an inner vital, even of an inner subtle-physical being which upholds and embraces our waking consciousness, which is not brought to the front, which is subliminal, in the modern phrase. But when we can enter and explore this hidden self, we find that our waking sense and intelligence are for the most part a selection from what we secretly are or can be, an exteriorized and much mutilated and vulgarised edition of our real, our hidden being or an upthrow from its depths. Our surface being has been formed with this subliminal help by an evolution out of the Inconscient for the utility of our present mental and physical life on earth; this that is behind is a formation mediating between the Inconscient and the larger planes of Life and Mind which have been created by the involutory descent and whose pressure has helped to bring about the evolution of Mind and Life in Matter. Our surface responses to physical existence have at their back the support of an activity in these veiled parts, are often responses from them modified by a surface mental rendering. But also that large part of our mentality and vitality which is not a response to the outside world but lives for itself or throws itself out on material existence to use and possess it, our personality, is the outcome, the amalgamated formulation of powers, influences, motives proceeding from this potent intraconscient secrecy."³⁷⁵

He does say that beyond the activity of man there is an energy of Consciousness-Force and behind this stream of energy "there is a whole sea of consciousness which is aware of the stream, but of which the stream is unaware. This sum of surface energy is a

³⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 355-356.

³⁷⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 735.

selection, an outcome from all the rest that is invisible. That sea is the subliminal self, the Superconscient, the subconscious, the intraconscient and circumconscient being, and holding it all together the soul, the psychic entity."³⁷⁶ Due to the interrelatedness of the intraconscient and circumconscient, the intraconscient will be dealt with further in the section regarding the circumconscient.

The very type of statements that Sri Aurobindo makes about these different states of consciousness is what we would expect from a knower of the psyche. This is not my field and I cannot judge whether this is the type of knowledge that is produced by our scientific psychological research. From my superficial insight, it appears to be not the case. Sri Aurobindo goes to very subtle and profound depths in his handling of this large variety of ordinary states of consciousness. I have to question what is the degree of veracity that is attached to his pronouncements in this particular regard. This question should be raised because I am aware of the fact that he has not studied psychology. To the best of my knowledge his 'theories' has either not been tested or the results of such research is not freely available. We are left in a position where we have to step back and decide whether what he said was true or not. When without knowledge, it is easier to reject something and to find it untrue especially if one is not qualified in a field. I personally cannot decide as to the untruth of his views simply because of the fact that I do not know the subject of psychology. Regarding whether what he has outlined is true, that I can also not determine myself even though what he says presents a coherent, integrated and comprehensive description of the reality of these different states. For now I believe that my task, and that is all I can do, is to reproduce what he stated and to enter the caveat that I did. But following from this there is yet another question namely, if what Sri Aurobindo said is true, why has our academic discipline of psychology not either produced this itself or studied his work to either negate or to utilise it?

SLEEP, DREAM AND WAKING - SOME GENERAL REMARKS

There are very many aspects in the study of Sri Aurobindo that we do not pursue such as the relationship between his views and those of his predecessors in different approaches. Enticing as a complete study of all the different components might be, we

³⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 583.

have to restrict ourselves at some point. To illustrate the point, the following paragraph. This paragraph is intended to indicate why we only cover the thinking of Sri Aurobindo in this complex field of Indian philosophy. We will be dealing with the views of Sri Aurobindo on amongst others sleep. In the Indian religio-philosophical landscape there are many other approaches by many people spanning a vast period of time on the same subjects that Sri Aurobindo covers. There is no one Indian philosophy. As in all philosophies, the various exponents and creators of the vast spectrum of Indian philosophy held views that ranged from total agreement to radical disagreement with each other. Examples are the Vedantic and the Buddhist philosophies where depending on the exponent, the basic nature of these two philosophies can differ very little or very much. I think this field is interesting but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into great depth as to the different approaches even on as common a state as sleep by the different exponents and commentators such as Vasubandhu, Gaudapada and Sankara.

In explaining conflicting theories, I refer to the work of Dasgupta (whose *A History of Indian Philosophy* was first published as recently as 1922) who seems partial to the views of Gaudapada on 'being' by stating "In my translation I have not followed Sankara, for he has I think tried his level best to explain away even the most obvious references to Buddha and Buddhism in Gaudapada's *karika* (a concise statement of doctrine in verse). I have, therefore, drawn my meaning directly as Gaudapada's *karika* seemed to indicate. I have followed the same principle in giving the short exposition of Gaudapada's philosophy."³⁷⁷ This is an interesting statement, because both these great thinkers had valid if conflicting opinions. This is where questions arise: why should Dasgupta not follow Sankara? However, it is not all that important because he (Dasgupta) is by and large representing different historical points of view as accurately as he can. But in his rendering of the history of Indian philosophy, are there not other cases of greater or lesser degrees of subtleties where the prejudice that he indulges in will influence our thinking? I think this only illustrates even further the complexity of this particular field. An example of the complexity of the differences in the case are of 'being', amongst others in the sleep state, as quoted by Dasgupta where he writes "Some disputants hold that coming into being is of existents, whereas others quarrelling with them hold that being is of non-existents; there are others who quarrel with them and say

³⁷⁷ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 425.

that neither the existents nor non-existents are liable to being and there is one non-coming-into-being. Gaudapada agrees with those who hold that there is no coming into being and says that the Buddhas have shown that there was no coming into being in any way. Gaudapada explains the three apparent manifestations of the self: (1) as the experiencer of the external world while we are awake, (2) as the experiencer in the dream state, (3) as the experiencer in deep sleep, when there is no determinate knowledge, but pure consciousness and pure bliss. He who knows these three as one is never attached to his experiences."³⁷⁸ Gaudapada then enumerates some "theories of creation: some think that the world has proceeded as a creation from the prana (vital activity), others consider creation as an expansion of that cause from which it has proceeded; others imagine that creation is like dream and magic; others, that creation proceeds simply by the will of the Lord; others that it proceeds from time; others that it is for the enjoyment of the Lord or for his play only, for such is the nature of the Lord, that he creates, but he cannot have any longing, as all his desires are in a state of fulfilment. Gaudapada does not indicate his preference one way or the other, but describes the fourth state of the self as unseen, unrelationable, ungraspable, indefinable, unthinkable, unspeakable, the essence as oneness with the self, as the extinction of the appearance, the quiescent, the good, the one. The world-appearance would have ceased if it had existed, but all this duality is mere maya (magic or illusion), the one is the ultimately real."^{379, 380} Furthermore, other factors that we normally would not think should be there (such as feeling) enter the fray. This type of complexity represents only the very tip of the iceberg. We could proceed with a more in-depth examination of Gaudapada as well as Vasubandhu and Sankara, but I think the principle of the complexity of the thinking of Sri Aurobindo and his predecessors has been established.

In explaining the terms and simultaneously indicating the complexity of the different states of consciousness we are here dealing with, even those which we think we know well by experience namely the ordinary states of consciousness such as sleeping, dreaming and waking, it quickly becomes apparent that if he is right, these states are very complex, and we are ignorant of their true reality. Sri Aurobindo says that "(t)he

³⁷⁸ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *A History of Indian philosophy*. Cambridge: The Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, 1963, p. 425.

³⁷⁹ This is a very complex blend of theories. It covers virtually the whole spectrum of Indian philosophy and again, within the limited scope of this thesis, we cannot do any form of comparative study of the views of Sri Aurobindo and the others.

³⁸⁰ Dasgupta, Surendranath. *Ibid*, p. 424-426.

terms waking, dream, sleep are applied because in the ordinary consciousness of man the external only is awake, the inner being is mostly subliminal and acts directly only in a state of sleep when its movements are felt like things of dream and vision; while the Superconscient (Supermind, Overmind, etc.) is beyond even that range and is to the mind like a deep sleep."³⁸¹ He explains in detail the nature and interrelationships of these states of consciousness which we investigate in this chapter.

In the conditions that we know as sleep, dream and waking we do have certain experiences but that is a small portion of the actual reality of those states. The aspects that we are not aware of is hidden beyond our conception in subliminal areas which range from the profound depths of the subconscious and rise up to the high levels of the superconscience. According to Sri Aurobindo, in the old Indian psychological tradition a human being was viewed as possessing a waking-self, a dream-self and a sleep-self.³⁸² Sri Aurobindo says that these three states can all be classed as a certain form of illusion because the only true reality is the *Atman*, alternatively they can be seen as three different orders of one reality which allows us three different types of self-experience and world-experience. Because of the fact that Hindu psychologists deemed consciousness primary, they viewed the forms in which consciousness operated as secondary and noticed that consciousness change relative to the material or mode in which it operated. In gross matter it was more solid but slow and difficult, such as when a man is in the waking state of consciousness. In subtle matter such as in a dream, the form and consciousness was free and more rapid but volatile.³⁸³

7. SLEEP

Regarding the sleep state, on the face of it this state of consciousness is the most inert and passive. Yet, according to Sri Aurobindo, present and active here is a consciousness which is similar in essence to the supramental plane of the gnosis. This gnosis or field of supreme knowledge is available to us as it is a part of our undeveloped potential and until we have moved further on our evolutionary path, its faculties are not active. It can only operate within a "body" which has been developed for it. Experiencing the gnostic level normally happens only when we transcend the normal mental level. The

³⁸¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 256.

³⁸² Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 519.

³⁸³ Dalal, A. S. *A Greater Psychology*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001, p. 207.

relationship that we at present have to that gnostic level is the same that we have towards the sleep state, where we are totally unaware. Even so, the sleep state is a powerful and profound state. What happens during the sleep state is that we approach a higher power of being. Here we move into pure consciousness which is beyond thought. This field has many aspects. It is one of feeling, but it is not merely one of emotion, as it extends beyond that into pure bliss and further to the will of pure mastery. It is actually the gate to the union with the supreme state of Sachchidananda, which is the basis for all activities in the world. When the soul becomes awake to these levels it becomes master of the ranges of gnostic thought, gnostic will, and gnostic delight. This brings the memory of the experience and power from the sleep state into the waking state. The soul experiences bliss during sleep and during waking a memory thereof is retained. Regarding higher states of consciousness, it is not possible for memories of that to be brought back, except that which says 'Somehow, indescribably, I was in bliss'. This is the bliss of the beyondness of an unconditioned existence which cannot be thought or described. It seems therefore that however high the power of the waking goes, there appears to be a beyond in which the image of sleep will still find its application. Sri Aurobindo warns that in describing these things in the language of symbols or in words, that language is restrictive and inadequate to truly convey the reality of what is. Using the words, 'dream' and 'sleep' for these higher states are only an image drawn from the experience of the normal physical mind with its mental limitations. To the physical mind, it might be sleep which we associate with limitedness, but to our wider and subtler consciousness it is a greater waking.³⁸⁴

8. DREAM

In this state, the consciousness of the mental and especially intuitional processes are found to operate freely and perfectly but in a subtle matter. This consciousness corresponds to a subtler life-plane and mind-plane, which does not have the same concrete reality as the things of the physical existence. Here the mental life of man is actually more at home in the Dream State than in the waking state, and this also contrasts with its operation in the Waking State which takes place in an indirect way and with serious limitations, simply because of the dense matter, the body, which is

³⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 525.

ponderous and slow and limits movement and agility.³⁸⁵ Because of the subtlety of the structure or components of the dream body, mental life there operates more effortlessly compared with its operation in the body. Of course, when back in the waking state, to the normal mind all that exceeds its normal experience but still comes into its scope, seems a dream and is not treated very seriously but is viewed as an unimportant illusion. This Sri Aurobindo views as being not correct. He regards both the waking and the dream state of consciousness as operating in fields of reality differing from each other, but each immensely important in its own way. In the same way that what we experience in the waking state is a recording as it were of our interaction with the physical world (which world is illusionary if viewed in a certain esoteric way, including the science of quantum physics), so our experiences in the dream state take place in what could also be viewed as yet another illusionary world.³⁸⁶ The fact that we perceive very little of our own reality is due to our inability to experience the subliminal reality of our being.³⁸⁷

We can experience and utilise the full powers of the dream-state if we bar the sights and sounds of the outer world from our physical organs. We then become open to the full extensive range of awareness in the dream-state, which Sri Aurobindo states has an infinite series of depths. It ranges from a situation where the physical senses are very close, moving on to an inner absorption where the mind finds itself in a state of trance. He also differentiates between the dream state of yoga, the region of the subtle mind free from the physical mentality, and the physical state of dream which is the domain of the physical mind. This is an important distinction because the dreams of the physical mind is incoherent and a result of a combination of interactions with the physical world by lower-mind faculties. On the other hand, in the yogic dream-state the mind is self-possessed and works coherently using both its ordinary will and intelligence but with a greater power than normal, and the same is also true of the higher will and intelligence found in the upper regions of the mind. Here the outer world is left behind and pure and more powerful thoughts are utilised to influence its environment in a mental, moral and even physical way. Here, even though in the dream state, we can be aware of the physical world through the subtle senses which belong to the subtle body, which body is

³⁸⁵ Dalal, A. S. *A Greater Psychology*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001, p. 207.

³⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 427.

³⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-2.1 [SABCL], p. 519.

yet another entity that we do not normally know that we all possess. From here, one may be aware of occurrences to the degree that one chooses and on a much wider scale than in the waking condition. This is because of the fact that the subtle senses have a far more powerful range than the gross physical organs, which wider range may be practically unlimited. Of course this awareness of the physical world through the subtle senses is something quite different from our normal awareness thereof through the physical organs. The subtle senses have power both on their own subtle planes and upon the physical world, even though the latter to them is a more remote world.³⁸⁸

It is possible to access the powers of the dream state, but then one has to exclude the different stimuli of the outer world upon the physical body. One can be aware of the physical world through the subtle senses, which belong to the subtle body, whilst in the dream trance. It is paradoxical that this awareness during the dream state can be much greater than during the waking state of consciousness. One can choose as to how aware one wishes to be in this state because the subtle senses have a far greater and more powerful range than that of the gross physical organs. When we are aware of the physical world through our subtle senses, it is different to our normal awareness where we use the physical organs. These physical organs do not operate in the very settled state, such as in Samadhi, nor is the way in which they operate very subtle. The subtle powers of the dream-state influence and operate on both their own planes and those of the physical world. Their subtle world though is remote from our own world of being. To practice techniques to aid evolution, it could be productive to shut down perceptions through the physical devices and to do without the intervention of physical sleep. This results in being in a space of quietude and internality. There the mind is awake in the dream-state and in possession of itself where it can exercise all its powers.³⁸⁹

Similar to the situation of the waking state, the experiences that we can have in the dream state are infinitely various. Here the mind has the use of our normal mental powers such as reasoning and discrimination and can use it whichever way it wishes, and that includes the ability to establish connections with the worlds with whom it either has connections or wishes to acquire access to. It can do this because it is liberated from the restrictions of the physical senses, which in its nature are outward

³⁸⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21 [SABCL], p. 521.

³⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 522.

going and not internally oriented. It can observe whatever is in the material world as well as on other planes, and these observations can include sound, touch, smell, taste, movement and action.³⁹⁰ All of this seems supernormal to the waking mentality but are completely natural and normal in the dream state because the subliminal mind in that state is free.

9. WAKING

During our waking state we utilise reason and logic to operate. According to Sri Aurobindo, the reason which is "active in our waking consciousness is only a mediator between the subconscious All that we come from in our evolution upwards and the Superconscious All towards which we are impelled by that evolution. The subconscious and the Superconscious are two different formulations of the same All. (The difference between the two is that) (t)he master-word of the subconscious is Life, the master-word of the Superconscious is Light."³⁹¹

The level of creation on which the waking state is operative is the material level. The nature of matter determines the nature of the consciousness that comes forth from or that operates in that matter.³⁹² The operations or essential activities, which take place in waking consciousness, are firm and solid yet slow and hampered. The waking state is the experience of consciousness of the material universe where we normally operate whilst being in this embodied existence dominated by the physical mind. So, we have established that we are mental beings and that we act accordingly. However, if we look a little bit further and understand what is behind this thinking operation, namely the *Purusha*, a completely different scenario emerges. On this waking level the mental *Purusha* involves itself with the mechanism of the present three aspects of our being namely mind, life and body. It can and does separate from this state, and it returns to its essential nature which is beyond the body and which is its natural state of pure self-experience. By playing this role of alternating between being in the relative and in the absolute, it allows itself firstly to intuit itself as the soul in the body where life experiences the activity of mind and of it also being the light of that activity. This soul

³⁹⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21 [SABCL], p. 523.

³⁹¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 65.

³⁹² On the other hand, it is also true that it is the consciousness which is the causative agent if you wish of whatever is created and therefore it is the nature of the consciousness which determines the nature of matter. But the statement as it stands above is also correct, especially to establish the principle mentioned there.

in the embodied being is the physical conscious being, which uses life and mind characteristically for physical experience, and it does not look beyond the life of the body. It is aware only of the physical universe and its oneness with the soul of physical nature. But it can also have gained an intuition of itself as a soul of the life, which has the body as a form or basic sense-image and mind as a conscious activity of life-experience. Sri Aurobindo says that the soul in life is the vital conscious being, which is capable of looking beyond the limits of the physical body and has a feeling of the eternity of life past and yet to come, but which does not look beyond a constant vital becoming in Time. These three *Purushas* are soul-forms of the Spirit by which it identifies its conscious existence with these three planes of its universal being.³⁹³

It is obvious that for us, the waking state is very important, as it is our common experience that it is in the waking state from which we are aware that we live. Furthermore, it is by operating in our physical bodies and through our mental aspect that we accomplish whatever we do accomplish. However prominent and obvious our physical body might be and however important it is to us, the fact is that we, through evolution, have become essentially mental beings and in our mentality we are nearest to our real self, which is the higher, the Spirit. All our actions, whether we are consciously aware of it or not, is to reach perfection. It manifests itself in the syndrome of wanting more, even if it is more on the most gross level, that of the material.³⁹⁴ Thus, the quest for man is to reach perfection, and for him to achieve that, he has to move away from the outward existence and develop the three mental intuitions which are those of the physical, vital and mental levels. This development could be twofold. Firstly, it could be more of a spiritual nature where he moves away from physical nature and becomes detached from the mind, life and body. In this way he becomes the uninvolved witness, the *Purusha*. For complete liberation in this way we have to elevate the mental being into the spiritual self and then depart from all mentality. While man is lodged in the field of mentality, he cannot move beyond it so as to exercise free control. This actually results in a duality of dependence where Nature is dependent on his consent, and he is dependent on its law and limits of action. The *Purusha* agreed because of the ego-sense to conceive of itself as the soul or mental being with a free will determined by his own

³⁹³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 634.

³⁹⁴ We want 'more' on the material level simply because the material level is where we live, we are unaware of higher levels and that 'the more' that is available on higher levels such as the higher mental or the spiritual is of an infinitely superior quality, if we can use such a word regarding those levels.

becomings. This creates a duality of dependence of Nature on him for his consent, and him on it by his dependence on its laws and limits of action. He knows that it is his power, and he is its subject.³⁹⁵ In dealing with these high superior personages and realities, for the sake of perspective it is appropriate now to remind ourselves that this *Purusha* is not remote and irrelevant to us, it is the *Purusha* that is active in us now, this is our essence and this is who we are.

10.SUBLIMINAL

The term subliminal is used for all parts of the being which is hidden and not on the waking level. This includes the inner mental, vital, physical, and the psychic. There is another term called the subconscious which is a diminished consciousness operating close to the inconscience and which is a lesser state of consciousness than what we perceive on the surface of being whereas the subliminal is larger than our surface existence. The nature of the subliminal is that of a powerful entity; "it has in it a larger and more efficient mind behind the surface mind, a larger and more powerful vital behind the surface vital, subtler and freer physical consciousness behind the surface bodily existence. And above them it opens to higher subconscious as well as below them to lower subconscious ranges."³⁹⁶ To Sri Aurobindo the fact of subtler aspects of being upholding the more gross, and even more subtler upholding the subtler is an integral part of his view of reality. In this instance, the subliminal contains the real essence of the mind, the vital and the physical body of a person. It is in direct contact with both the Superconscient above and the lower subconscious. The awareness of this subliminal is superior to that of the waking mind and it has faculties which are capable of more subtle and profound activities. There is a connection between the subliminal and the surface personality and the influence it has on that surface "is the best part of ourselves and responsible for our art, poetry, philosophy, ideals, religious aspirations, efforts at knowledge and perfection."³⁹⁷

The subliminal is on the crossroads of consciousness from the force of evolution below and the consciousness moving downward through involution from above. As already said, it contains an inner mind, an inner vital, and an inner physical and through that

³⁹⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 635.

³⁹⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 1606.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 1164.

influences the life of a human being to a large degree. This is our contact with the universe. This includes different senses such as subliminal sight, touch and hearing. This does not imply that the subliminal requires senses for gaining its knowledge; they only give shape to its style of perception and encounter of objects. The subliminal effortlessly enters the mental, vital and physical domains of all consciousness and this enables communication with all the domains of the involutionary leg of creation, without any need of the sense receptors such as our eyes and ears. It operates in the field of interior existence which we encounter and know through experience gained during sleep or during trance through meditation. In our waking state we do not know this and we are not aware that whatever inspirations or intuitions we do receive, is from the subliminal. This is because of a veil between our restricted waking reality and the domain of the subliminal. Sri Aurobindo says that "the subliminal is the seer of inner things and of supraphysical experiences; the surface subconscious is only a transcriber."³⁹⁸

The subliminal has the same abilities as we have in our waking state, as it possesses a mind, a life force and a clear subtle physical sense of things. Its senses are subtle and it perceives, it has an extensive memory and intelligence, it experiences activity and has a self-consciousness but all of these are much more developed than are our normal human equivalent. In its nature it is able to have a direct awareness of objects through the different ways in which it interacts therewith. It accomplishes activities such as gaining knowledge and understanding quicker than we do as it is not as hampered and bound and conditioned by a body and a life, nor by the influences of a limited nerve system and physical organs. It has a true mentality, which operates beyond these limitations, and it exceeds the abilities of our physical mind and organs. The reason why it is viewed as being subconscious is that it operates below the surface behind a veil. Sri Aurobindo says that it is rather a secret intraconscient and circumconscient than a subconscient. But even the subliminal has different layers and those closer to the surface also are subject to a degree of ignorant action.³⁹⁹

In the infinity of being and its boundless awareness concentration of consciousness is always present as an inherent power of consciousness-force. We can understand this

³⁹⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 427.

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 559.

when we look at the nature of exclusive concentration in our own mental consciousness. We think of man in a certain way and what we ordinarily mean by the term 'the man' is not his inner or real self, but only a sum of apparently continuous movement of consciousness and energy situated in the past, present and future. It appears as if this surface apparent man acts, thinks and feels. This appearance of energy is part of Consciousness-Force which deals with activities. Beyond this stream of energy however, there is a source or an ocean of consciousness which knows of the stream. However, the stream is unaware of the ocean. This is because this sum of surface energy is only a selection from all the rest that is invisible. That sea of consciousness has a multitude of components, which is our self, namely the subliminal self, the Superconscient, the subconscious, the intraconscient and circumconscient being. It is the soul, the psychic entity that is holding all these components together. The stream is the superficial or apparent man. In this superficial man his dynamic force of consciousness is concentrated on the surface but he himself is unaware or at best vaguely aware of his complete reality. In this analogy it is the quiet ocean and not the turbulent waves that is the source of action. Despite all this, the wave is not ignorant in its essence as it still retains the consciousness that it apparently has forgotten, but that is because it is involved with activity and movement and does not remember its ties to its source.⁴⁰⁰

The profound subliminal mind is behind the mental faculty, but it is much vaster than that faculty. This subliminal is the important aspect of man, however powerful the mental faculty is. The aspects of the subliminal are the inner physical, the inner vital and the inner mental. The subliminal is situated and operates on the surface of the subconscious in such a way that we are unaware of its positive contribution to our being. It profoundly influences our life by its positive influence on our surface consciousness, and the Supreme forces of the Superconscient in turn influence it. When we move to the subtler aspects of our consciousness, we move into this domain, which allows us much greater power in our lives. It is in this region where evolution, development and growth take place. By placing attention on that region everything from the subconscious up is influenced positively. The Subliminal mind is aware of the subtle aspects of the cosmos which it is privy to, in contrast to the surface mind, which either does not perceive these

⁴⁰⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 583.

signals or ignores it. What is real to this mind is the essence of what is. It is non-judgmental and sees all in a neutral way. We have to move behind the obvious surface reality in order to truly come to know ourselves and to move on in our evolution. The alternative mode of operation to this subtler mode is by mental activity, where we can think about, but cannot know, true reality. The route is to go down into our subconscious and subliminal reality and to open ourselves to the supramental reality.⁴⁰¹

In our task of evolving we are aided in ways unbeknown to us. We have to give direction to and control our lives, and here we can only control that what we are conscious of. The rest of our being must be governed by its own consciousness, which is subliminal to our surface mind and life and body. As these two facets are in fact one, the larger and more potent part (the subtle) will govern and determine the direction of the smaller and less powerful with the result that we are governed by the subconscious and subliminal even in our conscious existence and in our very self-mastery and self-direction we are only instruments of what seems to us the Inconscient within us.⁴⁰²

Having knowledge of our true self, and for us to derive the benefit of what is created in our evolutionary movement, we must move beyond mental knowledge, which is the imperfect knowledge of the superficial existence and master the ability of perfect harmony with our fellows, which include all from the rocks up, operating from the level of the subconscious or the subliminal in them and us.⁴⁰³

11. CIRCUMCONSCIENT OR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Another state of consciousness, that which has to do with our interaction with the environment, is the circumconscient. This arises out of the subliminal and it is a manifestation of consciousness which extends itself beyond the mental, vital, subtle-physical sheaths, forming a circumconscient or an environing part of itself. It is through this that we make contact with the environment and it is through that channel that we deal with the world. The subliminal has the ability to extend itself indefinitely and to cover more and more territory, eventually projecting into the cosmic existence around it.

⁴⁰¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21 [SABCL], p. 212.

⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 212.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, p. 213.

It reaches the point where the separation disappears and it is united with all that is, identifying itself with all existence.⁴⁰⁴ From our personal point of view *we* then are identified with all of existence.

It is this circumconscient consciousness that determines the nature of our interactions with the world outside us. This implies that, despite appearances, the individual is not limited to the physical body. He can transcend this apparent limitation, and experience the inner consciousness, which is connected with the body as well as the planes of consciousness above the body and a consciousness surrounding the body. This is part of oneself, part of the individual being, and through this, one is in contact with the cosmic forces and with other beings, explaining why it is called the environmental consciousness.⁴⁰⁵

Sri Aurobindo explains the environmental consciousness as follows. He says that each man has his own personal consciousness within his body and it is through this that he gets into touch with his surroundings, using the senses. Simultaneously, without his knowledge, there are other universal forces entering him. From his perspective he is having thoughts or feelings, which he deems his own. The truth is that they originate from outside, entering in waves the mind, vital, and feeling organs of perception. These thoughts assume a particular form within him, which form is determined by the body and the level of consciousness, and these thoughts rise to the surface. They succeeded in entering his body through the environmental consciousness. They could have a negative influence by for instance producing thoughts about illness, and if one can become aware of this particular aspect of one's consciousness, one can prevent it from entering and causing illness. In that case, these thoughts could either leave or it is possible for them to remain in the vicinity of that person with the intention of re-entering again.⁴⁰⁶ There is a difference between the subconscious and the environmental consciousness. In the subconscious are stored impressions and memories that move to the surface where we become conscious thereof. In the environmental consciousness however, thoughts are not stored but they move about there. One can become conscious of and control thoughts that pass through it. The result of a person being without an

⁴⁰⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21 [SABCL], p. 541.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 313.

⁴⁰⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 313.

environmental consciousness, is that he is unable to make contact with the rest of the world.⁴⁰⁷

12.SAMADHI

Sri Aurobindo's description of the process of samadhi goes some way towards explaining the nature of trance and the way in which he did, and other humans can, attain knowledge not normally accessible to the processes using the intellect.

He says that the aim of the Yoga of Knowledge is growth towards higher or a divine consciousness. There is such a state of consciousness which is not now normal to us, and we have to use a process of Yogic trance to reach Samadhi. This is a state in which the mind acquires the capacity of withdrawing from its limited waking activities into freer and higher states of consciousness. This state of consciousness is characterised by a pure supramental immersion in immobile, timeless and infinite being. For Sri Aurobindo, the aim of this process is not experiencing this divine state but it is in order to raise the level of consciousness. It is important to experience this comprehensive state of Samadhi because in our normal waking state we only experience very little of the world or of ourselves. The greater part is hidden in the subliminal aspect of our being.

Traditionally Indian psychology divided consciousness into waking state, dream-state, sleep-state, and then viewed the human being as a waking self, a dream-self, and a sleep-self. Beyond that is the supreme or absolute self of being. In this framework the waking state is the consciousness of the material universe which for us is dealt with by the physical mind. In the dream-state a consciousness operates which corresponds to the subtler life-plane and mind-plane, which to us, is ephemeral and is a less concrete reality compared to our normal physical existence. The sleep-state is a consciousness which compares to the supramental plane of the gnosis, which state we do not normally experience because the causal body of gnosis is not developed in us, and to us any interaction with that state is one of dreamless sleep. The *Turiya* (the Superconscient or the absolute), which is beyond, is the consciousness of pure self-existence with which we have no direct relations at all. To return to the divine we have to master all four these steps. We cannot reach the higher planes of consciousness from the physical mind; we

⁴⁰⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 314.

first have to leave the waking state and the material world. This is done through the vehicle of trance.

In Samadhi we move away from the waking state and experience different subtler degrees of consciousness, in which states it is increasingly difficult to communicate with the waking mind. In moving further away from the waking world it is difficult to be influenced or summoned back by that world. The point can be reached where a return to the waking world is not possible. Sri Aurobindo says, "(f)inally, the Yogin acquires at a certain stage of development the power of abandoning his body definitively without the ordinary phenomena of death, by an act of will, or by a process of withdrawing the *pranic* life-force through the gate of the upward life-current, opening for it a way through the mystic *brahmarandhra* (an opening at the top of the skull) in the head. By departure from life in the state of Samadhi he attains directly to that higher status of being to which he aspires."⁴⁰⁸ In short, he dies from this world to live in the world of the spirit.

The importance of the dream-state of Samadhi lies in its ability to easily reach higher ranges of consciousness and powers of thought, emotion, and will which enables the soul to grow in height, range and self-mastery. By going into self-seclusion through the act of withdrawing from the senses, it can, through unhampered reasoning, thought, and discrimination, achieve a deeper vision and identification with the Divine, or alternatively, through the experience of inner joy and emotion, achieve the delight of union with the divine Beloved.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that through the experience of Samadhi, a person can pass from the inner awareness to the outer waking whilst still retaining all memory of that inner reality, making the apparent supernormal abilities available to the waking consciousness, turning that into the normal experience, powers and mental status of the waking life. The subtle mind then becomes powerful even in the waking state despite operating within the confines of the physical being. This development proceeds, cultivating man to live in his several subtle bodies as well as in his physical body, allowing him to use their senses, faculties, powers, and to dwell in possession of

⁴⁰⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 521.

supraphysical truth, consciousness and experience.⁴⁰⁹ Samadhi is therefore very useful for attaining hitherto unreachable heights of spiritual and psychic experience. Once the spiritual realities become known, they can be brought into and experienced in the waking consciousness.⁴¹⁰

13. COSMIC CONSCIOUSNESS

Although strictly speaking cosmic consciousness is not an "ordinary state of consciousness", it does not fit in with the states of consciousness dealt with in the next chapter about higher states of consciousness. This is because cosmic consciousness is a strictly human type of consciousness whereas higher states of consciousness are open to all. When one is in a human body and experiences this state, it is experienced during the waking or the dreaming or the sleep state of consciousness and this section gives an indication as to the importance of cosmic consciousness in the overall evolutionary goal for man.

Sri Aurobindo says that man is restricted to his surface individual consciousness and knows the world only partially through using his outward mind and senses. Man's evaluation of his contact with the world determines the shape of his world. But he can develop the ability to become aware of even more whereby his consciousness becomes one with that of the world. Through this development "he becomes directly aware of a universal Being, universal states, universal Force and Power, universal Mind, Life, Matter and lives in conscious relations with these things. He is then said to have cosmic consciousness."⁴¹¹

Sri Aurobindo maintains that cosmic consciousness is a complex matter. It has two sides, the experience of the infinite, silent, inactive Self, on the one hand and "the direct experience of the cosmic Energy and its forces, workings and formations, this latter experience not being complete till one has the sense of being commensurate with the universe or pervading, exceeding and containing it."⁴¹² To achieve cosmic consciousness it is necessary for a person to attain unity of mind, of life and of body with the cosmic Mind, Life, and material Energy. The reality of cosmic consciousness

⁴⁰⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 525.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, p. 526.

⁴¹¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 1070.

⁴¹² Ibid, p. 246.

would be the result of possessing a consciousness similar to the supramental, which is unconditioned and in perfect unity with its source. It is a Truth-Consciousness which can establish the perfect harmony and rhythm of the higher spiritual world in a relative world. Even in cosmic consciousness there is still a further striving towards Nirvana which for Sri Aurobindo "means not a disintegration but a disappearance of a false and unreal individual self into the one real self or Brahman; it is the idea and experience of individuality that so disappears and ceases. ... In spiritual experience it is sometimes the loss of all sense of individuality in a boundless cosmic consciousness (that results); what was the individual remains only as a centre or a channel for the flow of a cosmic consciousness and a cosmic force and action."⁴¹³

Sri Aurobindo expands this further as follows: "Overpowered and subjugated, stilled, liberated from itself, the mind accepts the Silence itself as the Supreme. But afterwards the seeker discovers that all is there for him contained or new-made in that silence or through it descends upon him from a greater concealed transcendent Existence. For this Transcendent, this Absolute is not a mere peace of signless emptiness; it has its own infinite contents and riches of which ours are debased and diminished values. If there were not that Source of all things, there could be no universe; all powers, all works and activities would be an illusion, all creation and manifestation would be impossible."⁴¹⁴

14. AN OVERVIEW

Throughout time, a great deal has been written about consciousness. There are many theories and approaches to understanding the nature of consciousness but a comparative study of these different views is beyond the scope of this thesis. I will only mention, but not comment on, a few pointers to indicate the nature of the complexity of this field. Most of what was written was based on speculation. One popular approach was to start from the physical body or from the brain and to assume that one of these two entities creates consciousness. Another approach is that the universe is conceived of as a giant computer, and the emergence of consciousness during the course of cosmic evolution is attributed solely to the laws of physics, which over the immensity of time gave rise to

⁴¹³ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 46.

⁴¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 118.

an infinite complex of components which was sufficient to give rise to consciousness.⁴¹⁵ It appears impossible to define consciousness, it is simply seen as difficult, different and complex: the consciousness of one person differs from his own consciousness at another time, the consciousness of two people differ from each other, intra-species consciousness differ, the consciousness of a human and of a rock appears to be different. According to Sri Aurobindo, initial perceptions to the contrary, there are no barriers or rigid demarcations between these different states of consciousness. The nature of consciousness can be seen in two ways. It can be viewed as an entity possessing some form of continuum where all the possibilities are present simultaneously: here it depends only on where the emphasis is placed that determines how that particular facet of this continuum is viewed (waking, dreaming and sleeping, with the one in a more active mode, the others more dormant). The alternate view is more radical, where we have the view of Sri Aurobindo that everything at its base has an integral reality consisting of amongst others consciousness. We are looking here at a vast infinite sea of consciousness which is involved in everything and every level of what is and what is not. Not only do I then share, I am the consciousness of the rock and also of what is intangible. In practical terms, this applies both to the field of duality and to the subtler regions, right up to Brahman.

I submit that if we consider these contentions regarding the nature and extent of consciousness of Sri Aurobindo as being incorrect, then the emphasis must change to us supplying the reasons for the incorrectness of his approach and this necessitates supplying a more accurate alternate cosmology. But for now these are the views of Sri Aurobindo and this is what we have to deal with. The picture that emerges in this particular view of the reality of consciousness is that of an infinitely complex, totally comprehensive mechanism or tool for the utilisation in all matters pertaining to knowledge. It is simultaneously a totally integral part of everything in the entirety of every facet of the universe. And not only are we as denizens of the universe involved with it, it is involved in us. Consciousness is not only one connecting line between us and what is, it exceeds that limitedness, it constitutes our own personal Jewel Net of Indra, it confirms our reality as being both an individual and simultaneously being in essence the totality of the universe.

⁴¹⁵ Wallace, B. Alan. *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 27.

In becoming aware (even if it is only a possibility that this complex reality can exist) of the extent and complexity of our different states of consciousness which we at this moment possess and use, we certainly have to view ourselves in a different light. Here we have to move away from the limited perception that we are operating on the level of the waking state and when that ceases, we are experiencing certain states, the consciousness of which is of an illusory nature. Until we experience the details of these different ordinary states of consciousness ourselves, it must remain an unproven theory. Even if it is no more than a theory, it is a very exciting theory, opening up vast vistas of possibilities and of knowledge regarding ourselves. And we cannot be too complacent about the reality that it is only a theory, too many mystics have told us about our infinite potential. They contend that we can have this knowledge ourselves if only we were to develop the different possible states of consciousness within us. For some the task might be daunting, for some the loss of security of the known might be even more daunting, but for all the possibility is that of infinity. Whether we like it or not, we are involved in the universe, and to the degree that we are involved with the universe, to that degree we truly live. The implications of this become clearer in the next chapter where the higher nature of both the universe and ourselves are discussed.

Chapter 6

HIGHER STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

"One may say truly, I think, that personal religious experience has its root and centre in mystical states of consciousness."⁴¹⁶

As human beings we think we know what consciousness is. We just cannot define it all that accurately. In the previous chapter we have been given insight as to what the consciousness is that we use every day. In the reading of Sri Aurobindo, and assuming that what he says is correct, we realise that we do not truly know what consciousness is. We do not know its nature, its ontology, its range, and its locus; in fact we know very little about. Sri Aurobindo extends the range of consciousness we know which is primarily waking, dreaming and sleeping, to incorporate the range of the Superconscient awareness which starts with the higher mind and terminates with the furthest in the range, that of the Supreme or Brahman.

Consciousness and especially higher or mystical states of consciousness has always interested and affected humanity greatly. This is borne out by the variety of thinkers such as James quoted above, but also many others mentioned in this thesis, that have thought and written about the subject of consciousness and its importance to humankind. Our mode of conduct is fashioned by how we are aware and consequently by what we know, by our philosophy. Moving from an individual to a broader perspective, the bases of religions were often the mystical experiences of their founders. Again on a more individual note, people who have had mystical experiences and either communicated their mystical encounters as amongst others Tennyson (quoted later) did, or deemed what they had experienced so special or even sacred that it was not to be

⁴¹⁶ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*. New York: The Library of America, 1987, p. 342.

profaned or sullied by sharing with others, constitute the base of the body mystic.⁴¹⁷

There are common elements here that should be brought into a cohesive perspective. This thesis is about Sri Aurobindo and the mystical matters that he dealt with. He made a tremendous and exciting contribution to the knowledge and the practice of this field. But without in any way belittling or underestimating him, (for perspective we should remember that he was only one representative person of many of this genre, one link in a very long chain spanning vast periods and distances) to understand this field a larger picture is required where we deal with not only him but with other important role players and in the process synthesising different perspectives and interrelationships.

I have already dealt with the basic field of mysticism in chapter 1. A broad representative pictorial outline of the field of mysticism is suggested in a schematic form in figure 3. I will not attempt to analyse in detail the components and their interactions as represented by the different circles apart from pointing out the complexity that they suggest and what the different circles could mean. As has become clear in this thesis, the field of consciousness according to Sri Aurobindo is so basic that it encompasses everything in the universe. At times consciousness is given the prefix 'mystic'.⁴¹⁸ At no point in my study have I arrived at a complete and comprehensive definition and understanding of either consciousness or mysticism, at least not any that was based on an intellectual understanding of this field. This could well be because of the fact that when we intellectualise, we differentiate the constituent components of a particular object. To understand them, these resultant components are given names and meanings that do not completely describe them nor does it completely inform us. So, to at least have some idea as to these interactions and to integrate or synthesise these different elements I have drawn a schema in the form of interrelated circles of Figure 3. I would suggest that the biggest circle (biggest because we are dealing with mysticism in this chapter) represents mysticism. It is best to think of these circles rather as being

⁴¹⁷ The fact that a person has had an experience, even though he or she does not relate that later, changes both that person and that which he is an integral part of namely the Cosmos. More locally of course he as a member of a community influences that community even without communicating anything about his mystic experience and background. Influence can therefore be exerted in ways far more subtle than through intellectualisation.

⁴¹⁸ The term mystic consciousness is intended to describe a type of consciousness that is superior to ordinary consciousness. For pragmatic use, this will do but consciousness in itself is so superior; it constitutes the supreme divinity and *the* building block of the universe. Again however, in operating and communicating on the relative level, this type or mode of relativising matters is the only option that we have.

balls, occupying a many-dimensional space, as being porous and interpenetrating, containing dynamic activity and movement and as not being linear

Some of the circles are completely within this biggest circle, some are halfway in, some on the border have circles within them that fall halfway or completely within the border of mysticism and others of that grouping fall totally outside the ambit of the mysticism circle, and some circles just barely overlap the boundary of mysticism. These different circles are all disciplines of one kind or another. This could include amongst others different academic disciplines, intellectual orientation, or a philosophical approach. What I wish to illustrate is that these three (or other) possible approaches are in some way or another mutually inclusive or related to each other. One possibility is to place them within, partly within, just touching or outside the big circle. The different circles can represent either individuals, or institutions or disciplines or a blend thereof. The emphasis and perspective of a person will determine where precisely his ideal organisation or individual will find itself within this picture. The purpose that is served by using this picture – which I know is vastly oversimplified – is to give an indication of firstly how complex things can be and secondly the fact that interrelationships which is not always thought of does exist. It is possible for instance that one or more small circles in the cluster in the centre can also simultaneously be present in another circle closer to the border where it functions in a different capacity. Our pictorial here tells us that there is a vast interrelationship between all the different components of humanity whether the elements they are composed of are personal, social, political, mystical, academic, intellectual, and philosophic; we do not operate in isolation, we are all part of one holism. Virtually the only reason why we could disagree with that is the fact that we do not understand causality properly and we do not know what the effects of each and every act of ours eventually will have. The emphasis on the holism of what is, does not deny that these different components in the relative field are all different and they each fulfil a particular and useful function.

The higher states of consciousness according to Sri Aurobindo are those states that are presently extremely uncommon but which we have the potential to develop.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁹ Whether they in fact are extremely uncommon could well be open to debate, but the fact is that there are not very many reports of experiences of higher states of consciousness. It is also true that reports of higher states of consciousness are sometimes dismissed because of the ignorance of the audience.

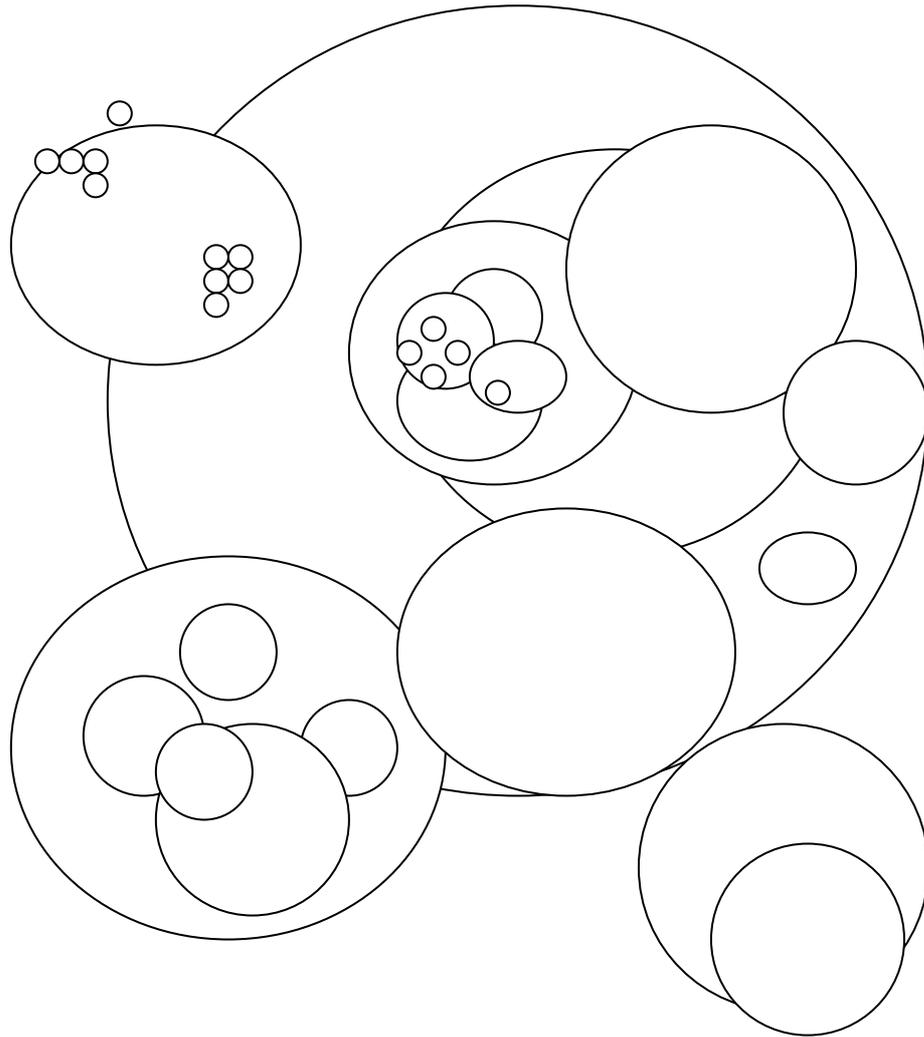


Diagram of potential interrelationships between different individuals and organisations in the field of mysticism. These circles and groupings of circles represent 'members', i.e. fields (with the large central circle representing mysticism), individuals, organisations, academic, intellectual and/or philosophical approaches and some of the different resultant groupings. Members can be present in different categories, depending on their personal orientation and fields of interest.

Figure 3

According to him, these states are already inherent in us; it is simply the extension of the consciousness that we have. He calls the range⁴²⁰ the Superconscient, which in ascending order includes Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, Supermind, and Sachchidananda.⁴²¹

1. SUPERCONSCIENT

There are different levels of higher states of consciousness, which states are defined by Sri Aurobindo as those that are above the waking, the subconscious and the subliminal. These higher states are related to the very highest, or even beyond the very highest that we can conceive of. This is the region of the Supreme Spirit. These states are present in the Superconscient range which, whether we are aware of that or not, is at the base of all our yearning, this is where we originate from and which states we desire to return to. According to Sri Aurobindo's cosmology, consciousness is the essence of our being. Through our consciousness we are part of and are affected by the Superconscient, as well as by the subconscious and inconscient. These three interact with, and in a way contain, those aspects of us that we call waking and subliminal. This has been dealt with in the previous chapter. More specifically, in our evolutionary process we realise increasingly that the Supreme Spirit is our essence. Intellectually we can call that Sachchidananda with its creative and sustaining and destructive components, and with all the divine characteristics of the supreme Lord. In this mode of the infinite Sachchidananda is beyond everything, it is transcendental as well as immanent. The implication thereof is that Sachchidananda is within us. This came about through the route the involutionary cycle took, initially reaching the state of total inconscience

⁴²⁰ Because of the uniqueness of these different states of consciousness, and by naming and defining them using an inadequate language, it is difficult to comprehend its ontology without experiencing it. To illustrate, the following quote. The example is the experience of Bucke, also quoted in James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. "All at once, without warning of any kind, he found himself wrapped around, as it were, by a flame-coloured cloud. (He thought there was a fire in the city.) The next (instant) he knew that the light was within himself. Directly after there came upon him a sense of exultation, of immense joyousness, accompanied or immediately followed by an intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe. Into his brains streamed one momentary lightning-flash of the Brahmic Splendor which ever since lightened his life. Upon his heart fell one drop of the Brahmic Bliss, leading thenceforward for always an aftertaste of Heaven." This is a good but inadequate description that can only be fully understood when a person experiences it himself. From the foreword by Acklom in *Cosmic Consciousness* by R M Bucke, New York: Penguin, 1991.

⁴²¹ It must be understood that the range of higher states of consciousness as outlined in this chapter, and the sequence in which they operate, is only applicable to our present terrestrial experience. This is so because, according to Sri Aurobindo, this is the sequence in which the involution stage of the eternal cycle took place here. On some other different worlds other rules might apply depending on the nature of the involution in those worlds.

where to all appearances there is no form of awareness whatsoever. These appearances deceive because the reality is that the fullness of Sachchidananda is present in the inconscient in an utterly dormant way. From this stance it directs the totality of our past involution and our future evolution, the totality of our being and of our life.⁴²² It operates in our subliminal existence with no true loss of its will and knowledge. From this vantage point it oversees with its supreme skill our hesitant, ineffective and faltering efforts towards evolution. In fact, Sachchidananda *is* us, it is within us but in a way also above us and despite our utter ignorance, we are inherently and intrinsically conscious of this aspect of our self, our nature and of our spirit. This knowledge of our true nature we have in an essential way, and this knowledge we gained not through reflection of the mind or in any mode related to our duality, it is through certain qualities of our human apparatus that we have that allows us access to essentially our self, our Superconscience where we have the supreme status, knowledge and experience of Sachchidananda. Even though this state of Sachchidananda is our true reality, at the level of evolution that we find ourselves now, we are completely unaware of that. All the same, that is the basic reason why we are struggling to evolve, why we wish to gain not only knowledge but supreme knowledge in order to return to ourselves. It is our tangible more surface reality and the ignorance that is associated with that, that causes all the limitations that we experience.⁴²³

Regarding certain of the characteristics or components of the superconscience which as said is beyond our present level of awareness, we find that to be the higher planes of mental being, supramental being and pure spiritual being. These are the components that are essential for evolution. As we become more aware and more able to perceive the subtle, we experience these higher aspects of Mind, which is the source of what could be termed our larger mental movements. That would include those mental activities related to revelation, inspiration, intuition; this includes all mental activities that appear to have great power and light. It is at this level and through these activities that we, however inadequately and partially, then become aware of the power and the presence of the spiritual world right up to the level of the Supermind. This type of

⁴²² The nature of Sachchidananda is such that at any stage of the involution and the evolution it is present in its fullness. It exercises a choice of being in a state of ignorance or unawareness and that is its reality at that particular level of existence. But that is in its essence only an illusionary form, whether 'visible' or not. However, for the purpose of describing the reality pertaining to a particular level I will deal with those matters as if that lesser reality describing certain qualities is the reality.

⁴²³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 561.

interaction influences our consciousness and it allows us to rise to a more sublime level, transcending the mental level and experiencing the supramental and the supreme spirit. We still operate in our normal self as we call it, and yet this interaction brings a realisation of the fact that we are spiritual beings, and this can influence and steer our normal human life and consciousness towards the spiritual. It is a type of higher mentality from which these enlightening and transforming influences come. These are possibilities, and also only a preliminary stage of our evolution, for a highly developed or a spiritually awakened human being. Evolution involves far more than a mere awareness; it has as its aim an integral self-knowledge, the training of a complete form of consciousness and power of being and an ascent from our normal mind to the planes beyond. This movement is possible for us at our present level through what Sri Aurobindo calls an absorbed superconscience. This however is not the end of our evolution, it is only a stage and if we stopped there, it could lead to a state of stationary or ecstatic trance, whereas for Sri Aurobindo the ideal is for this highest spiritual being to manifest itself in our normal waking state, which then affords us the ability for a greater type of life, imbued with higher being, consciousness and resultant action. The persons that we are now then acquire divine transforming values, resulting in an entirely new type of human life for us. This change can come about through the ascent, the widening of the reality that we are based on and through the integration of what we then experience.⁴²⁴

Through evolution of the mind, through our consciousness experiencing an ascending range of sublime levels and through the movement from the mind to the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuition, the Overmind and beyond that, there is a number of subtle changing realities eventually resulting in the experience of Supermind or the Divine Gnosis. Every one of these changes or stages of consciousness are gnostic in their essence. Initially we started from an original inconscience in which our reality was a general ignorance to a greater or lesser degree, but even this ignorance was based on a self-existent knowledge. This is the base for the growth that we eventually do experience in our evolution towards these higher states of consciousness. This is so because all these grades that we will experience or have experienced, are simply different grades of energy-substance of the spirit. They are not merely vehicles for

⁴²⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 736+

knowledge but they are the regions of being, they represent grades of spiritual substance and energy and fields of existence with at its base the universal Consciousness-Force as the motive force for this process into ever-higher realities of being. Whenever the power of any of these levels becomes our reality, we find ourselves affected and changed in the way in which we think, know, and experience being, with a dawning of a greater existence and with a hitherto unknown power and awareness.⁴²⁵ We should understand that the moving or shifting from the one level to the next does not take place in discrete movements but it forms part of a gradation in a continuum. The totality of the continuum exists already, but only that part that is enlivened becomes the reality in our experience.

2. HIGHER MIND

Having obtained the level of mind, we are now where we can experience and utilise our human intelligence. This serves us well for a time but this is not truly representative of our potential, however intelligent and intellectual we may be. This is merely a – very necessary – stage in our evolutionary upward movement. The next stage that we will inevitably experience is that of Higher Mind. This is a mind of a unitary type in the sense that the light that we experience there is clear, it is not mingled, obscure or a half-light. It has the clarity that the Spirit lends it. One of its cardinal characteristics is of a powerful type of knowledge, where multiple layers of not only knowledge but also ways of action, of becoming and of form are inherent in a spontaneous fashion. It has as its immediate origin the Overmind, and its original inception in Supermind. Its mode of operation is through Thought, the reality of that thought-mind is that it is of a luminous nature where the conceptual knowledge it attains originates from the Spirit. Based on the reality of the original identity of consciousness namely Sachchidananda which is not only privy to but is the totality of knowledge, consciousness at any level potentially perpetually knows all that is, however complex and multifaceted. In mind, this potentiality is not easily realised but it is there all the same. In the involutionary stage at the level of the higher mind, this knowledge was not the potential but actual. At the level of the mind it became potential, lost in amnesia. In moving from the mind to Higher Mind, the amnesia recedes and consciousness again progressively assumes its rightful place.

⁴²⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 938.

In the Higher Mind a different mode of operation replaces that of ordinary mind. It contains different aspects, the first being the aspect of cognition. Thoughts here operate directly, it is not through induction or a logical progression of facts reaching a conclusion based on that progression, there are no expressed or implied deductions and influences, nor the building of an edifice with the intention to arrive at a particular ordered outcome based on knowledge. Sri Aurobindo refers to the mechanisms of the normal mind as a limping action of our reason based on our ignorance in our search for knowledge. Because it has completely and comprehensively lost the ability to perceive directly, mind has to utilise these rather ponderous and fairly inaccurate methodologies to arrive at the best quality of knowledge it can under the circumstances. This would include safeguarding its steps of thinking against error, utilising a particular mental structure based on carefully laid foundations. Unfortunately these foundations are not firm because, according to Sri Aurobindo, "it is not supported on soil of native awareness but imposed on an original soil of nescience."⁴²⁶ This is not where our mind is operating at its keenest and swiftest with great insight and divination. It cannot muster the searchlight of intelligence to probe the little-known or the unknown. To use these abilities we have to move to the Higher Mind, which has as its basis a self-existent all-awareness which integrally knows and which can in a harmonious fashion present clear and complete thought-forms applicable to the required knowledge. At this level it is possible for this type of mind to deal with isolated or detailed aspects of what is. The way it normally operates is as Sri Aurobindo says, "its most characteristic movement is a mass ideation, a system or totality of truth-seeing at a single view; the relations of idea with idea, of truth with truth are not established by logic but pre-exist and emerge already self-seen in the integral whole. There is an initiation into forms of an ever-present but till now inactive knowledge, not a system of conclusions from premisses (*sic*) or data; this thought is a self-revelation of eternal Wisdom, not an acquired knowledge."⁴²⁷ This is a radically different, and arguably infinitely superior, way of thinking and of gaining knowledge compared with the logical intellectual methodologies of the normal mind. These methodologies support my hypothesis in the section on Popper in chapter 2. The way in which the higher mind operates in this instance is to leisurely and joyfully linger in the company of that large aspects of truth that come to the fore. Such a truth thus observed and experienced is superior than what

⁴²⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 940.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 940.

went before and can form an improved structure for living in a mental life, but for evolution they eventually have to be integrated and more knowledge must be gained, more truth must be unearthed resulting in greater knowledge of the higher realms of truth.⁴²⁸

Another aspect applicable here is that of will, of dynamic accomplishment or attainment of the Truth. What takes place here in this facet is that this more superior Mind, through the power of thought, influences and shapes the rest of the being, that is the mental, the feeling heart, the life, and the body. It operates utilising the tool of knowledge for the accomplishment of purification and for creation through the innate power of knowledge. The intention here is for the heart and the life to accept this thought-force and to work with it, so that it could respond positively in order to modify itself in a way that the feelings and actions of the human can become harmonious with this higher wisdom. In this way the mind as well as the will and the life impulses vibrate with the emotion of this higher thought energy. The effect of this new mental mode of operation influences the body in such a way that thinking can even heal the body. The positive vibrations of the thought impose itself on Mind, Life or Matter. In this way its influence charges the whole being with a new and superior consciousness. This establishes a foundation for the accomplishment of positive change and the attainment of a superior truth of existence.⁴²⁹

To be sure, this ideal situation of positive change taking place is a function of time and growth. It is however not easily accomplished. Regarding matter, this is changed very slowly due to the *tamasic* (the mode of ignorance and inertia) and dense nature of the medium. Regarding our body, life and mind it could encounter a certain degree of either unreceptiveness for, or a more definite refusal to, change. This is due to the nature of the inconscient which assumes the role of ignorance and exhibits negativity and an obstruction to positive change. There is not complete nescience in the mind as this vehicle is quite used to operating on the intellectual level using thought, but even here the mental intelligence is trained and accustomed to a certain system of already formed ideas which operates on a lower level, what Sri Aurobindo refers to as Knowledge-Ignorance. This basically is the normal mental logical intellectual mode of operation,

⁴²⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 941.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 941.

which from the higher level's point of view is only partially effective. The basis for the problematic here is related to the fact that all thoughts are forces which form different realities according to the prevailing conditions, and under conditions of for instance dealing with inconscient matter, their efficacy is reduced to virtually nil even though it still has potential to change matter due to its force nature. The pure type of knowledge of the descending light which experiences the resistances mentioned above in a variety of negative ways, is rendered less effective to create changes in the mind. It is in effect ignorance fighting for survival. Sri Aurobindo maintains that if these lower thought forms are dismissed and deprived of their right to exist, they could recur either from outside, as they still are part of the universal Mind, or they may be driven downwards into the vital, physical or subconscient parts and reappear from there at the first opportune moment to repossess their lost domain. It seems strange that ideas could be so tenacious but the explanation is that evolutionary nature accords all things she created this right of persistent existence for the sake of steadiness and solidity in her creation. Inherent in the nature of any created force is the claim to be, to survive and to effectuate itself wherever and for as long as it wishes, resulting in a variety of achievements gained through inharmonious activity and struggle of different forces. This is not the ideal and for evolutionary purposes any mixture of ignorance with knowledge should be obliterated and replaced by an evolution through a harmony of forces with pure knowledge. This will only be achieved as and when the powers of light and knowledge overcome the powers of ignorance. This is also applicable to the lower levels of the intelligent being, in this instance probably a human, and specifically in the heart and life and body of this being. In the different aspects of a human different types of reactions take place when the higher forces attempt purification, for instance in the case of the heart it will not be ideas but less conscious and more obstinately self-assertive forces such as emotions, desires and base feelings that arise to defend their turf. These forces too, as in thought described above, when driven out take refuge somewhere else, for instance in the outside circumconscient universal nature, or else inside the lower levels of the human or in the subconscient from which base a new invasion could be launched. But even these obstacles serve a purpose in that it prevents a too rapid transmutation, establishing stability in the creation and the opportunity for

different created beings to prove or disprove their worth in its interaction with the rest of creation.⁴³⁰

3. ILLUMINED MIND

It is clear that the way in which mind operates is through the use of the intellect. It is this same mind that has to change in order to accommodate the working of the higher spiritual Higher Mind. For this Higher Mind to gain entry into the mind, it has to modify and diminish itself or its idea-force because of the limited nature of mind and its inability to accept this spiritual type of thought force. This type of arrangement is some form of compromise. This change results in a degree of inability by the Higher Mind to neutralise the different obstacles presented by the mind and it fails to outright create the gnostic being, which is one of the goals of humans. Even though not successful in this higher endeavour, the fact that it puts in an effort to that effect, does affect positive changes of eventual benefit to a human in that it prepares the mind and enables future evolutionary movements, it prepares an integration of the greater Force of consciousness and knowledge in the human being. The Illumined Mind is that greater Force, which mind is not so much involved with higher thought but with spiritual light. The nature of this particular higher thought is one of possessing sublime characteristics. Sri Aurobindo says, "Here the clarity of the spiritual intelligence, its tranquil daylight, gives place or subordinates itself to an intense lustre, a splendour and illumination of the Spirit: a play of lightnings of spiritual truth and power breaks from above into the consciousness and adds to the calm and wide enlightenment and the vast descent of peace which characterise or accompany the action of the larger conceptual-spiritual principle, a fiery ardour of realisation and a rapturous ecstasy of knowledge."⁴³¹ Thought in this high domain is thus entirely different to anything the mind has thus far encountered. It is certainly very much beyond its normal workings. Here the mind experiences a cascade of inwardly visible light. This reminds very strongly of the already quoted experience of Capra: "...cascades of energy coming down from outer space, in which particles were created and destroyed in rhythmic pulses; I 'saw' the atoms of the elements and those of my body participating in this cosmic dance of energy."⁴³² Sri Aurobindo contends that light is not primarily a material creation; when

⁴³⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 939.

⁴³¹ Ibid, p. 944.

⁴³² Capra, Fritjof. *The Tao of Physics*. Oxford: Fontana. 1982, p. 9.

one experiences such a cascade, it is not through a sensory subjective perception that that happens, such light is what one could consider to be of a primary and spiritual nature, a manifestation of the illuminative and creative divine reality. This is in contrast to the appearance of material light of the denser universe, this spiritual light forms the basis not only of this material light but it is also the material energy or building blocks as it were for the creation of Matter. This spiritual light is characterised by elements which Sri Aurobindo identifies as a dynamic "golden drive, a luminous 'enthusiasmos' of inner force and power which replaces the comparatively slow and deliberate process of the Higher Mind by a swift, sometimes a vehement, almost a violent impetus of rapid transformation."⁴³³

The mode of operation of the Illumined Mind is not primarily by thought, but by vision. Thought is present but its function is to serve and express sight. This is different to the human mind which is thrown upon thought for its operation, and because that is all it knows, imagines thought to be, if not the highest, then the main process of knowledge. Even such a consideration of the possibility of thought not being the highest knowledge-gaining apparatus, is a rare incidence of intellectual humility. According to Sri Aurobindo, in the higher spiritual order of being, thought is not indispensable and plays only a secondary role. When thought is of a verbal nature, it is virtually a concession of Knowledge made to Ignorance, "because that Ignorance is incapable of making truth wholly lucid and intelligible to itself in all its extent and manifold implications except through the clarifying precision of *significant sounds*; it cannot do without this device to give to ideas an exact outline and an expressive body."⁴³⁴ We might well point out that words may be deficient in a particular way but even Sri Aurobindo's in pointing out their deficiency, still uses them to express and convey meaning. But in all fairness, this might well be because there is no other way in which Sri Aurobindo can convey his ideas to an audience not skilled in operating in higher states of consciousness.

This conundrum regarding the deficiencies of words is not unique to Sri Aurobindo and other thinkers have encountered it. One such is Wittgenstein and we can briefly compare the approach and analysis or elucidation of thought and its related fields of these two thinkers. What is relevant here is that Sri Aurobindo states that he

⁴³³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 944.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 944.

communicates on a variety of levels of consciousness, (and not restricted to the following two examples) one being the intellectual and the other the intuitive mode. Sri Aurobindo is fully aware of the value and also the limitations of the intellectual utility. Wittgenstein does not propose another mode for the communication of knowledge: he confines himself to the intellectual mind. Wittgenstein⁴³⁵ in his introduction to his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* despaired about the efficacy of words as messengers of meaning and stated that "(t)he whole sense of the book might be summed up (in) the following words: what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." This essential message of his book is reaffirmed at the end, in paragraph 7 where he says, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." These statements then imply that not only are there things that can be said clearly but also, more importantly, there are things that 'we cannot speak about.' I argue that this is a clear admission of the inadequacy of the mind and the intellect to truly deal with subtle knowledge. Wittgenstein, as did Sri Aurobindo, wrote and said things, which implies that for him there were things that could be said clearly. But is this truly the case? Can things in fact be said clearly? More importantly, did Wittgenstein say things clearly? I believe that the focus should be on what cannot be said clearly. We should briefly deal with the alternative and determine what is clearly, to what degree do we want something to be clear, what standard should be used. I could argue pragmatically that what he said was clear enough for me to be able to know that is not totally clear. Is that not clear, or using a lesser standard, at least clear enough? I would argue in the affirmative. The mere fact that something is not perfect does not render it non-existent. Relatively unclear thoughts can exist, and they also have a right thereto. This imperfect reproduction is then what I have to use. And from a pragmatic point of view I have no arguments. Of course I understand him, at least to a degree. But when we talk about true understanding and true clarity, this is where words fail us. He proceeds in paragraph 6.522 stating, "There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical." He did not define what things nor how they make themselves manifest but he identified them accurately as mystical. There is a degree of totality or absoluteness in the sentence: "They make themselves manifest." Here they (things) are self-reliant, they do not move beyond themselves, they seek no outside, nor internal validation because they are self-reliant

⁴³⁵ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. This eBook was prepared by Matthew Stapleton. Downloaded from www.gutenberg.net. 2002.

and self-existent in that they do not concern themselves about to whom they make themselves manifest or the fact that they make themselves manifest or how they make themselves manifest. They are in themselves and that is what is mystical. The same principle of favouring being over the mechanism of being is seen in his contention in paragraph 6.44 where he said "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists." I argue that these statements are open-ended, whatever logic there is, still leaves enough space to allow meanings to flit right at the edge or just beyond the limits of logic. This is the quality of the insight of the mystic Wittgenstein, he identifies the mystical element in the process of making themselves manifest, skilfully using words to do so. To him, both his words and his ladder are disposable and that does not concern him at all. The way in which Wittgenstein has presented his case above is masterful. This is because of the degree of inexactness, because of the gaps between the meanings and the words and despite his penchant for defining, clarifying and organising, there is still this openness in his writing that extends a berth for truth. Both Sri Aurobindo and Wittgenstein alert their audience to the abilities and also the limitations of the use of words. But of course, if we had more - for instance perfect knowledge without words so much the better and that is possible according to Sri Aurobindo.

But on a more down-to-earth level, generally in the domain of the mind this deficiency or shortcoming of words seems to be the accepted reality. It is not the radical essence of thought or the process of thought itself that is dealt with by the mind, but the products created by the thought processes. If what Sri Aurobindo says is true, I submit that it appears that he sets a high standard and affects a lucid and incisive analysis of thought in utilising the activity of thinking. He analyses the reality of the operation of thought in the following quote. "But it is evident that this is a device, a machinery; thought in itself, in its origin on the higher levels of consciousness, is a perception, a cognitive seizing of the object or of some truth of things which is a powerful but still a minor and secondary result of spiritual vision, a comparatively external and superficial regard of the self upon the self, the subject upon itself or something of itself as object: for all there is a diversity and multiplicity of the self."⁴³⁶ Here thought is analysed, it is identified as a device, its origins namely that of consciousness are disclosed, and the mode in which it operates, that of creating a lesser reality of the absolute reality of an object, as well as

⁴³⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 944.

possessing an essentially superficial nature is highlighted. (It is interesting to note that the works of these two thinkers were created approximately simultaneously, that of Wittgenstein in trenches in Flanders and that of Sri Aurobindo in trances at Pondicherry. Were they not both in different war zones that we do not know much about?)

The way in which the surface mind works is that there is a superficial or surface response of perception; the mind becomes aware of an object, whether this object is concrete or abstract, and it proceeds to conceptualise and formulate what it had observed. This is different to what takes place in the higher levels of mind. Here, there is a deeper and spiritual perceptive response based on the very substance of consciousness, resulting in a comprehending formulation in that substance which produces an exact figure of the nature of what has been perceived. Because of the completeness and the precision of the results of this process, which is a representative image of truth, no verbal representation is needed. The results that have been produced by comprehension in this manner, present to the mind the complete truth of the object of knowledge examined, the truth thereof is perceived with a deeper spiritual sight whereby a created secondary concept remains just that, secondary and derivative, and whereas that is a very useful methodology of communicating knowledge, it is not vital or a prerequisite to receive or possess knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo maintains that the knowledge derived by the Illumined Mind is a greater power for knowledge than that possible through the normal consciousness of the thinker. The ability of the inner sight to perceive is greater and more direct than that of thought. It is the substance of what is being perceived that is grasped in the spiritual sense of sight, and it is not only the figure but also the significance of the figure that is encapsulated. Sight can perceive and comprehend more than thought can circumscribe. This greater accuracy and completeness in the higher states of consciousness is progressive. The Higher Mind, through the spiritual idea and its power of truth, focuses a greater consciousness into the being of a particular reality. The Illumined Mind expands that ability even further because of its greater consciousness, and it is capable of a more powerful and dynamic integration of the Truth-sight and Truth-light in its perception and grasping of meaning and reality. Here the thought-mind is illumined by a direct inner vision and inspiration. He describes the operation of the higher states of

consciousness and the effects it has on a human mind in a fairly restrained tone, if compared with that of Tennyson at the end of this paragraph. He says that these higher states operate by bringing "a spiritual sight into the heart and a spiritual light and energy into its feeling and emotion, (it) imparts to the life-force a spiritual urge, a truth inspiration that dynamises the action and exalts the life-movements; it infuses into the sense a direct and total power of spiritual sensation so that our vital and physical being can contact and meet concretely, quite as intensely as the mind and emotion can conceive and perceive and feel, the Divine in all things; it throws on the physical mind a transforming light that breaks its limitations, its conservative inertia, replaces its narrow thought-power and its doubts by sight and pours luminosity and consciousness into the very cells of the body. In the transformation by the Higher Mind the spiritual sage and thinker would find his total and dynamic fulfilment; in the transformation by the Illumined Mind there would be a similar fulfilment for the seer, the illumined mystic, those in whom the soul lives in vision and in a direct sense and experience: for it is from these higher sources that they receive their light and to rise into that light and live there would be their ascension to their native empire."⁴³⁷ This is the vision of the potential for a human in his upward evolutionary movement. Every level has its own charm, increasing in direct proportion to the success of his own efforts.

It is interesting that Sri Aurobindo mentions the different representatives of the human race who have already proven the truth of these statements; the sages and thinkers, the seers and the mystics. Sri Aurobindo could use Alfred Tennyson as an example of the seers and the mystics he referred to. Tennyson reports his experiences and his perceptions of the nature and reality of higher states of consciousness as follows.

Through repeating his own name silently, he had the experience that "individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words ... the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life. I am ashamed of my feeble description. Have I not said the state is utterly beyond words?" As to the possibility of this state being of an illusionary nature, he wrote: "By God Almighty! there is no delusion in the matter! It is no nebulous ecstasy, but a state of transcendent wonder,

⁴³⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 946.

associated with absolute clearness of mind."⁴³⁸ As is so often the case when people experience these states, we here again encounter the expression of ecstasy and the lamented inability of words to accurately describe the experience. But to those of us with an ear or a heart, he speaks clearly enough. Those people can tell him: I hear you Sir, and I believe you, and I am the better for it.

4. INTUITIVE MIND ⁴³⁹

Higher Mind and Illumined Mind is subject to the Intuitive Mind which is on the next higher level in order to gain the deeper knowledge they want. It is from the level of the intuition that the knowledge that they have turn into thought or sight, from there it originates and that higher knowledge is eventually made available to the mind. So obviously the nature of intuition is important. Sri Aurobindo refers to intuition as a power of consciousness which is nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge-by-identity. It apparently is hidden and appears from that concealed identity. The way in which intuition works is that the awareness of the subject that is investigating, encounters and joins the consciousness of the object being investigated, and in the ensuing process enters into that object and sees, feels or vibrates with the truth that it encounters; at this point the intuition leaps out like a spark from the shock of the meeting. It is also possible that the consciousness of an investigating subject, even without contact with an object and therefore in a more abstract way – I can think of a present-day investigator with limited clues searching the mind of Parmenides, – perceives the hidden forces behind the appearances of the object by the process of looking within himself and directly and intimately feeling in the greater truth behind the appearances. Another situation could be where the consciousness encounters or contacts the spiritual reality of things and beings, again resulting in a flash of intimate truth-perception. This form of knowledge perception is more than sight or conception; it is produced by a penetrating and revealing touch, which touch incorporates conception. This means that the knowledge of some entity or identity, which is hidden and inactive and in truth not even really fully aware of itself, then remembers and conveys through the intuition its identity, its 'personal' view of itself in the sense of its self-feeling and self-vision in a complete and automatic certainty.

⁴³⁸ James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*. New York: The Library of America, 1987, p. 346 in footnote.

⁴³⁹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 946-950.

Turning to the human mind, even though not yet operating in higher states of consciousness and certainly not at the level of the intuitive mind, it is still influenced by and has glimpses of this intuitive faculty. Here the intuition appears as a remembering of truth or a conveying of truth. It might appear as a flash revealing truth by breaking through a veil of ignorance or nescience. At the level of the mind, because of the impurity of the vehicle, it is negatively affected resulting in misinterpretation even though in truth it hears the direct truth in all its intuitive fullness. The quality of the knowledge that becomes available is not a function of the intuition but of the purity of the receiving mind. Furthermore, not all messages or 'intuitions' arriving in the mind are truly that; they could be communications or thoughts rather than intuitions of varying value and character, arriving from a variety of origins and derivations. The quality of such communications could be dubious; Sri Aurobindo refers to infrarational mystics (he states to be a true mystic it is not sufficient to reject reason and rely on sources of thought or action of which one has no understanding) that receives communications on the vital level of such a nature that could well be from a dark and dangerous source. Under these circumstances it is to the reason that we should turn to analyse and discard these intuitions (more normally the pseudo-intuition). The role of the intellect here is to observe and through discriminating intelligence to arrive at the truth, the mixed truth or the false. Here we can attempt to safeguard ourselves using the reasoning faculty. The unfortunate reality is that by using the intellect to evaluate the working of the present embryonic intuitive faculty, we preclude the use of probably both present and future intuitive insights. The reason for that is that the working of the intuitive faculty is beyond the field of expertise of the intellect; the two methods differ in that the intellect searching for truth uses methods that are different, tentative, and uncertain compared with the certainty and surety of those of the intuition. In arriving at a conclusion, Sri Aurobindo states that the reason uses a camouflaged intuition because it is with that type of intuition that it is able to choose or arrive at any assured finding. It is not even aware of the fact that it uses this mode of operation to arrive at a reasoned conclusion or a verified conjecture. An intuition that has passed such a judicial review, will fail as an intuition because it would have severed its link of validity to the inner source of direct certitude. For the mind to change the way in which it is working, using logic and reason, to that of the intuitive faculty with its pure intuitive perceptions and cognitions, requires both these aspects to operate together in a co-ordinated fashion. This implies that there must be harmony in the way of working between intellect and

the intuitive faculty, and further that the intellect is not suspended when the intuitive faculty is developed. This is part of our evolutionary progress. When this type of development had been perfected, any differentiation between intellect and intuition becomes somewhat superfluous, as such type of differentiation would be engaged in mainly by the intellect prior to the development of the intuition. It is obvious that there is no true conflict between these modes of operation, there is a requirement that both should be developed and used. A confrontational partisan view of these two states of consciousness is totally unnecessary; we need to develop every ability and potential we have on our evolutionary journey.

Sri Aurobindo states that the intuition is always a spark of a superior light, it is a part of the Supermind light which is entering into some type of intermediate truth-mind above us where it becomes modified to a degree. From there it enters into our ignorant mind-substance where its original nature of veridical pure and unmixed light, is affected and changed. The reason why the intuition begins to enter into us is because it is in response to our consciousness that is being raised to a higher level, that growth of consciousness prepares a mode of communication between these two levels. The downward movement of the intuition is similar to lightning flashes which could either be constant or sporadic. The effect on the mind is that its normal mode of operation namely of judgment based on reason becomes inapplicable. Here the mind ceases to operate utilising only reason and logic, and it "can only act as an observer or registrar understanding or recording the more luminous intimations, judgments and discriminations of the higher power."⁴⁴⁰ When the mind is called upon to verify an isolated intuition and to understand its nature and application, it, in its role as the receiving consciousness, has to rely on either another presently existing intuition that will supply the clarity, or it must call down from the intuitive level the necessary intuition applicable to the situation. This type of situation will only occur during the transitional stage from the normal intellectual to the intuitive mode of operation of the mind.

According to Sri Aurobindo, intuition has a fourfold power. They are powers of "revelatory *truth-seeing*, a power of inspiration or *truth-hearing*, a power of *truth-touch*

⁴⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 948.

or immediate seizing of significance, which is akin to the ordinary nature of its intervention in our mental intelligence, a power of *true and automatic discrimination* of the orderly and exact relation of truth to truth."⁴⁴¹ From this it is clear that the intuition can perform all the normal tasks of the intellect. This includes the function of logical intelligence which in its essence is the working out of the right relationship between different items or ideas. However, it performs these tasks utilising an unfaltering unique and superior process that will not fail in the execution of its duties. It operates on a very broad scale, in that it synthesises not only the mind of thought but also the heart, life, sense and physical consciousness. This is very easily performed as these different areas already possess its own powers of intuition which is derived from the hidden light. Therefore the power that descends from above can incorporate all of these heart-, life- and body-perceptions into itself. The result is that the whole of consciousness is changed into the stuff of Intuition. That is the result of the greater radiant movement bringing its nature of superior truth into the will, feelings, emotions, life-impulses, sense and sensation, and the workings of the body consciousness. These mentioned human elements are transformed by the light and power of truth and the result is that the degree of their knowledge and of their ignorance is illuminated.

Through the working of the intuitive faculty, a degree of integration can take place. The extent of the integration depends on the degree that this new light can penetrate the subconscious and the Inconscient. The intuitive light and power might not be successful or completely successful because it is only a small edge of a delegated and modified Supermind, and not the totality of the identity-knowledge of that superior level of consciousness. This is because the nature of the Inconscience, even though it does contain all of Sachchidananda within itself, is too dense, solid and vast in its present role to be completely transformed by an inferior power of the truth-nature.

5. OVERMIND

Development of the intuitive faculty is only a necessary step to the next higher spiritual level namely the Overmind. This particular faculty is a power of cosmic consciousness and a principle of global knowledge in which the light of the supramental gnosis is present. This light of knowledge descends into the human mind through an opening in

⁴⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 949.

the cosmic consciousness. This is accompanied by both the opening of the awareness of the human being, and a vast horizontal expansion of the spiritual consciousness of such a person. The minimum requirement for the descent of the Overmind into a human mind is that the surface mind with its limited outlook should be replaced by a deeper and wider awareness. If this does not happen, then the Overmind will not be able to operate with its expanded view of things and its characteristic dynamism. With the descent of the Overmind, there is a steadily diminishing of the ego sense leading to the eventual abolishment thereof; it is replaced with an extensive cosmic perception and the expanded feeling of a boundless universal self and movement. Whatever ego-related activities still persist, are only peripheral in its nature.

The way in which a person in this process of transformation now experiences the process of thought and thinking, is that the origin of thought is exterior to the individual body and manifests from outside; it appears as if thought arrives in cosmic mind-waves. The nature of these thoughts has a more internally directed aspect, this "inner individual sight or intelligence of things is now a revelation or illumination of what is seen or comprehended."⁴⁴² Whatever comprehension is gained is felt to be a part of the universal knowledge and not of the self, not originating from the self. The same applies to the feelings, emotions and sensations, which the subtle and gross body experiences as waves, arrive from the immense cosmic reality. To place the body in perspective in this situation, the following: it performs the action of a very small support system or even less, a point of relation, for the action of a vast cosmic operation. This unbounded cosmic dimension causes, in a human, the disappearance of the separate ego, all sense of individuality, leaving only the cosmic light and the play of its forces. Whatever is now felt by the human mind of the delight of the force of being, is done without a sense of personality, instead it is experienced as a field of manifestation present everywhere, present at all points and accompanied by an endless all-pervasive consciousness of unity.

The Overmind is a flexible field of multiple possibilities. Its consciousness and experience could take the form of an infinite number of formulations. Its reality is not one of diffusion but of unity; the universe could be experienced as being within oneself

⁴⁴² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 950.

or as being oneself. The self Sri Aurobindo is referring to here is not the self of the ego but rather a free and pure essential self-consciousness, which is identified with the All. The awareness here is one of being a universal individual, one with the cosmic being. This experience is that of an existence of cosmic consciousness. Sri Aurobindo identifies further aspects within this state of consciousness, on the one hand the individual is included in the Cosmos identifying with all things and beings, feelings and emotions, which is in it (the Cosmos), and on the other hand all these things are included and incorporated in oneself as part of one's being. This is not orchestrated or ruled or governed but it is a movement of free play of the universal nature where the person responds with either a passive acceptance or else identifying dynamically with whatever is happening. In all of this activity or non-activity, the spirit is free and untouched or undisturbed, it identifies with all that is and happens in an impersonal and universal way. When the influence of the Overmind becomes powerful, the mind can experience and sense an overpowering presence and direction emanating from the cosmic self, which experience could become the norm in everyday life. It is also possible that a new and special centre which is superior to, and which dominates the physical instrument, is created. The mode of operation in this centre is individual regarding its mode of existence, and impersonal from the perspective of his feeling dimension. It is cognised as being an instrument to assist movement towards the Transcendent and Universal Being. Moving towards the Supermind, (which is the purpose for the development of all these states of consciousness) this particular action of impersonalisation allows the personal being to discover itself in a new mode as a true individual, which mode has replaced the ego and which ego now has ceased functioning. This new being in its essence is the Supreme Self, "one with the universe in extension and yet a cosmic centre and circumference of the specialised action of the infinite."⁴⁴³

All the changes above are necessary prerequisites for the entry of the Overmind consciousness. It results in an evolved spiritual being that can handle or manage the innumerable varieties and developments that will take place with the entry of the Overmind. This consciousness is experienced as a consciousness of Light and Truth, which imbues the accompanying power, force and action. A multifaceted and universal

⁴⁴³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 951.

experience of beauty and bliss in all that is and with all that is becomes the norm. There is a power of an ordering Overmind gnosis present, infinitely ordering the cosmic structure of the consciousness in a subtle and harmonious way. The way of living changes to a spiritual one, creating a new superior nature which becomes habitual and the norm. The body, life and mind still partake of all types of experiences but now all experiences are spiritual in nature. Intuition, illumined sight and thought takes on a greater nature and their essence increases in mass, energy and substance. This movement takes place in the cosmic manner; it is greater in all respects, it is more comprehensive and global, and it is a more potent truth-force. The evolving entity finds itself in a vastly superior spiritual space.

The change that has taken place with the entry of the Overmind and the accompanying dynamic spiritual transformation represents the highest possibility of the Spirit in the spiritual-mind plane. It coordinates and synthesises the prior three steps lower down, and it extends their manner of operation to its highest and greatest potential, contributing a universal wideness of consciousness and force, a harmonious functioning of knowledge and a greater bliss of being. It is however not the final possibility of the spiritual evolution. This is due to the nature of the Mind and of its status and power. Its power is that of the highest possible type of the Overmind hemisphere. Also, even though based on a cosmic unity, its action operates in a form of division and interaction and it still therefore operates in the field of multiplicity. This is true for all the different levels of mind; its play is the play of possibilities. It is fully aware of the knowledge of these possibilities and it is, and acts, beyond ignorance, even so it works in a manner to allow the independent evolution of their powers. It operates within the basic prescription of a cosmic formula and it is not a power for a dynamic transcendence. On earth, the basis of the cosmic formula is the complete nescience which resulted from the separation of Mind, Life and Matter from its basic supreme spiritual origin. With the entry of the Overmind into the separative Mind of the entity, the division can be partially reached. Through its action it can unite the individual mind with the cosmic mind on its highest plane, equating the individual self with the cosmic self and giving the mind the nature of universality. But further than leading the mind beyond itself, it cannot go. In the presence of the original Inconscience it cannot energise the Transcendence because that is only possible through the Supermind. Only the Supermind has this supreme self-determining truth-action and infinite direct power of

manifestation of the Transcendence. Sri Aurobindo says that "(i)f then the action of evolutionary Nature ended here, the Overmind, having carried the consciousness to the point of a vast illumined universality and an organised play of this wide and potent spiritual awareness of utter existence, force-consciousness and delight, could only go farther by an opening of the gates of the Spirit into the upper hemisphere and a will to enable the soul to depart out of its cosmic formation into Transcendence."⁴⁴⁴ The next step therefore is the opening of a higher facet of the spiritual domain and the imparting of the will in the soul to move beyond this cosmic formation into Transcendence.

The descent of the Overmind on earth does not result in the complete transformation of the entire Inconscient but it can succeed in completely transforming each person individually by imposing its cosmic truth and knowledge upon the Ignorance. This does not change the fact that the basis of nescience still remains and it is only in the direct contact with the Overmind that the cosmic light is present. This implies that the original darkness is still present and that it still represents a threat to the evolving consciousness of an individual.

The field of Overmind is that of consciousness and its business is to develop consciousness. Because of its many-faceted reality and its infinite spiritual potential, there are very many different possibilities open to Overmind and it is natural for Overmind to develop either one or many of these possibilities present in the numerous dynamic spiritual formulations. For a human, this would take place on the plane of the world where the evolving spiritual entity originated. The evolved and involving spiritual being might be part of one or more spiritual communities which are present together with mental men and also the vital being of the animals, which are all based in this particular situation on the terrestrial region where they coexist in a loose relationship. The formula that operates here possesses a supreme power which is based on the principle of unity of all the diversities in existence. It is however possible for this new revolutionary consciousness to be not yet present. The evolutionary process is one of flux, and the movement can be up or down. The downward trend could be caused by the gravitation of the Inconscience, which has the ability to dissolve already evolved formations of life and mind. The result of this can be that life and mind could return to

⁴⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 953.

its original matter. The deliverance or prevention of this downward pull of the inconscience would be the creation of a secure base for continuing spiritual and eventually gnostic evolution which can only be secured by a descent of the Supermind into the present reigning formula on earth. The underlying reality of what is would be that of the supreme law and light of the Spirit. The influence of the penetration of that spirit would be a transformative one whereby the Inconscient will no longer be able to retard evolution. It is therefore obvious that it is necessary for the transition from Overmind to Supermind, and also for the descent of Supermind into the lower natures for the full evolutionary movement to succeed.

Overmind and its accompanying powers penetrating and influencing the mind, life and body, results in an expanding of the entity subject thereto. With the progression of these evolutionary steps, the subject gains greater power and a higher intensity of gnosis, which in itself and in its origin is the power of Supermind. This results in an influx of indirect supramental light and power into the evolving being. This causes Overmind to progressively transform into Supermind. "(T)he supramental consciousness and force would take up the transformation directly into its own hands, reveal to the terrestrial mind, life, bodily being their own spiritual truth and divinity and, finally, pour into the whole nature the perfect knowledge, power, significance of the supramental existence."⁴⁴⁵ This would result in the soul passing beyond the limits of Ignorance and reuniting with the supreme Knowledge, integrating with the supramental gnosis and hence resulting in a complete transformation of the Ignorance.⁴⁴⁶

6. SUPERMIND

Sri Aurobindo states that it is very difficult to communicate anything completely or factually about Supermind because of the totally supramental nature of this level of consciousness. The language used by Mind or even spiritualised Mind is not sufficient for this form of communication. To form some impression of the difficulty of this task, the following quote from Sri Aurobindo: "As the summits of the human mind are beyond animal perception, so the movements of Supermind are beyond the ordinary human mental conception: it is only when we have already had experience of a higher intermediate consciousness that any terms attempting to describe supramental being

⁴⁴⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 955.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 950.

could convey a true meaning to our intelligence; for then, having experienced something akin to what is described, we could translate an inadequate language into a figure of what we knew. If the mind cannot enter into the nature of Supermind, it can look towards it through these high and luminous approaches and catch some reflected impression of the Truth, the Right, the Vast which is the native kingdom of the free Spirit."⁴⁴⁷

Supermind is a totally different type of consciousness and its reality and its acts are unique. Statements about Supermind will most likely be either not understood at all or be misunderstood. We cannot know anything truly about the nature of Supermind from a position external to Supermind. He did however present us with certain details regarding Supermind. He said that Supermind is placed between the Sachchidananda and the lower creation and the purpose of the supermind is to transform the lower nature⁴⁴⁸ so as to create a supramental race.⁴⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo calls this process of change supramentalisation which means rising above mind to Supermind and the descent of the Supermind into the nature in order for the final transformation to take place.⁴⁵⁰ All this implies that we therefore have to evolve into Supermind via the route from Higher Mind up to and beyond the transformed Overmind. The nature of Supermind is unitive, its knowledge and clarity is of a non-dual nature, and no divisions or separations exist there. This is different to the principles of mind when knowledge is known by the reality of the relationships of opposites.⁴⁵¹ Supermind is totally beyond mind but this definition is not inclusive of, and stops short at, the Ineffable. It straddles the space between the One and the Many. Its nature is of the essential unity of things and of the fundamental truth and it is superior to mentality.⁴⁵² It is internally free of ignorance; its nature is that of knowledge which it possesses naturally. Activity in Supermind is related to interaction of the high with the high, in a beyondness that is beyond our ken. It is omniscient and omnipotent. It affects all levels of existence in whatever is, and its operation is directly from its own infinite spiritual freedom and its infinite potentialities. Its intelligence is that of the supreme, and it is infinitely greater

⁴⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19. [SABCL], p. 920.

⁴⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume: 22-24, [SABCL], p. 239.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 1126.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 509.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid, p. 259.

⁴⁵² Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine*. Volume 18-19 [SABCL], p. 143.

and more extended than any form of mental activity, its reality is beyond that which any form of mental activity can either achieve or comprehend.⁴⁵³

7. SACHCHIDANANDA

The concept or rather the reality of Sachchidananda goes back in the Indian philosophy. It is not restricted to that philosophy however because we are looking at a Trinity which is found, to mention only one religion, in Christianity. Whatever terminology we used to understand these different concepts, whether it is pure consciousness, whether creation or emanation, whether revelation, all of this must be understood in some way and it is normally understood in a limited way because of the limited awareness and lack of deeper knowledge that a human being has. A comparative analysis between the two types of Trinity's would be a worthwhile exercise. However, even understanding the one description that we are focusing on namely that of Sri Aurobindo, is a vast task. We perforce have to forego the inviting and worthwhile but overly ambitious comparative study between these different aspects.

Understanding the importance of Sachchidananda and its relationship with ourselves is very difficult. It is also important as this goes to the very essence of our own particular being, consciousness and happiness. It is the ontology of Sachchidananda that we are dealing with and that we will elucidate in this section. When Brahman in his timeless and spaceless reality decided to establish duality for the purpose of enabling him to experience himself for the increase of his joy, he encountered what we would call a technical problem or hitch. That was that as he was, he was all that was. And being the complete fullness of what was, he could not feel what he felt or be what he was as that was only possible in a situation of contrast and variation, therefore in a state of duality. The first step for him was therefore to initiate the reality of duality. This he did starting with the creation of Sachchidananda. In its nature, Sachchidananda is Brahman, it is not separate from Brahman and it is not less than Brahman. Yet, it is a form of differentiation of Brahman. It is best explained by the analogy of a many-faceted diamond. Every facet is the diamond yet there is a separateness in the nature of the facet compared with the reality of the diamond. We can understand this even though it sounds paradoxical when we say that it is the diamond and it is not the diamond. The

⁴⁵³ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 756.

name of Sachchidananda is fully descriptive of its ontology. It consists of the three words *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. *Sat* is being, *Chit* is consciousness-force and *Ananda* is bliss. These three are even more integrated with each other than facets on a diamond would be. Every aspect of Sachchidananda is imbued with every other aspect thereof. The existence of one, the activity of one and the motivation of one are the basis and prerequisite for the others. It is again paradoxical but existence is consciousness-force and bliss, consciousness-force is bliss and being, and bliss is consciousness-force and being. In reality they are inseparable and are not distinct from each other at all. What happens is that they can become more prominent one from the other, and one aspect can take the lead under certain circumstances. These circumstances are very dependent on the particular level of the involution or the evolution where they are examined. The differences that are observed will always only be in appearance and not in their secret ultimate reality. Even though the one can exist phenomenally without the others, which according to Sri Aurobindo would be the case in the Inconscient, this presents us with an irreconcilable contradiction. Here in the Inconscient would exist an apparent intolerable separation of these components leading them to experience pain, ignorance, falsehood and death because at that level there is nothing except the full potential of all that is. In the Inconscient it is because of this separation that the possibility exists for the evolution of a limited and suffering consciousness out of the universal nescience of matter.⁴⁵⁴ From this we must draw the conclusion that apparent separation leads to apparent pain for the components of Sachchidananda.

We have noted three component terms of the existence of Sachchidananda above. Whatever terms we use, the purpose is to deal with essence, with the manifestation of the conscious being in the transcendent. In this process we deal with contradictions and paradox. All these components and processes represent the original unifying spirit-stuff and the one substantial mode which all comes together in Sachchidananda. We have three elements, only they are not three, but one. In our minds and in our mental experience we make distinctions and we separate things, because that is how our mental faculty is constituted. In the supramental region the mode of operation is paradoxical from the perspective of the normal mind. The mind we possess now operates in a particular mode. If it is not in that mode, it cannot operate. It has to be conscious and it

⁴⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo. *Letters on Yoga*. Volume 22-24. [SABCL], p. 239.

does not tolerate contradiction. It will not accept that unconsciousness is simply other-consciousness, that it could be the movement of the surface aspect of our awareness into our subliminal self-awareness or for that matter into other awarenesses on other planes of existence. Intellectually understanding the three components of Sachchidananda is virtually impossible. Their interactions and their ontology are beyond comprehension to the human mind. This is because we normally deal with duality. We understand within the framework of duality and we are ill-prepared to accept any other. Sri Aurobindo refers to the way the mind works and says that it cannot say: "I am, but unconscious." The truth is that I am, even though unconscious. He also says: "I am, but miserable and without any pleasure in existence." The reality is that this too is impossible. What we are, what we truly are, does not have at any time anywhere an unconscious component or a "non-I am" component. This reality can be discussed on the mental level and we can arrive at any conclusion we wish but our conclusions are irrelevant seen from the perspective of the true essence of things and in the field of Sachchidananda. For us to understand Sachchidananda is for us to understand ourselves. Our consciousness is never anything else but conscious. Our being is eternal and our innate inalienable bliss is forever beyond space and time. From the above it sounds as if everything and anything is possible. Sri Aurobindo uses the example that it is difficult for us to realise that existence and undelight of existence cannot go together. This is the nature of the ontology of these different aspects. The truth of what is, is structured within consciousness. We can call something misery, or grief or pain, and then we think we know what that is. Sri Aurobindo says that this misery is "merely a surface wave of the delight of existence which takes on to our mental experience these apparent opposite tints because of a certain trick of false reception in our divided being."⁴⁵⁵ These are simply partial visions and irrelevant observations tossed up by the infinite sea of our self-existence. It has a beneficial lesson though, namely to point out to us our surface habits and workings of the mind. It shows us where we are not, and towards what we should move to, or more accurately what we should become namely our true existence, our true consciousness and our true delight. This is ourselves, our essence which is Sachchidananda.

⁴⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 370.

Sat, Chit, Ananda: this is the start and end of all. That is also what we are.

Sachchidananda and we are one. In overview, it works as follows. *Chit* is the divine Consciousness and not our mental self-awareness which, useful as it might be, use a lower and limited mode. Our own consciousness is a type of property that we have in the same way that we have clothes or computers. It gives a certainty and security to view things in this way. It also indicates our ignorance, our relationship with what is and our lack of understanding of our very own ontology. Only when we become truly aware do we become ourselves. And then we find that we are consciousness and that there is a consciousness in a plant, in metal, in the atom and in electricity. There is consciousness everywhere. And if we have the insight we will realise that these different forms of consciousness are one, and it is one with us, with our own consciousness. It is not more or less developed, it is different. If we talk about lower modes of consciousness then we are referring to the conscious-stuff of inferior planes in one indivisible existence. We have our full share of the whole range of consciousness, in our subconscious being we have a mode of operating which is similar to that of matter. Our consciousness also have parallels to the consciousness of plants and also of what we term lower animals (ourselves being higher animals). Of these different things we make sense by using the conceptualising dualistic mind. But the truth is that we have no real awareness of these lower planes, this is because we are unable to perceive their truth *on their own terms* and by using our mental apparatus and reason and logic we block the truth and what we receive is imperfect and is valid only in terms and according to the values of the thinking and reasoning mind. We are to a degree aware of our animal nature, and we are aware of the fact that we do not know the reality below that, which Sri Aurobindo calls sub-animal and merely vital. We know little about what is below or subtle and beyond our normal consciousness, this is because we do not have the awareness of different levels, but we can develop those. When we do we will find that our body has a consciousness of its own, it is a complex entity we do not truly know and which has habits, impulses, instincts, and an effective will all of which differ from the rest of our being; all of that can resist our conscious awareness and realities. It lives its own life. All of this is the result of the evolutionary process that has brought together so many different levels and components and aspects of being into a human body which is dominated by the mental faculty.

The space on the evolutionary chain that we now occupy is therefore simply a temporary transient manifestation. It is a high level compared with previous levels that we had occupied, but we still have to move to other levels, to supernormal and superhuman planes. "There consciousness, *Chit*, as the universal conscious stuff of existence takes other poises, moves out in other modes, on other principles and by other faculties of action."⁴⁵⁶ Above the mind there is a Truth-plane that can affect the way in which our normal mind operates. In that field, whatever mind is there, all knowledge is available spontaneously, effortlessly, it is knowledge by identity and it is naturally in possession of that knowledge. At that level, the mind has a natural ability of operating in that different way. But beyond this plane is yet another where *Chit* becomes revealed as the elemental origin and primal completeness of all this varied consciousness. It operates here in whatever formation and experience it wishes. "There will and knowledge and sensation and all the rest of our faculties, powers, modes of experience are not merely harmonious, concomitant, unified, but are one being of consciousness and power of consciousness. It is this *Chit* which modifies itself so as to become on the Truth-plane the Supermind, on the mental plane the mental reason, will, emotion, sensation, on the lower planes the vital or physical instincts, impulses, habits of an obscure force not in superficially conscious possession of itself. All is *Chit* because all is *Sat*; all is various movement of the original Consciousness because all is various movement of the original Being."⁴⁵⁷

Where *Chit* is, there is *Ananda*. With these elements present there is fulfilment, to the degree that we do not know them, to that degree we experience lack and limitation. The fact is that there is no limitation, there is no lack, there is only the lack of perception of what is. All is present everywhere including in ourselves. For us to have the benefit thereof, we must be aware thereof but aware in the sense of realisation, making it real. The reality of *Chit* is that it eternally possesses its self-bliss. It is the Divine which manifests itself in all ways, in All-Quality or in No-Quality, in the One absorbing the Many or in the One manifesting its essential multiplicity, being everything. It does this because it is eternally Sachchidananda. Our relationship with Sachchidananda involves us in action, it is our task "also to know and possess our true Self in the essential and the universal(, it) is to discover the essential and the universal delight of existence, self-bliss

⁴⁵⁶ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 372.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 373.

and all-bliss. For the universal is only the pouring out of the essential existence, consciousness and delight; and wherever and in whatever form that manifests as existence, there the essential consciousness must be and therefore there must be an essential delight."⁴⁵⁸ This is our potential and we have the choice to experience this.

That aspect of us that is part of Sachchidananda, part of the divine, that is our soul. Our soul has all the potential that is needed. Generally though the individual soul does not fully realise the true nature of what it experiences. It is because it is separate both from the essential and the universal and it is in the habit of identifying with separate and dualistic unessential details. From where it is it acts correctly by taking its mind, body and life-stream for its essential self. This perception is set against the universal essence. Its action is driven by the desire for self-fulfilment and therefore it is correct action. It is in the detail of the action that it errs. It sees the fragmentary for the whole. This it combines into an artificial centre of mental experience which in fact is the mental ego and it mistakes that for itself. For now it is unaware of the greater that is beyond and which is its true self. Here the lesser ego is served instead of the greater Divine. Why this has come about can be explained in that this self-division is due to self-limitation. Here we are unable to master the true nature of being and of experience which results in ignorance and limitation for our body, life and mind. It is however within our abilities to regain this unity, to live our divine potential even within the field of duality.⁴⁵⁹

8. BRAHMAN

However much we protest that we cannot say anything about Brahman, we keep on referring and talking about Him/It (from here on he, him or it). The reason why we cannot say anything about him is because of the fact that he is so beyond our normal human domain that whatever we say about him is only partial. With this understanding, we can get some concept as to the nature and reality of Brahman. The cosmic Brahman contains all things in a one and indivisible eternal transcendent. Things and creatures seem divided in this state but in truth all that is, is always one and equal in all things and creatures and the division is only a surface phenomenon. Our perception from this appearance level is based on the ego which gives us individuality but also separates us from the true perception of what is. In this separative state we enjoy an unlimited form

⁴⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 373.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, pp. 370-374.

of free will. The truth is that this free-will is illusory, as it is the various aspects of Nature that express itself through us. It is Nature and not our independent ego, which "chooses what object we shall seek, whether by reasoned will or unreflecting impulse, at any moment of our existence."⁴⁶⁰ When we move beyond that we return to our true self and become the spirit which in its essence is superior to the different forces of Nature. In growing into a form of perfection of equality in the soul, mind and heart, we become aware of our unity with all that is. It is the realisation of this unity that is necessary for us to live a divine life utilising a divine consciousness and performing divine action whilst in a human body. Becoming in our self The Supreme Power, we are equal to all things and to all beings enabling us to act with an absolute wisdom in our dealings with all that is, with the sacred and the profane. It is in this state that we can experience the only true freedom possible to man which is beyond the mentally created divisions and which is unity with the conscious soul in Nature.

As humans in the life before we attain to the spirit we can have free will but that is only relatively real. Our understanding is limited and partial. It is also very useful because in us using free will, we practice and strengthen our will allowing action which in turn teaches us to experience. This therefore allows us to gain knowledge. We must be aware that there is a total Truth in Nature greater than that which we can reach through our individual choice. There exists "a secret divine Will, eternal and infinite, omniscient and omnipotent, that expresses itself in the universality and in each particular of all these apparently temporal and finite inconscient or half-conscient things."⁴⁶¹ It is this which is the power or the presence of the Supreme and which exists within the heart of all creatures of Nature.

This divine Will is intimate to us and we ourselves are part of it. It is our own highest Self that possesses and supports it. On our normal human level, our will is conscious in the mind, and what it knows is through thought only. The divine Will is superconscious to us because it is in its essence supra-mental, and it knows all because it is all. If we allow our conscious will to become one with the will of the Eternal, only then shall we attain to a true freedom resulting in a divine life of freedom. Such is Sri Aurobindo's vision of Brahman and our relationship with this divine personage.

⁴⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Volume 20-21. [SABCL], p. 88.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, p. 90.

9. THE FUTURE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

In writing books and in teaching his students, it is obvious that Sri Aurobindo wanted his knowledge to be passed on to succeeding generations of evolving humanity. The nature, the understanding thereof, and the knowledge that he taught is based not purely on the intellect. In dealing with his work, the intellect is totally necessary, but in addition there should be a development of a supra-intellect, a set of higher states of consciousness to truly understand what he is dealing with and what he is teaching. These higher states and our normal waking state of consciousness are different the one from the other in the way in which they work and in the way in which we perceive them but yet they are all on the same continuum of consciousness. It is the same road to a destination but viewed from the perspective of different milestones.

The stated purpose of his work has been to manifest that innate ability of operating on higher states of consciousness, which will result in the union with the supreme. To achieve this result, individuals by using his integral yoga techniques have to raise their level of consciousness. On the face of it this seems to be a religious undertaking. This is not what he intended, Sri Aurobindo decided against the creation of a new religion. In teaching his techniques he made a decision not to form a new religion because it seems that he was not enamoured with the way in which religions tended to become dogmatised and formalised, even during the life of the founder. In considering his intentions we to a degree should understand the term 'religion'. Certain factors are normally present in a religion. A religion is of value to its followers in that it aids them in achieving certain goals. Generally these goals would be of a spiritual nature where a better life than the present one can be lived.⁴⁶² It seems that what Sri Aurobindo intended was to add value to the lives of people, and this goal he wanted to attain by teaching them how to achieve higher states of consciousness. It is irrelevant whether we call the framework that is used by the name of religion or philosophy;⁴⁶³ it is the

⁴⁶² Ames, Edward Scribner. *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1929, p. 34.

⁴⁶³ The difference between the concepts philosophy and religion is somewhat blurred. It could be argued that the essential difference is that, in religion, an overt God is named, is present and plays a role, whereas in philosophy that God is covert. One can further argue that religious people have a dual set of beliefs, that of a professed belief in 'God' (which to them is their religion) and simultaneously other very dearly held beliefs where 'God' is not seen to be present (and which to them is not a religion). Those deeming themselves to be nonreligious still believe but they only believe in some form of philosophy where they exclude some entity that goes by the *name* of 'God'. An example would be the philosophy or religion of Money. I am not implying that all people are totally beholden to money, nor am I minimising or

intention that is important here. I believe that what he wanted to avoid was using a methodology or a vehicle (organised religion) that generally speaking has proven itself to be deficient in achieving the goal, in his case, elevation of the state of consciousness of humans with a corresponding positive change in quality of living. Regarding the difference between religion and philosophy, I believe that for this particular discussion these two terms can be used interchangeably.

Generally teachers in expounding their knowledge and depending on their disciples or students have had their knowledge suffering various fates. The relevant factors present in analysing this scenario are the teacher, the knowledge and the students. The material that teacher teaches is his knowledge and he speaks from his level of consciousness. At that particular moment of teaching, it is his knowledge that is given forth, but it is virtually immediately distorted or changed by his student, as most teachers will attest. The reality is further that the knowledge that teacher gives out the next day does not remain constant over time because his level of consciousness changes and therefore it impacts on the knowledge that he gains or has and that he presents. This implies that at a later date he could conceivably teach a different type of knowledge. But even if his knowledge remains the same, what he teaches could change if it is taught in a different context. He teaches students and what they hear depends on their level of consciousness, depends on the framework of their own reality which was formed by a variety of factors and experiences. Two students listening to the master will certainly hear and interpret the knowledge differently. Therefore, from the perspective of the students, this knowledge cannot be absolute for them because of their difference of

underestimating the value and use of money. I am simply analysing human behaviour in regard to their dealing with money and highlighting the nature of the underlying philosophy thereof. And from what I can ascertain, I argue that most people have an unshaken belief in money and in the way in which it works. For a religious person, this belief could very often be more dearly held than their belief in God. The proof of this lies in the fact that when a person uses money, he is not surprised by the fact that it does work, he does not question the procedure that is followed, and he does not think a miracle happened if a simple piece of paper fixed a big problem of his. Both these systems, religion (with a God) and philosophy (as in the philosophy of money), believe in something which in each instance is fairly intangible. To explain further, in religion there is a belief in a God which cannot be defined accurately or comprehensively to the satisfaction of all the believers. In the philosophy of money the elements contained within that philosophy is parallel to that within a religion; there is a virtually universal and total belief as to the existence and the value of money, also money cannot be described accurately or comprehensively to the satisfaction of all people believing therein. (I could even argue that normally there is a greater belief in money by a religious person than there is in his religion: if a 'miracle' was performed in the name of his religion or his God, that would probably be newsworthy whereas the 'miracle' of a piece of paper presenting him with a farm is accepted as normal.) I therefore believe that the conclusion that one can derive from this argument is that there is not much difference between things that one 'accept' or 'believe in', whether it is presented under the guise of a religion or a philosophy.

perception. And yet, that knowledge could in fact be absolute if it were presented by an evolved entity which is operating from higher states of consciousness.⁴⁶⁴

If we approached this particular problem of the perpetuation of his knowledge and the teaching thereof as an intellectual exercise, then I believe we will not be successful. He, as did other mystics before him, has stated that this type of esoteric knowledge is attainable only through the development of consciousness. This development follows that of the development of the intellect (and both are necessary for growth towards higher states of consciousness). They are not in conflict with or in contradiction to each other. They are simply on a continuum of evolution where higher states of consciousness succeed the development of the intellect. Therefore, for the understanding and integration of these higher truths, it is necessary for an individual to practice whatever technique he has to in order to develop these supramental levels of awareness. This has been the route of discipline throughout all the ages.

10. OVERVIEW

Throughout time, a great deal has been written about consciousness. Most of what was written was based on speculation. One popular approach was to start from the physical body or from the brain and to assume that one of these two entities creates consciousness. "The universe is conceived as a giant computer, and the emergence of consciousness during the course of cosmic evolution is attributed solely to the laws of physics, which over the immensity of time give rise to a nearly infinite complexity that is purportedly sufficient to give rise to consciousness."⁴⁶⁵ If we were to place this statement side by side with one made by Sri Aurobindo regarding the origin of

⁴⁶⁴ Of course, the fact is that everything *is* absolute even including 'partial' knowledge, which in the present argument we would define as knowledge of a nature that were given out by a person not operating on higher levels of consciousness. One of the pragmatic differences between these two types of 'absolute' knowledge would relate to the perceiver of the knowledge. If the perceiver operated from higher states of consciousness, he would find the absolute not only in this 'relative' absolute knowledge, but in anything and everything else or in nothing as well. His grain of sand would be his crystal ball. Conversely, a perceiver not operating from higher states of consciousness would deal with knowledge of whatever hue in exactly the same limited and insufficient fashion. He does not receive the whole picture, the complete fullness of what is, because that is beyond his capabilities. This is the situation where the knowledge is praised or blamed, attacked or defended, with all activity taking place within a certain defined illusory reality (illusory compared to the reality of the subject or the true knowledge it is dealing with). The knowledge here is of something, it represents something but it is not that something. However, this is where humanity finds itself at the moment, and this has to serve because this type of knowledge is all that we have to deal with, it is of necessity a substitution for a reality that is beyond the conception and comprehension of this particular observer (that is not operating from higher states of consciousness).

⁴⁶⁵ Wallace, B. Alan. *The Taboo of Subjectivity: Toward a New Science of Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 27.

consciousness, we could well be tempted to accept or reject both, depending on our personal individual perspective. There is no obvious proof as to the correctness of any one of the two. We would be hard pressed to justify the acceptance or rejection of only one and not both. Why should the views of Sri Aurobindo receive preferential treatment above that of any other person apart from the fact that he categorically states that he is not speculating but reporting what is true? Very often we become convinced of things on grounds fairly remote from the intellect. We then justify what we believe by using the intellect. Here on the face of it we remain clearly objective whereas in reality we are defending a subjective point of view using an inappropriate tool (for a subjective reality) namely logic.⁴⁶⁶ However the fact remains that we have a subject that is not easily slotted into any category that is created by the mental apparatus. Yet the subject is supremely important in that according to Sri Aurobindo, it deals not only with our normal awareness, but with every conceivable aspect of ourselves.

Sri Aurobindo presented us with a spectrum of our cosmic potential and the assurance that that potential can be realised. In the process he moved beyond what we normally understand and can comprehend. Our normal mode of understanding is through the mental apparatus but here we are called upon to understand supramental realities. This new type of reality we should also be able to understand because in our essence we are in ourselves all that is. The essential nature of ours is that of Sachchidananda and that comprises its three components namely being, consciousness-force and bliss which is the totality of all that is. Sachchidananda in its essence is Brahman, in its operation it is the eternal cycle of the involution and the evolution, it is the mystic infinite completeness and abysmal nothingness of the Inconscient, and this too is our reality. It is on this level that we should be able to operate, as does Brahman. We don't, not yet, but in time according to Sri Aurobindo we will.

⁴⁶⁶ The appropriate mode of operating on the different levels of consciousness is not always appreciated or utilised. An example regarding the confusing of the correct mode of action on the emotional level vis-à-vis the intellectual level is illustrated by a question such as: What do you feel about so and so? Answer: I feel such and such. Question: Why do you feel such and such? Correct answer: Because I do. I suggest this answer because in the field of emotion this is the reality and that reality is then conveyed. It presents the true feeling and not a nonapplicable intellectual justification of that feeling. This last question could be argued to be totally out of order because it appears that the question subtly implies that feelings should be logically explained and validated. This at best implies uncritical confused thinking and at worst malice. This however is what very often happens because the subject of thought is not very often considered critically.

The picture that our thinkers and especially our mystics (of which Sri Aurobindo is only one arguably important member of the many that constitute our heritage) painted of our abilities and our potential is original, vast and virtually mind-boggling. Individually they differ one from the other as regards their scope, their approach, their influence, but they all contribute to the building and the construction of a comprehension of the vast array of components and elements that we form part of. It is through their eyes that we can discern not only their efforts but also the importance of their efforts for us. Some are more theoretical, some are more abstract, others are practical and all of them are a blend in one way or another of these three modes. Sri Aurobindo described in great detail the different components and the different aspects and interrelationships of consciousness and especially the supra-intellectual facet thereof. He emphasises that whatever he talks about it is already part of our being. Inherent in this knowledge is a promise of nothing less than the attaining by a human of the very highest, which is a gnostic level of divinity, and that this very highest can then be lived right here on earth.

Chapter 7

CONCLUSION

1. PERSPECTIVE ON SRI AUROBINDO

In this thesis we have analysed and interpreted the thinking of Sri Aurobindo, a great and profound philosopher, spiritual teacher and mystic. He had an immaculate Western and Oriental education. Educated in London and Cambridge, he became well versed in a number of the languages of Europe, both modern and classical. He read widely and absorbed the cultures that he encountered. He also knew the languages of his country of birth, India, as well as the different philosophies and religions which he not only wrote about, but of which he expanded, elucidated and synthesised the salient principles found in the various apparently conflicting philosophies.

The religio-theoretical context that Sri Aurobindo finds himself in is of a broad and deep universal nature. He was a student not only of the religions and philosophies of India but to a lesser extent also of the West. It does not appear as if he was concerned about being a member or of professing a belief in one or another religion but he did couch his philosophies and experiences within the framework of Hinduism. The picture that emerges is of a person more concerned with a supreme deity and its reality than with the form that humans apply to behave towards and interact with such a personage. But by the same token, he quite readily quoted scriptures and philosophies of other religions – Hinduism, Buddhism or Christianity – to illustrate contentions or to point out similarities between the approaches of different religions. In a fairly recent debate between the constructivists and the perennialists, both the essential nature of mystics and mysticism and the perception of that nature, was at issue. The constructivist position is that mystic experiences are culturally mediated whereas the perennialist position is more in line with that of Sri Aurobindo as outlined in chapter 3, namely that the mystic experience is supra-intellectual and as such does not form part of the normal intellectual mode of operation of humans. Therefore, experiences of this kind are in the domain of a higher state of consciousness where the mode of operation and the issues of culture are irrelevant and it cannot with accuracy be represented in words. The contention of Sri Aurobindo is that words are useful and necessary for where humanity

finds itself at the present but it is insufficient and inadequate in conveying the truth of reality which is beyond the relative.

The position of the perennialists is based on the postulates as expressed in the discussion of the perennial philosophy in chapter 1. I do not think that the position of Sri Aurobindo as a perennial philosopher has been totally proven, but it appears that in the main there is a very strong parallel between the major elements of his philosophy and that which apparently is the core of the perennial philosophy.

A great deal of understanding of Sri Aurobindo was gained by examining him in his historical context for the limited purposes of this thesis. He was a cultured and educated man straddling the divide between India and Europe. On the one hand he studied the philosophies and languages of Europe and importantly that of the Greek philosophers. Comments throughout his works on these philosophers indicated a deep insight into their thinking. He recognised the existence and the importance of mystic thinkers of the West. He also perceived the essential unity and the interconnectedness of mystics over both time and space. On the other hand his comprehension is fleshed out in his Indian life not only by his personal experiences but also by the insights gained in his studies of religion and philosophy, such as his translating and commenting on the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads. The different principles that he identified are in line with and parallel to the thinking of philosophers of diverse times such as the pre-Socratic Parmenides through Plotinus, Cusanus, Böhme to Bruno as mentioned in chapter 3. The views of Sri Aurobindo and these different philosophers bear a striking family resemblance. There are differences on detail and of an individual nature but seen together they are basically the same and they complement each other. He synthesised his cognitions in his cosmology where he formulated his version of the eternal cycle of being which involved (or originated) from the source of all which is in a unitary state, through a descending range of levels of consciousness culminating in the Inconscient and returning through evolution back to the source.⁴⁶⁷ He did not place a timespan on whatever evolutionary advances had been attained by humanity in its journey back to the source, but he did mention that the ideal of a significant proportion of evolved human beings that could bring about a paradigm shift for humanity, could be obtained

⁴⁶⁷ This is reminiscent of the systems of Plotinus and of Ken Wilber.

within from a few millennia to a couple of decades. Regarding the similarities in the philosophies and experiences of mystics of Europe and India, the picture that emerges is of a Eurasian perennial philosophy family grouping possessing profound fundamental similarities and superficial differences. Even though beyond the scope of the present thesis, the question arises about the possibility of such a reality or a tradition (of a perennial philosophy) which unbeknown to us might already be existing in other parts of the world, in Africa, in Australia, the Americas and in the Pacific Islands. I believe that this postulate is possible and reasonable because it can be accepted that there is ample evidence that mystics are and have been present worldwide and throughout time. As an example⁴⁶⁸ we can consider Africa and more pertinently South Africa, in this context. The aboriginal San people coexisted with nature within the dictates of a philosophy of great sensitivity and harmony. Krüger points out the isolation of the San from other continents of the world for 40 millennia or more which meant that their cultural and spiritual paradigm developed in isolation. As a group we can only consider their beliefs as an ideal-typical construction because of the great variations present right down to the individual level. "Bushman beliefs relate to Bushman ritual (dance) and art as the shell of the tortoise relates to the rest of its body" which covers and shields the vulnerable parts, it grows, is vulnerable itself and it ages.⁴⁶⁹ Of importance is the fact that this primitive people have a cosmology possessing a structure that is sophisticated and subtle but not rigid. It is more of an intuitive than an intellectual orientation. Their cosmology allows them to harmoniously coexist with nature, to a degree that, anecdotally, they possessed supernormal powers, for instance they were the rainmakers for their communities which communities included other races. The knowledge that we have of their dances, which induces trances, is scanty at best and knowledge thereof is probably the key to their mystic reality, and to the possible bond connecting them to the mystics of the Buddhists, the Hindus and Christians. The question is whether there is a type of 'perennial philosophy' present in their and in other older cultures on other continents. This is quite possible if we consider only two of the main criteria namely the existence of a supreme being and the return of human beings to that source. This fascinating line of investigation which proposes that the essentials of the 'Eurasian perennial philosophy' is present in the other parts of the globe could fruitfully be pursued in a future study. The views of these different philosophers bear a striking

⁴⁶⁸ Krüger, J S. *Along Edges*. University of South Africa: Pretoria, 1995, p. 201.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 201.

family resemblance. There are differences of an individual nature but seen together they are basically the same and they complement each other.

2. MYSTIC KNOWLEDGE

Sri Aurobindo was a mystic. He did maintain however that 'mysticism' was a word used to describe something that seemed magical but which became very ordinary when the underlying principles are understood. This would include present everyday examples such as the use of electricity or electronics. However it is described, this is the field of knowledge that he lived in and he became a mystic not because of a desire for an otherworldly life or for spiritual experiences, but because he wanted to be more effective and efficient in the conduct of the day-to-day life and the tasks he had to perform. In his case it was that of a political reformer, or a terrorist, depending on one's point of view. In short, he wanted the British out of India and he was prepared to use any and every means to achieve that, whether violence or yoga. Even before he started on his yogic career, he was inclined to experiences which differed from the normal, normal here being waking, dreaming and sleep states of consciousness. Shortly before spending a year in jail during a trial, he learnt and practiced yoga and during his period in jail and in court had a range of spiritual experiences which continued and influenced his philosophies and his conduct of life until his death in 1950.

He writes of experimenting with and investigating critically the different states of consciousness that he encountered. The purpose of his yoga is not the attainment of *Nirvana*, even though that state has its benefits when it is experienced in that it confirms to the mind the reality and the superior nature of alternate states of consciousness. The purpose of his yoga is the establishment of higher states of consciousness within the human being which is the process of elevating the normal consciousness of a person to that of the divine. This involves the emptying the mind of thoughts and maintaining that new state. He says that this is a difficult process and that it can be achieved in different ways, the easiest being to *call down* the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body. The silence that he refers to is of a profound nature which enables the mind to operate in higher states of consciousness.

He explains that the instrument with which we rise towards higher states of consciousness is the mind. The mind of a more developed person consists of two parts, the one being the factory of thoughts and the other the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will. It is this latter part that manipulates the data and makes it serviceable. When such a person grows further, that mind expands and elevate itself above these two facets to that of a more universal mode of operation where essential truth is dealt with.

His writings on the subjects of consciousness and reality are classic perennial philosophy as I have argued in chapter 1, including amongst others the reality of a supreme originating being and the ability of humanity to reunite with this being. The supreme being is of a supra-cultural reality that is often dealt with by different groupings worldwide according to their own local perceptions and customs. I think the same can be said of Sri Aurobindo's approach in that he describes his experiences within the framework of the Upanishads and of Hinduism. He asserts in his works that what his yoga instructor Lele taught him resulted in "a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he (Lele) had never intended – for they were Adwaitic (sic) and Vedantic and he (Lele) was against Advaita Vedanta – and which were quite contrary to my own ideas. (He did not expect to see anything otherworldly but) they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of the vacant forms in the impersonal universality of the absolute Brahman."⁴⁷⁰ In his various books where he referred to experiences that he had, he makes it quite clear that those were his actual experiences and not theoretical possibilities as expounded in the holy Hindu books but neither did he state or imply that he views himself, or sets himself up, as a unique prophet expounding the original and unknown realities. It is simply that what others in the past had experienced and which resulted in the recording thereof in the holy books, he too experienced. On occasion when speaking to disciples and where the subject was experiences as described in the Upanishads, he agreed with the Upanishads, saying that is what he too had experienced even before having read about it in the Upanishads.⁴⁷¹ It therefore appears as if what he experienced was universal mystic realities whereas his personal descriptions were recorded in a local language. What he said therefore is not the quoting of other

⁴⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo. *On Himself*. Volume 26. [SABCL]. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. 2000, p. 79.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 89.

authorities, but his own convictions and experiences.⁴⁷² The other mystics we dealt with in chapters 1 and 3 appears to agree with Sri Aurobindo that the world of matter and individual consciousness is a partial reality only, and that in its true nature it is grounded in the holism of the Divine Reality. Man has the ability to access this Divinity through his innate abilities which include direct intuition. This is not separate from the way in which the mind normally operates, but it is an extension of this same consciousness. For attaining a deeper and more profound understanding of knowledge, intuitive perception is superior to intellectual reasoning. Everything that is has inherent in it a range of different levels, the one based on the other, starting from the infinitely subtle which is the original divinity, to the absolutely gross which in essence is only another form of divinity. The purpose of humanity's sojourn on earth is the development of consciousness to the point where it (humanity) achieves union with the absolute. Whereas the perennial philosophy seems to have as its goal the realisation (both in the sense of knowing and of achieving) the reality of the supreme, Sri Aurobindo extends that ideal, and says that the next step thereafter is to continue living on this high level but in an embodied state, wherever he finds himself, in our instance the earth. He holds that the achievement of this goal is not only possible, it is inevitable. This is so because of the inherent divinity in every human being. The reality of what is, does not depend on a perception or a validation by a human or by a rock or by a God, it simply depends on its own reality. All the knowledge of what is, is inherent in the object and the perception of such knowledge by an apparent outside entity from the point of view of the object is irrelevant.⁴⁷³ Certainly this reality has different levels of being which can be differentiated if one so desires, but it must be always borne in mind that whatever that particular perceived reality is, that particular partial perception is true (in fact, absolutely true) but only at that very specific level of reality. Because this is the field of the relative, whatever reality is singled out for examination is only one of

⁴⁷² These experiences are spiritual of nature. He is obviously aware of the pitfalls that can occur in gaining knowledge of this nature and in utilising this process of gaining knowledge, he warns against "speculative confusion" and an approach which proceeds "to accept uncritically every experience & every random idea about an experience as it occurred to the mind & set it up as a revealed truth & almost a semi-divine communication, to make a hopeless amalgam & jumble of science, religion & philosophy all expressed in the terms of the imagination. (This warning is given because) ... The result is that it lays its hands on truth & muddles it so badly that it comes out to the world as an untruth." p. 66. In the relative field of knowledge he asserts, "language has its distinctions on which clear thinking depends, & we must insist on their being observed." p. 74. Sri Aurobindo. *Essays Divine and Human* Volume 12 [CWSA].

⁴⁷³ Apparent, because in reality the observer and observed here would in essence be the same, would form a unitary reality. However, in the field of dualism you have separation and therefore the possibility for the existence of object and subject.

many, and neither this chosen one or any of the other possible realities are superior in any way as in essence they are all One. It is clear that everything that is, is a blend of the gross and the subtle, the material and the spiritual. We find ourselves on the material level which as discussed is in fact also the spiritual level. This is our paradoxical quest, well put in the following quote, to find the one ultimate Truth, where "(w)e now return in our Timeless era to our own Infinitely and Perfection that once before was ours, and which we have never left."⁴⁷⁴

3. OVERVIEW OF HIS THEORIES ON EVOLUTION AND CONSCIOUSNESS

An overview of the essence of his cosmology revolved round the cycle of involution and evolution, which cosmology is remarkably similar to that of Böhme. This takes place beyond space and time, and only one small section thereof, namely the portion that deals with matter, life and mind takes place within a temporal and spatial arena. He outlines a cosmology which starts with "The One" which is the Ultimate Unnamable Reality of what is. This entity is the ultimate source of all. It desired to know and experience Itself, which is not possible within a unitary reality. What was required for this type of experiencing is some form of duality where contrasts and oppositions can occur. To achieve this, a process started with the establishment of Sachchidananda. This is the first step in the move away from the original source. The explanation of what now transpires is that of the involution of consciousness, of a form of contraction if you will, of this one specific facet of Sachchidananda, namely that of consciousness. The whole reality of this consciousness and this process should be viewed against the backdrop of firstly the fact that this consciousness is a continuum, and secondly the fact that this continuum is in fact beyond spatiality and the process takes place beyond temporality. Sachchidananda is a facet (like that of a diamond) of "The One" which is separate yet one with the ultimate source. Its name is an indication of its essential reality. It consists of the three historically well-known components in Indian philosophy namely *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*. *Sat* is being, *Chit* is consciousness-force and *Ananda* is bliss.⁴⁷⁵ In dealing with consciousness we have to examine and understand

⁴⁷⁴ Barnard, Gustav. *A Simple Plan for Enlightenment*. Benton Harbor, MI: Patterson. 1996, p. 95.

⁴⁷⁵ Because of the integrated nature of these three, it is not incorrect to talk in terms of for instance consciousness instead of bliss or being or any combination thereof. Wherever the one is, there the others are too and a person can therefore say that the whole downward involutionary spiral is a spiral of consciousness. This is borne out by the different names of the components of this spiral.

the nature and reality of Sachchidananda. All three the components of Sachchidananda are always inherently present, they are indivisibly intertwined and interrelated in whatever is. They are immensely complex and multitudinous, and we gain a glimmer of understanding of this statement if we consider that everything in or beyond temporality and spatiality is composed of the kaleidoscopic nature and working of only these three components. We may place a different emphasis on one or another of the components, simply for a limited and incomplete intellectual understanding thereof, but that is only for pragmatic use and does not reflect the reality of that particular component of the Trinity; we can never attain to knowledge of that by intellectual means.

Sachchidananda is followed (again, in a timeless and non-spatial manner) by Supermind which is a domain of non-dual spiritual knowledge and clarity, where no divisions or separations of any kind exist. This state effectively straddles the absolute non-dual and the dual region. From here Overmind originates, which is the site of the light of the supramental gnosis and the region where the gods have their home. Following this, the region of the Intuitive Mind comes into being. The mode of operation current in this region is that of original knowledge acquired by identity with the object of knowledge. The totality of knowledge of the object is spontaneously and intuitively available to the subject due to the unitary nature of their relationship. The Illumined Mind follows the Intuitive Mind. The activity here is mainly involved with spiritual light and knowledge. The next step down is that of Higher Mind where the knowledge is not spiritual knowledge but a spontaneous and powerful clear type of knowledge. Below that stage is the human Mind, where knowledge is not complete and pure and is dealt with through logic and reasoning. Then follows Life where the type of consciousness is of a low and animate nature, sufficient to maintain the creature and its functions. Creature here is not restricted to animal but could be any type of life. Below this level is that of Matter which is the densest tangible form of the manifested facet of the involution and evolution cycle. Sri Aurobindo maintains that Matter has consciousness of a type and nature that is sufficient to maintain this entity. Lastly, we have the Inconscient which is a state of total nihil, a totally dormant nescient state with seemingly absolutely no consciousness whatsoever. Yet, this state contains in seed form the total potential of Sachchidananda. This is the nadir of the cycle. We can say that the Inconscient is the totality of all that is contained within a space of infinitely less than a mathematical point. Due to the infinite and all-embracing total potential contained within it (in its

essence it is Sachchidananda), it has the ability to move from that state of nihil right back up to the original source. This is due to the inherent nature of this cycle, it has to return from this unlikely state of supreme dormancy the return journey back to "The One". All the above stations are visited in the reverse order and explored to the full, eventually culminating in the reunion with its source.

This cosmology of Sri Aurobindo is not totally unique but is embedded in a vast historical movement. It is similar to for instance the approaches of Plotinus and Vivekananda. Because of that, one could again ask whether his work is original and if it is, what is the justification for its production. What drove Sri Aurobindo? Did he relinquish his political ambitions and instead turned to philosophy because of the heat that the British applied? Early on during his stay in Pondicherry he did say that he was satisfied that his goal of Indian emancipation would be achieved and that future assistance that he would give to this cause would be from a subtle supramental level. These are all debatable points. One could point out that Vivekananda had a similar approach to Plotinus and question Vivekananda and his motives on that particular point. Was Vivekananda in fact original? In fact, was Plotinus original? Regarding Sri Aurobindo, his writing reveals a passionate and enthusiastic individual. Can the 'what' that drove him be easily quantified, or quantified at all? If such a question is asked, is it asked to understand Sri Aurobindo or is it asked in order for him to justify himself? The difference in the motivation for the question is subtle, but important. Here the emphasis changes from Sri Aurobindo to the questioner. His (the questioner's) objectivity here becomes very subjective. Regarding his choice of career, political versus philosophy, I believe that whatever justification had to be made he made to himself and not to an audience. The audience would never be satisfied. On the one hand the radical Indian politicians were dissatisfied with his choice because they did not have his presence and leadership available on a day-to-day basis, and on the other hand the British were dissatisfied as is proven by the fact that they requested the French on several occasions to extradite Sri Aurobindo from Pondicherry which was in French territory. We have his word for motivating his career choice which resulted in the expounding of what could well be described as an all-encompassing and clear philosophy regarding the reality of all that is.

As is clear, all the different fields that are found in the cycle of involution and evolution are related to consciousness and we can view the description given in this particular cycle as the major cycle which to human beings would arguably be of academic interest only. Of greater interest would be what we can term a minor sector of this cycle which deals with the evolution of consciousness up to the level of the human mind. Of interest here would be the different states of consciousness experienced by humans. Here he deals with the waking, dreaming and sleep state of consciousness but he does not restrict himself to this. He extends the analysis he performs and details a large variety of states of consciousness or modes of operation that we are not normally aware of but which is yet a part of our human consciousness. It includes, but is not restricted to, the subconscious (below the normal conscient level), intraconscient (which operates behind a veil), the subliminal (which comprises the hidden inner mental, vital, physical and psychic), the circumconscient or environmental consciousness. In addition to that he explains other states that we do not encounter normally but which is still part of our potential namely the states of samadhi and cosmic consciousness, which states lean towards that of higher states of consciousness. It becomes clear that whatever conceivable state of consciousness we can experience constitutes an exceedingly complex reality. Therefore, the overall impression that we are left with is one of consciousness and the complexity thereof and also of the importance, potential and possibilities that that holds for our evolution.

4. SOME PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS PHILOSOPHY

Sri Aurobindo presents a persuasive argument regarding the potential of the human being as well as the possibility of its realisation, backed up by his own personal experiences and example. It follows an evolutionary route which is not a linear and straight process, nor is it necessarily inevitable. Humans have a choice in their own evolution. What Sri Aurobindo did was to outline a cosmology giving details of the journey both from and back to "The One". He presented us with in-depth details regarding knowledge about our self, about numerous and important different types of consciousness that humans either do or can possess. The subtleties of the consciousness that we already have is delved into and both expanded and expounded on. The question could be raised: is what he says the truth and did he truly experience these higher states

of consciousness that he has detailed so well? In short, what he presents us with, can we accept it, can we rely on it, can we possibly satisfactorily verify it in some way that is still within the parameters of our present way of understanding and perception without appearing to be a gullible and/or fearful/hopeful devotee? The answer comes: try the route and you will know. This has a very familiar ring about it. Other opposing theories and philosophies have maintained the same. Our scepticism regarding the veracity of his yoga has merit in that it gives us security, security of a type that is supplied by the certainty and definition of the intellect. It also includes a denial of some reality that is not ours yet. But viewed from a different angle, is it security or knowledge that we want? Sri Aurobindo has, both implicitly and explicitly, presented evidence of the way in which he views the intellect. To him the intellect is very important and it should be developed to the full. Those fields that are beyond that of the intellect and which can be grouped together under the category of higher states of consciousness, is in fact only an extension of the mind that we possess at the moment. He himself developed his intellect to a remarkable degree; this is implicit in his writings and in his work. The mode in which knowledge comes from these higher states of consciousness can be called inspiration. This is an insufficient term but it will have to suffice. He did not teach emotionalism or blind acceptance of dogma, but he has made statements that indicate that he is of the conviction that whatever shape or form of either knowledge or inspiration one experiences, should be verified by the intellect and by common sense. But he also contended that, regardless of the merit that the intellect has, it has its limitations. He is clear about the fact that we cannot arrive at the ultimate truth by utilising the intellect. Our choices are limited to two alternatives: we maintain our scepticism and definitely lose out on the possibility of arriving at the ultimate truth, or we follow the uncertain route with its, for us, possibly unsuccessful outcome but at least there is a possibility of success with this particular route. These alternatives summed up state that the first route would definitely not give us the truth that we seek, whereas with the second alternative there is no guarantee but at least the chance that this apparently evasive and elusive knowledge could be found.

5. CONCLUSION OF SRI AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY AND IMPORTANCE

The conclusion that Sri Aurobindo arrives at regarding the potential of a human is dramatic in the extreme and of immense importance for humanity if it is true. It is nothing less than the elevation of the level of awareness of a human being to that of divinity, and then thereafter living a divine life on earth in a human body. The transformation of the consciousness of man that Sri Aurobindo foresees is towards a consciousness of a superman which is superior to the normal human being as he is now constituted. Sri Aurobindo says that the division between the levels of consciousness separating these two beings is as big as that which separates the human mind from that of a plant. The mind of man is a mind imprisoned in an imperfect living and conscious body. He views the fact of the present situation of man as temporary and that it is part of a process of continual change and evolution; whatever the reality that is applicable to him now is not permanent and can change. Therefore there is the possibility that change can elevate the mind of man to the level of the mind of superman with a supramental spirit which is one with a divine gnosis and which will envelop and freely use a conscious body, which is open to spiritual forces. The transformed terrestrial body of Supermind will be equipped to deal with the role of simultaneously living the spiritual and material life where it will be in eternal possession of gnostic Truth. Superman becomes a conscious part of the Eternal as its source is the dynamic consciousness of the divine Knower and Creator.

This is a very inspiring vision. Could it possibly be achieved, and if so, in what way? One way to do this from a pragmatic point of view is to establish a working example of this ideal state. What would be required is for a group of people to live following the guidelines as laid down in the philosophies that he expounded. This has already been done in a type of ashram situation in Pondicherry with the Auroville project. The initial leadership for this project came from Sri Aurobindo and from his co-worker and companion Mirra Richards. Since her death late in the previous century this project has gone ahead. Whether it is fulfilling its functions is not clear because we are here looking at firstly the definition of what its functions are and secondly the timespan required for evolutionary progress. On the surface the intention would be of elevating

the state of consciousness of a human being to that of superman operating as a gnostic being as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo.

It is against this backdrop of vast and many-faceted arrays of levels and dimensions that I wish to consider the holistic reality. To make a human here seem meaningful and profound is difficult. One can contend that the degree of awareness a person has determines his real status in the scheme of things. He forms an intrinsic part of the total reality in a holistic fashion. There is no separation between human consciousness and spiritual Consciousness: it all is One. Humans are an integral part of all that is, therefore I am in All and All is in me. This is knowledge that can be obtained through the development of higher states of consciousness, but this knowledge is not based on the working of the intellectual and reasoning mind. The true reality of what is cannot be understood by analytical means: analysis of what is will destroy the wholeness and create duality. This resultant partial intellectual understanding will not produce comprehensive knowledge of the kind envisaged by Sri Aurobindo in the state of Supermind where knowledge is clear and of a non-dual nature with no divisions or separations. In order to attain greater knowledge of the spiritual reality, given the statements of the mystics that not only is the universe us, but we too are the universe, we have to change the way in which we perceive and comprehend. This implies a change of consciousness. However well one can argue for the apparently more popular alternate reality of understanding based on logic and reason, here the votes of the mystics are going to the candidature of this more intangible reality. The fact that this is strange territory, not well charted and somewhat insecure should surely not present an insurmountable obstacle; the present well-trodden paths shared that fate in the past.

Here we are not looking at a new religion. But there are still perplexing questions about Sri Aurobindo in this regard. As already mentioned, he stated that he did not wish to establish a new religion. How do his students or followers respond to this wish? What have they made of his philosophy? Has it been changed into a cult and should his every dictate be followed slavishly? Is he viewed as an avatar, not necessarily in name but in fact? Or is he considered a great thinker or perhaps a combination of all three these possibilities? If his disciples follow his philosophy to the letter, either at present or in the future, would that be wrong? The reason for this question is, if they do not operate in this way, can the positive results envisaged by Sri Aurobindo be guaranteed because

now it is not a Sri Aurobindo philosophy but the disciple philosophy that is relevant and determinative. Further, if he is to be followed slavishly, can original and thinking minds tolerate such a restrictive environment? As in all religions and philosophical groupings, there are certain latitudes that are operative. The teacher did not cover everything and what he did cover was set out in words which immediately brings into question exactly what his teachings were. Always the teacher speaks from his level and always the student hear from his. Certainly we can see his words but we only see the surface: to what degree can disciples see the depth?

Given all these imponderables the road ahead is not necessarily very clear. The effect of his philosophies during his life and since his death has been arguably limited. This is evidenced by the fact that he simply is not a well-known philosopher. This could be because of the fact that he is not necessarily a very easy read. Reading him arguably requires a certain intellectual ability and bent. Because of his erudition, comprehensiveness and profundity, the study of his work can be a very satisfying exercise. Even though he to a degree presented what he experienced and thought within the framework of the Hindu philosophy, the emphasis of his philosophies is on his basic findings as is applicable to every human being. Different philosophies appeal to different people. This is dependent on their level of evolution. Up till now one can say that the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo has not made a great impact on humanity, but is it not possible that that is because of the fact that his work was too advanced for the present period? I would argue that his philosophy is comprehensive, profound and of great potential value for humanity. It addresses that part of the human psyche that is beyond the physical with its base needs, beyond the level of the emotions where only feelings pertain, even beyond the level of the intellect with its invaluable logic and reason and it finds itself in the supra-intellectual domains of being. It is also not restricted to any confining or restrictive religious or philosophical dogmas. He does not ignore any of the above aspects of a human being but is not bound to any one of them, it is inclusive and far-reaching. Potentially, it can supply a holistic evolutionary roadmap for humanity to move beyond the problematic physical, spiritual and environmental reality it finds itself in.

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⁴⁷⁶ SABCL is an acronym for 'Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library.'

⁴⁷⁷ CWSA is an acronym for 'Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo.'

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