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SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES AND INTEGRAL REALIZATION

Hinduism at its highest can very well be described as a record of the varieties of spiritual experiences and a most luminous guide to spiritual disciplines. In its basic scriptures we come across different statements of the nature of the supreme Reality. Theologians and philosophers not especially impressed by the validity of spiritual experience of a comprehensive nature find this baffling. Even those who have faith in the truth of the scriptures portraying the nature of the Reality in diverse manners, describing features of the Absolute in such a way that the statements seem to be mutually contradictory, try to emphasize one statement over the others. Their motive is philosophical consistency and from their point of view, they are justified. But in the process of building a foolproof metaphysical system based on spiritual experience, they sacrifice something, sometimes indeed a great deal of the variety and richness of spiritual experience. It is necessary to enquire into the structure, function and capacities of that in man who is capable of having spiritual experience. Equally it is incumbent on us to investigate the nature of spiritual experience as such, whether it does or does not outstep the boundaries of logical reason or whether it must conform to the canons of philosophical thinking. Needless to say that the rational dialectical mind is not the organ of spiritual experience. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that the mind as such is the faculty in man by which the **atman** in him has intimations of the spiritual Reality in and through spiritual experience. We should point out that by "mind" here we are meaning what is known as **buddhi** in Indian spiritual psychology. **Manas**, which is normally translated as mind in English is more directly connected with the work of the senses. **Manas** has an image of the object with which the senses are in contact and of which they bring a report to the mind. This image has no light to reveal itself, being finite in space and time—no finite thing has the capacity of self-revelation. The image is presented to the **buddhi** for interpretation

and determination. But the **buddhi** also is part of, the first evolute of **Prakriti** which is the unconscious energy from which the whole world evolves. **Buddhi** can interpret the image presented to it by the mind but not by its own light. Indeed it has no light of its own. But it is capable, if it is pure and tranquil, of catching and reflecting the Light of **Purusha**, the spiritual Soul or **Atman**. The light of **buddhi** is borrowed as that of the moon. If we extend the meaning of mind to include **buddhi**, we can understand why in Sanskrit the word Soma means both the moon and the mind. However, that is by the way. This is why in Hindu spiritual disciplines the purification of the **buddhi** is of essential importance.

It may seem strange that **buddhi** should be taken as the organ of spiritual experience. But the **Jiva** or the **Atman** in its essence has the same nature as that of the spiritual Reality, that is, uncreated, eternal, non-physical, non-vital, non-mental, non-intellectual or non-**buddhic**. For some reason it is connected with these things here in this world. And in embodied state of its existence its highest instrument of knowledge, will and emotion is **buddhi**. There is a transparency in **buddhi** due to the predominance of **sattwa** in it, which, as briefly stated above, enables it to receive the pure Consciousness of the spiritual **Jiva** or **Atman**. Both **Jiva** and the Supreme Reality are **Cit**, pure consciousness. We are not at the moment saying anything about the relation between **Jiva** or individual **atman** and the Reality, but only pointing out that they are both of the same nature. This is because in some systems of Hindu spiritual philosophy, a Supreme Reality other than and beyond the individual **atman** is not recognised. Nevertheless it must be emphasised that even these systems unhesitatingly accept that there is a truly spiritual Reality and man really is that. It is the **jiva** or the **atman** that has spiritual experience in which it has the knowledge of and feels union with the supreme Reality. This is true of the systems which do believe in an Absolute or God. Here again we are not at the moment defining the nature of the union. In Sankhya, Rajayoga and Vedanta this is the general idea about the instrument of spiritual experience "...Evidently there are two possibilities of the action of the intelligent will. It may take its downward and outward orientation towards a discursive action of the perceptions and the will in the triple play of Prakriti, or it may take its upward and inward orientation towards a settled peace and equality in the calm and immutable purity of the conscious silent soul no

longer subject to the distractions of Nature.”¹ And, “therefore, it is the upward and inward orientation of the intelligent will that we must resolutely choose with a settled concentration and perseverance, *vyavasaya*; we must fix it firmly in the calm self-knowledge of the Purusha.”²

The question may be pertinently asked: why should there be such a variety of spiritual experience? Is the Reality many, or are none of these experiences quite valid? It must be said that the experiences are themselves self-validating. They carry their evidence within themselves. This may be a dangerous doctrine both in the field of knowledge and in that of personal experience of one's own character, conduct and behaviour. Anybody can claim to have had spiritual experience and that it is not to be submitted to any outward test but that it carries its own evidence within itself. This may very well be so and in many cases it is so, but human consciousness is extremely complex, the being and nature of man very complicated. It is perfectly possible that a man may have a genuine spiritual experience and yet his whole being and nature does not “catch up” with it, that he does not become a genuinely spiritual man. The experience may have its own self-validity. But the real question is: what does such experience do to the man, how far does it become established in his consciousness and how far it affects his nature and character?

The genuine spiritual man will certainly be to some, if not to a great extent, changed as a result of spiritual experiences which have altered his consciousness, given him a new world-view and a new sense of values. His roots will be no longer in Time but in Eternity, his values will no longer be of the world but of the Spirit. He cannot continue to be what would normally be called immoral or unethical, though, it must be said that he is not merely moral or ethical; spirituality transcends morality without rejecting it. However, this is another topic of discussion and we shall not pursue it here. But this must be emphasized that the minimum that will happen to a man of genuine spiritual experience is that he will no longer be capable of knowing himself as a body or the vital force in it or the mind or a combination of these three. His experience of himself will be that he is a spirit of the

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1. *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library*, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 91. (All subsequent references in this article are to the volumes of the *Centenary Library* mentioned above.
 2. Vol. 13, p. 92

same nature as that of the ultimate Reality, the supreme Spirit. This is the basic minimum required for **moksha** or liberation from the ignorance, **avidya**, due to which the true spirit in man, his real being, identifies itself with **buddhi**, **manas**, **prana**, and **deha**, and the **indriyas**, and **ahamkara**, respectively intelligence, sense-mind, vital force, body, senses the separative ego-sense. The function of the last mentioned principle is to persuade the spirit or the **atman** that it is not that but the other principles which it is truly not. It also produces in the embodied **jiva** the sense that it is separate from everything, that it has a body of its own, a life-force of its own, a mind of its own, as if these were not individual formations of cosmic matter, cosmic life and cosmic mind. In those systems of spiritual philosophy which accept God as a supreme personal Being, the **ahamkara** is taken as a principle which produces a sense of separation from him also.

The question now arises as to what is the status of the liberated **jiva** or **atman**? And it is here that we are confronted by an enormous variety of possibilities.

This matter can be profitably discussed by looking at the different systems of Indian spiritual philosophy. We may for our present purpose take Sankhya and Yoga (of Patanjali) as our starting point. Both of them explain existence by the twin principles of **Purusha** and **Prakriti**, the category of eternal self-existent pure Consciousness and that of the eternal unconscious Energy. For some reason or other the two, in spite of being disparate kinds of realities, are fused together; this fusion is for the **Purusha** a confusion, for it loses its self-knowledge and begins to identify itself with **Prakriti** and its evolutes. Life's aim therefore, is, according to Sankhya and Yoga, the overcoming of the confusion and the release of the **Purusha** from it which will be for it the state of **kaivalya**, aloneness, both Sankhya and Yoga assert that there are innumerable **Purushas** or Conscious Souls. The arguments given for this position need not concern us here. What is to be noted is that in neither of these two practical spiritual philosophies is there any idea of a supreme One Reality. We would suggest that if there were a direct spiritual experience of such a reality, there would be in these philosophies a concept of God or of Brahman. All the schools of Vedanta, on the other hand, firmly believe in Brahman, the Supreme Reality which is one. The concept of the Brahman in these schools differs very widely. What is common among them is the idea that Brahman is **sat-cit-ananda**, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. But apart from this common ground, there are vastly diverse ideas entertained by

these philosophies. Is Brahman indivisibly one or one-in-many, is it static or dynamic, impersonal or personal, endowed with features and qualities or devoid of any attributes, transcendent of the universe or immanent in it, or both? Each of these positions has been taken by one school or the other. In the philosophy of Bhagavanapada Shankaracharya, Brahman is One without a second, devoid of any creative power, relationless, without any qualities and if at all the world is accepted, however provisionally, completely transcendent of it. The logical consequence of this concept of Brahman is that the world is unreal, and so is the individual soul. However, the world and the apparent individual soul may be explained, there is no gainsaying that they are not **real**. Maya is and is not the power of Brahman; the former if the world be accepted and sought to be explained, the latter if already one has gone beyond the sense of its reality. Individual soul is either a limitation, false in the last analysis of Brahman or a reflection, false again, of Brahman in Maya which itself is unreal. Inconveniently enough the world persists as a false appearance in eternal Time and an eternally persistent false appearance could very well be described as an inexplicable mystery, an uncategorisable illusion.

But when you look at Brahman, there is no hesitation about its nature. Is it merely very skilful philosophising or is it a highly rational statement of an authentic spiritual experience? Many scores of spiritual seekers have had this experience and those who have been able to establish it in their consciousness have proved it by the example of their living that they are a different breed of beings. Their utter peace and tranquillity, lack of not only selfishness but also the separative ego-sense, complete detachment from any transient value, their compassion and charity are undeniable. To sit near them, with only an open mind, even if it is not convinced of their spirituality, is to bathe in a new light, to breathe a fresh atmosphere, to relish a different quality of joy. We do not have to go very far from our own times. A Ramakrishna, a Tailangaswami, a Sri Aurobindo, a Ramana Maharshi bear eloquent witness to the concrete reality of this experience vividly exemplified in their state of consciousness, the quality of their personalities and the way of their life.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world—only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of

empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above, no abstraction—it was positive, the only positive reality—although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial.³

It is to be noted that Sri Aurobindo had other experiences which gave an entirely different picture of the Reality though without contradicting the one given in the experience described above. He says that in the experience of *Nirvana* there is no *Ananda*, exhilaration or bliss but adds that he had this experience years later. Apart from that, there were other experiences, especially the one that showed him conclusively that the sheer *That* was also the divine *Personality* which dwelt in everything in the universe, in fact, was their secret, inner reality.

I lived in that *Nirvāna* day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Super-consciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always, with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.⁴

On the other hand all the other *sampradayas* or schools of Vedanta conceive of Brahman as One, but personal, endowed

3. Vol. 22, p. 49

4. Vol. 22, p. 50

with creative energy, full of auspicious qualities, some one with whom the individual soul can have intimate relation or union, someone who presides over its spiritual destiny. The world is real, so is the individual soul. Ramanuja, Bhaskara, Vallabha, Nimbar-kara, Madhwa, Baladeva, all giants in philosophy and mystical saints of a very high order, are unanimous on these points. Yet their conceptions of Brahman and the world and the individual soul and the mutual relationship of them are vastly diverse. How intimate is the relation or union between Brahman and Jiva, between the supreme Self and the individual soul? Complete identity is ruled out. But the relation is conceived as identity-in-distinction, unity-in-difference and difference-in-unity. As Sri Aurobindo sums up,

The Advaita Vedanta (Monism) declares that the Jiva has no real existence, as the Divine is indivisible. Another School attributes a real but not an independent existence to the Jiva—it is, they say, one in essence, different in manifestation and as the manifestation is real, eternal and not an illusion, it cannot be called unreal. The Dualistic Schools affirm the Jiva as an independent category or stand on the triplicity of God, soul and Nature.⁵

In the school of devotion originated by Chaitanya, the stand-point regarding the relation of the individual soul and the supreme Divine is quite complex. This is because the nature of the supreme Reality is itself very complex. It is non-dual consciousness, **advayam jñanam**, but it has three different self-formulations or poises. Reality in this philosophy is not devoid of the Power of self-manifestation, Brahman and Shakti are one reality, though in language we would have to speak of it as if it were two. The distinction between the three aspects of Reality is determined by whether, the Self-Force, **svarupa-sakti**, is or is not manifest and if manifest, in what aspect and how much, for the Shakti also has different poises. The three aspects of the Reality are called **Brahman**, **Paramatma** and **Bhagavana**. The first is that in which the Conscious Force is entirely absorbed and involved and without any manifestation or operation. This is sheer Existence; Consciousness and Bliss, impersonal and it is with this aspect that the individual soul can find complete identity. **Paramatma**, the Supreme Self, is the creator aspect of the Reality in whom Maya,

5. Vol. 18, p. 149

or the creative Power of the universe is manifest and operative. Maya is in itself an unconscious power, constituted by the three gunas **sattwa**, **rajas** and **tamas**, famous in Indian philosophy. With **Paramatma**, the individual soul can realise unity but not identity. **Bhagavana** is the supreme aspect of the Reality. He is the Lover enjoying the love of liberated souls, "particles of consciousness", **cit-kana** in the terminology of this school, and loving them in turn. One of the joys of **Bhagavana** is to make his companions and devotees who serve him with utter submission and complete surrender taste the love which he enjoys himself. The very nature of the Reality is Love, which splits itself, as it were, as the Lover and the Beloved, which are not two realities but the One Reality as two-in-one and one-in-two. The school has a new term for this biune Reality. **Bhagavana** is not **Dwaita**, but **Yugala**.

The self-force of the Reality also has three poises or aspects—**sandhini**, **samvit** and **chadini**, respectively the power of being, the power of consciousness and the power of enjoyment. It is the last which is the characteristic power fully manifest in **Bhagavana**. The highest spiritual destiny of the individual soul is to love the Divine Lover in the supreme self-giving and utter surrender of oneself as a free gift; it is its own reward. **Bhakti**, devotion, which ripens into **prema**, love, is a natural disposition of the soul and **Bhaktiyoga**, the discipline of devotion is the path to its realisation and manifestation.

The **cit-sakti** or Conscious Force can be seen from another angle. It is a self-force but also **jiva-sakti**. The Jiva or the individual soul is a formation and manifestation of the **Jiva-sakti** and the other is the stuff and the power of the world of ignorance in which we live, move and have our being.

Here we find a synthesis of the different conceptions and experiences of the Brahman as delineated in the other schools of Vedanta. One thing is to be noted especially. Even if the Jiva, individual spiritual soul, is distinct from the supreme Reality, it is of the same nature as the latter; both are **cit**, Consciousness, uncreated, eternal, non-physical, non-vital, non-mental, non-intellectual and free from the ego-sense.

We are using the word soul for this reality but it must be pointed out that the word as used in this context does not mean what it conveys in the context of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. There is no concept parallel to the **atman** in Hinduism in the Semitic religions or the theologies based on them or in Western

thought. This difference is responsible for a lot of misunderstanding of Hinduism by Western writers. We cannot however deal with this subject here which merits separate discussion.

The relation between the individual spiritual soul and the ultimate Reality of course depends on the concept of Reality one has. If we take a comprehensive view of what the different Upanishads have to say on this topic, there will emerge a view which will be as follows: The Absolute, transcendent and ineffable in itself is also at the same time the One which by its inherent Conscious Force,—we say Reality and its Conscious Force which is suggestive of a duality, in fact, however they are the same Reality and it is inadequacy of language because of which we have to say Brahman and its Power,—becomes or manifests itself as individual self which is nothing but a centre of its Brahman's consciousness formed by itself for self-knowledge, self-action and self-enjoyment. The same Absolute is also the Lord and Master of its self manifestation as the universe. To this aspect of the Absolute, the individual soul's relation is one of unity, to the transcendent it is one of identity and about itself its awareness is that it is an individual manifestation of Ishwara, the Lord. While Ishwara is immanent in the universe, the Jiva or the individual soul also comes down in the universe, forgets its nature, and has to, by spiritual discipline, recover its self-knowledge which, if it is complete, will include the experience of difference-in-unity, unity-in-difference and identity. We can now see that of the different schools of Vedanta each formulates one experience, or if one school has more than one aspect include in its spiritual perceptions and the metaphysics based on that perception, it still prefers one to the others. For example, the Bengal school of Vaishnavism chooses Bhagawana aspect to that of the cosmic Creator and the immobile, immutable, indivisible Brahman. Ramanuja, Nimbarka, Madhwa and the others take only one among these patterns and do not accept the others as possible relations between the atman and the supreme Reality.

There is another statement of what we are discussing in the great Trika system of Kashmir. Shiva is the name of the Absolute Reality in the spiritual philosophy based on the **Agamas**. Shiva is not one of the gods, he does not belong to the trinity of Brahma Vishnu and Mahadeva. Shiva is not only **sat** and **cit** and **ananda**, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss but also Existent, Conscious, Blissful and the enjoyer of bliss. To use more familiar philosophical terms, it is both impersonal and personal, static and dynamic. It is, to use the terms of the school itself, **prakasa**,

illumination, and **vimarsa**, the force of self-illumination. Like Bhagavana and **Svarupa sakti** in the Bengal school of Vaishnavism, Shiva and Shakti, **prakasa** and **vimarsa** in the Trika, are a biune reality, **yamala**. As Shiva, it is transcendent, as Shakti it is immanent. That is to say, in the universe which is nothing but the objective 'expansion' of Shakti, Shiva is present everywhere. **Vimarsa** which is Shiva's force of self-illumination is also the power of self-limitation, **atma-samkoca**. This limitation in practice results in a loss of the all inclusive "I" inherent in Shiva. In the view of this school, material things like jewels, for example, also emit light, or illumination, they are also **prakasa**, but they do not have the sense of "I", they do not have, in other words, **vimarsa**. Matter is nothing but limited Illumination and this limitation is due to the absorption of self-illumination, **vimarsa**.

One result of the self-limitation of Shiva is his manifestation as individual self which assumes different poises on different levels of the universal manifestation. **Shakti** has, mainly speaking four levels of its existence and function, **cit-sakti**, **mahamaya**, **maya** and **prakriti**. **Prakriti** is more or less what it is in the Sankhya philosophy, unconscious, constituted by the three **gunas** and the immediate origin of our world. In **Prakriti** Shiva suffers complete self-forgetfulness and designated Purusha who is subject to **Prakriti**. **Maya** is the creator of the sense of division. In **Mahamāya** the individual soul starts having the sense of the One. In the different levels of knowledge within the realm of **cit-sakti** it becomes capable of integrating the world of multiplicity with the One of which the world is the self-objectification. The ultimate aim of this spiritual philosophy is to recover the full self-consciousness of Shiva by which it is dynamically identical with its own self-manifestation as the universe. The **samarasya**, perfect harmony or equipoise of Shiva and Shakti, is the state of **Paramashiva**. Individuality being the consequence of the self-limitation of Shiva and **Paramashiva** being the status of the integral Reality in which all self-limitation is transcended, individuality also is transcended. It would appear, therefore, that in this system, individuality is not retained in the ultimate realization.⁶ It is real in so far as Shiva

6. It should be pointed out that some exponents of the Trika believe that **Paramashiva** is a state in which the individual souls who attain to it do not lose their individuality but go beyond the sense of separation from **Paramashiva** and other liberated souls. This however does not seem to be the interpretation given in the classical texts of the school itself.

becomes the Jiva but the Jiva in recovering the state of Shivahood seems to cease to be Jiva, **pasabaddho-sivojiva**, **pasamukto jiva-sivah**. Shiva bound by fetters is Jiva, Jiva free of the fetters is Shiva.

The vast differences in spiritual experiences are a matter of history. We have looked at them from one point of view, namely that of the relation of the individual spiritual soul with the supreme Divine or Absolute. But the matter can be studied from other points of view too. For example, we can try to understand the differences in the light of the nature of the Reality in the different systems of spiritual philosophy which, to repeat once again, were intellectual formulations of spiritual experiences and not merely of rational speculations. A convenient starting point is again Sankhya of which the Yoga is the twin philosophy. These two systems have no place for what might be called the One Self or Ishawara, the Lord or the Absolute. Purusha, the separation of which from Prakriti is the aim of these philosophies, is multiple. Purusha is not one, but there are many souls. Purusha is devoid of any knowledge, will or capacity for enjoyment, all of which are functions of **buddhi**. It is pure Consciousness, eternally existent but that is all. In fact, one liberated Purusha is not even aware of other liberated Purushas. This is an authentic experience, but what about the One Self accepted by all the schools of Vedanta and the Monistic schools of Tantra, whatever may be our precise conception and experience of it?

Obviously if the Upanishads and the Gita and other Scriptures are proclaiming the existence of such a reality and also claiming that there are methods of training our consciousness in such a way that a direct experience of it can be obtained, it becomes necessary to look at the nature of the One Self. As experienced and explained by Shankaracharya, it is like the Purusha of the Sankhya, static, devoid of self-knowledge and action and power of self-enjoyment, though unlike the Sankhyan Purusha it is one and not many. Ramanuja's experience of Brahman is that of a Reality which is One but not exclusive of many souls and of **Maya** which is the cause of the world. The other acharyas or founders of Vedantic schools are more in agreement with Ramanuja than with Shankara. But in so far as the cosmos is concerned they do not bring in the idea of Conscious Force. In the Gita, one of the authorities of the Vedanta philosophy we come across the idea of the two Natures or rather the two phases of the Nature of Purushottama the superpersonal Divine. One is the

Conscious Force, the other its lower unconscious executive Energy. Creation is initiated by the Will of the Divine but executed by the lower Prakriti. This is important because it gives an altogether different picture of the Reality. If the "creative"⁷ impulse belongs to God himself, then it becomes possible for the liberated soul, while still living in the world, to take part in the maintenance of the world under the guidance of Divine Knowledge and as an instrument of the Divine Will. Neither Sankhya and Yoga nor Shankara, nor any of the other Vedantic acharyas will emphasize this. In fact, in Sankhya-Yoga and in Shankara there is no work to be done after liberation. But according to the Gita, though there is no work to be done either to fulfil one's personal desires for transient values or as moral duties towards one's fellows, there is still not only the possibility but also the joy of the work of the liberated, *muktasya karma*; Krishna says in the Gita that though he has nothing to obtain in the three worlds he continues to work incessantly because if he did not, the world and peoples would be destroyed. For it is His Conscious Power which maintains the world process and it is through liberated people who, though they have no personal axe to grind, yet submit to the Will of the Lord and accept to be his instruments, that the power of the Lord functions. Here we find the ideal of the synthesis of spiritual knowledge, utter spiritual devotion to the Lord and completely dedicated will become one with the Will of God, as a supreme fulfilment of the liberated man. Here we come across an experience richer and more comprehensive than we find in the Sankhya-Yoga or Shankara or the other schools of the Vedanta.

In the Tāntrik tradition we have different schools representing the diverse philosophical doctrines regarding the nature of Reality, individual souls, the world and liberation. We get dualistic, dualistic-cum-monistic and monistic systems. But in all Tāntrik systems the world is real and not an illusion. Nevertheless, the ultimate spiritual fulfilment of the liberated soul is not here in the universe but beyond. The world of Space, Time and Causality, of multiplicity and division, has no place in the consciousness of

7. We are using the word "creation" in the sense of "manifestation" and not in that of making something out of nothing by a "fiat" of Divine Will.

the liberated soul.⁸ Though it is real it has no spiritual worth. It is only a field where the moral and spiritual life has to be cultivated but once liberation has been obtained and the body has fallen off, the liberated soul does not come back there any more. In fact not to have to return to the world is the whole aim of attaining liberation. Even the Gita which makes work a means of liberation and an expression of a state of liberation and union with God, ultimately gives the injunction, "having been born in this transient and unhappy world turn to Me and adore Me (the Supreme Lord)", because He is the supreme refuge, and the supreme refuge is that from which there is no return to the world of flux. The monistic Tāntrik systems too do not envisage any ultimate spiritual fulfilment of the spiritual soul in the world of matter. This is in a sense rather strange because the Tāntrik tradition sets up the ideal, not only of liberation, **mukti**, but also of enjoyment, **bhukti**, which it must be emphasized, is pure spiritual experience of the Divine Shiva everywhere, in everything. In the practical yoga of the Tāntrik systems there are disciplines by which even the senses can be so spiritually converted into instruments of a new kind of knowledge and operation that they become sources of spiritual **bhoga**, enjoyment of the **rasa**, the inherent essence of all things which is Shiva himself. Yet these systems insist that the supreme realisation is not here in the world but beyond the universe. We should immediately point out that this has nothing to do with physical death but at the same time it is true to say that the material body of man itself does not become a partaker in the experience which the liberated soul has. The Isha Upanishad also speaks of enjoying Immortality, **amrtatavam asnute**, in the universal manifestation. Of course this follows the complete renouncing of all values other than union with the Lord, **Isha**. Since the Lord possesses the universe which is his self-manifestation, the awakened spiritual soul by union with the Lord enjoys his omnipresence in everything. Incidentally, Immortality does not mean the survival of physical death. It is, on the other hand, attaining to the state of existence beyond birth and death. And birth means the connection of the spiritual soul with the body and death its disconnection from the body. Truly speaking the soul's status is beyond all change, coming and going, and the direct knowledge of this status of its own self-existence is achiev-

8. These statements do not mean that the individual soul cannot attain liberation while it is still living in the body in this world. Their significance is explained in the rest of the paragraph.

ing Immortality. Needless to say that those spiritual philosophies which have a clear perception of God hold that the state of Immortality includes the knowledge of the soul's relation of union with him. Along with this the Upanishads assert that the liberated man is capable of becoming a master of desires; that is to say, he has control of the forces of Nature. The liberated soul becomes immortal by realizing the eternal **beyond** the universe, it enjoys immortality by realizing the same reality as Infinite **in** the Universe.

Enough perhaps has been said about the diversity of spiritual experiences all of which, I believe, are genuine and authentic. But why this diversity? The answer is to be sought in the medium of spiritual knowledge. In Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta it is the **buddhi** purified of all gross desire, tranquil, full of sattwa, settled in a state of equanimity and grown into the likeness of the **Purusha** or **atman**, the **cit**, which is reflected in such **buddhi** which is the medium of such knowledge. This is the instrument of spiritual experience and knowledge. I shall have occasion to say presently that in the other systems we have referred to, there are other instruments of the knowledge of the self and God. But let me point out here that what Sankhya, Yoga and Vedanta say about the pure **buddhi**, is completely true. There are methods by which such purification can be effected and experience confirms that the pure **buddhi** is capable of knowing the self. The **Katha Upanishad** (1.3.12) says that the Self is seen by the seers of the subtle sight, by the instrumentality of subtle intelligence, **sukshma-buddhi**.

This however raises a logical difficulty. If **buddhi** is a category of unconscious Prakriti or Maya, how can it be the medium of the knowledge of Purusha or Atman or Brahman? Purusha and Prakriti, Brahman and Maya are utterly disparate kinds of realities (we are not at the moment considering Maya as illusion), and there being nothing common between the two, it is not logically possible for anything in the latter to have experience or to be the medium of experience of the former. The Gita speaks of the Self knowing the Self which means that the Self has its own light by which it knows itself. This Light is of course not **buddhi** which in fact has no light of its own. This power of the Self of self-reflection, **cit-sakti**, Conscious-Force, **Vimarsha**, can be said to be the true medium of the knowledge of Reality. Abhinavagupta, the great Kashmiri philosopher and yogi, says that **samvit** or the highest spiritual Consciousness is really the only **pramana**, the only true source of all knowledge, spiritual or worldly. The truth of

the matter is that **cit-sakti** or **samvit** arranges itself on different levels in each of which it functions differently, till it comes down to the level of the sense where it has to know, or rather, the soul has to know, sensible objects through the senses. But as the consciousness involved in the senses becomes less bound to them, it becomes capable of knowing things less indirectly till it comes to the level on which it knows just by being itself without needing the help of any other instrument like **buddhi** and the senses. One of these levels of **samvit** is **buddhi**. If this be true, then it can be seen how **buddhi** can become the instrument of knowledge of spiritual realities whether they be the Purusha or Self or Ishwara or Brahman. Of course, that knowledge is by reflection and it is not the knowledge which the Self has of itself, through its own light. This way of looking at **buddhi** as a lower formulation of a higher, more direct source of knowledge needs a modification of the metaphysical position which attempts to explain existence and life by the two principles of Purusha and Prakriti as understood in Sankhya-Yoga or Brahman and Maya in Vedanta, but this is a subject which cannot be dealt with here.

I have mentioned above the Trika idea of **mahamaya** and the stages beyond it in which the spiritual soul released from the subjugation to *māya*, progressively achieves the capacity of integralising the universe to itself. This also is the process of its knowledge of itself as **Paramashiva**. There are five such stages counted by the Trika philosophy. It is not necessary here to go into the details. It will suffice to say that the object which appears to be completely separate from the subject in the world of *māya* is progressively seem to be a projection of the latter. There comes a stage where the division between the two becomes only a distinction held in Consciousness, it is only ideal. There in a state of developed spiritual knowledge, the object is the idea of objectivity. Let me hasten to add that this position is not at all similar to that of subjective idealism. Things are not merely states of consciousness of an individual mind. They are nonmental and independent of Ram or Rahim or John. Nevertheless things are formations or creations of a transcendent and Cosmic Consciousness and as such they exist in consciousness though not in mental consciousness. **But this cannot be known before a sense of unity has dawned on man.**

To know the self is to approach the perception of the One and though this first comes in a way that removes the many from oneself, later, according to Trika and in our day, Sri Aurobindo, the soul evolves to that level of its own existence on which, its

limitations having been shed, it is ready to integrate into itself the object which was nothing but a projection of its own Conscious Being. This growing knowledge of the true nature of the Self is not attained by the **buddhi** but higher instruments of the Conscious Force. In the last analysis knowledge is nothing but Consciousness in the subject becoming aware of Consciousness in the object. At one stage, there is perfect equipoise and there Consciousness is both subject and object and knows itself as subject being aware of itself as object. Beyond this level there is no movement of Consciousness and silence is the only expression.

If it be true, to take an example from the Vedantic schools, that the different experiences of the individual soul and the supreme Self and their mutual relationship and all the consequences of such experiences, as briefly mentioned above are real, and if it also be true that purified **buddhi** is a medium of such experiences, how can we account for the differences in the different schools? We cannot fall back upon the concept of **samvit** or Conscious Force as an instrument of self-knowledge as we find it conceived in Trika or Sri Aurobindo. The solution lies in seeing what level of experience of integral Self-Knowledge is reflected in the **Buddhi**.

It will be necessary here to look at the system of spiritual psychology as we find it in the writings of Sri Aurobindo. He also starts with the idea of Consciousness-Force which is infinite. The movement of Consciousness-Force towards itself and therefore towards Being—let us remember that Consciousness is fundamental, not only undeniable but also indubitable and therefore is Being,—emerges as integral knowledge. Infinite Consciousness turns itself into the infinite faculty of Knowledge or Omniscience. Sri Aurobindo calls this the Supermind which is the Divine's own Knowledge of himself. But this self-knowledge of the Divine includes in itself world-knowledge, the integral perception of the universe-to-be. Thus the Supermind is the Divine self-knowledge and world-knowledge. It has, according to Sri Aurobindo, three poises or statuses. In the first there is an equal concentration and there is no individualisation; not only is there no separative ego but there is no spiritual individuality either. Everything that is to be manifested is contained here but everything is One with the Divine as the All. Thus All is in each and each is in All, in fact, All is each and each is All. In the second poise there are formations of centres of Consciousness, of the individual souls. Here also, in spite of the emergence of individuality, there is no sense of separateness. Each individual soul knows itself as the Absolute who is also cosmic and individual, it also knows at the same time

that there are other individual souls which are equally the Absolute and thus cosmic and individual. In the third poise each individual soul looks at the movement of consciousness as something a bit removed from itself, the movement taking the form of something looked at, regarded, known, as an object. There is no sense of separation as yet, the object is only ideal, held within the consciousness which regards it. It is at this stage that the tendency of the individual soul to look upon a movement of its own consciousness as separate from itself starts. This will give rise to what Sri Aurobindo calls "ignorance", the parent of the sense of division between the Divine and soul, between soul and soul and the soul and the world.

It is the reflection of one or the other of these three poises of the Supermind on the pure and tranquil buddhi that gives rise to the experiences behind the non-dual, the non-dualistic-cum-dualistic and the dualistic schools respectively of Vedanta.

It is indeed only when our human mentality lays an exclusive emphasis on one side of spiritual experience, affirms that to be the sole eternal truth and states it in the terms of our all-dividing mental logic that the necessity for mutually destructive schools of philosophy arises. Thus, emphasising the sole truth of the unitarian consciousness, we observe the play of the divine unity, erroneously rendered by our mentality into the terms of real difference, but, not satisfied with correcting this error of the mind by the truth of a higher principle, we assert that the play itself is an illusion. Or, emphasising the play of the One in the Many, we declare a qualified unity and regard the individual soul as a soul-form of the Supreme, but would assert the eternity of this qualified existence and deny altogether the experience of a pure consciousness in an unqualified oneness. Or,* again, emphasising the play of difference, we assert that the Supreme and the human soul are eternally different and reject the validity of an experience which exceeds and seems to abolish that difference.⁹

Is there any way of synthesizing these different standpoints? There is a harmony possible, not by logical dialectic but by a comprehensive synthesis of the authentic spiritual experiences which are the root of these philosophies. We may include in this synthesis, not only the viewpoints of the different Vedantic schools but also those of the various schools representing the Tantrik tra-

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dition which too are formulated in monistic, monistic-cum-dualistic and dualistic ways. This will mean a synthesis also of the ideas of liberation and mastery and enjoyment, of attaining Immortality beyond all manifestation and enjoying it in the universe. But this will require the evolution of our consciousness to the level of Supermind, to the integral Knowledge which is in possession of the Truth of the Divine in itself and the Divine in the world.

We have seen that in the Trika philosophy the limitation of individuality persists till the soul achieves self-knowledge as the Absolute. We have seen also that this means an abolition of individuality. The supramental knowledge however sees the supreme Reality as transcendent, cosmic and individual. In the supramental knowledge there is no diminution of Being, Consciousness and Delight. Thus I am justified in saying that supramental idealism achieves a synthesis more integral than that attained by the Trika. This integral Knowledge which is also the supreme creative Will, if brought down into the world and applied to mind, life and body, will achieve practical results not only not attempted, but also not dreamed of, till now in spiritual philosophy. But of that I cannot write here. I will conclude with briefly pointing out, in Sri Aurobindo's own words, the bearing it has on the knowledge of the Reality.

...“The position that we have now firmly taken”, says Sri Aurobindo, “abolishes us from the necessity of these negations and exclusions: we see that there is a truth behind all these affirmations, but at the same time an excess which leads to an ill-founded negation. Affirming, as we have done, the absolute absoluteness of That, not limited by our ideas of unity, not limited by our ideas of multiplicity affirming the unity as a basis for the manifestation of the multiplicity and the multiplicity as a basis for the return to oneness and the enjoyment of unity in the divine manifestation, we need not burden our present statement with these discussions or undertake the vain labour of enslaving to our mental distinctions and definitions the absolute freedom of the Divine Infinite.¹⁰”

Again,

Obviously, these three poises (of the Supermind as briefly mentioned above) would be only different ways of dealing with

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the same Truth; the Truth of existence enjoyed would be the same, the way of enjoying it or rather the poise of the soul enjoying it would be different. The delight, the Ananda would vary, but would abide always within the status of the Truth-Consciousness and involve no lapse into the Falsehood and the Ignorance. For the secondary and tertiary Supermind would only develop and apply in the terms of the divine multiplicity what the primary supermind had held in the terms of the divine unity. We cannot stam any of these three poises with a stigma of falsehood and illusion. The language of the Upanishads, the supreme ancient authority for these truths of a higher experience, when they speak of the Divine existence which is manifesting itself, implies the validity of all these experiences. We can only assert the priority of the oneness to the multiplicity a priority not in time but in relation of consciousness, and no statement of supreme spiritual experience, no Vedantic philosophy denies this priority or the eternal dependence of the Many on the One. It is because in Time the Many seem not to be eternal but to manifest out of the One and return into it as their essence that their reality is denied; but it might equally be reasoned that the eternal persistence or, if you will, the eternal recurrence of the manifestation in Time is a proof that the divine multiplicity is an eternal fact of the Supreme beyond Time no less than the divine unity; otherwise it could not have this characteristic of inevitable eternal recurrence in Time.¹¹

The supreme synthesis of the ineffable transcendent Absolute manifesting itself as the One which in its turn formulates itself as the Many, of liberation from the false subjection of the soul to its mental, vital and physical instruments, to know the One and enjoy it in the Many and as the culmination, to prepare mind, life and body, apparently unspiritual, for the clear emergence of the Divine in them so that "even the body can remember God" is the challenge of the present and the promise of the future to which the evolving soul of man is progressing. This is the consummation which the Grace of the Divine and the aspiration of the Self involved in Matter are preparing in the march of Time in which it will be truly the moving image of Eternity.

Two things are worth mentioning in connection with the ideal of integral realisation. Indeed it is necessary to refer to them because they will make it clear. First, Sri Aurobindo has said that the ideals of the traditional yogas have to be realised on

11. Vol. 19, pp. 881-82

planes of consciousness which are derived from the Supermind and are, as we have already mentioned, in touch with the Truth. As far back as 1920 he wrote that after realising complete knowledge, utter devotion and perfect dedication of will and effecting a synthesis of them on the spiritual mind level, his yoga aimed at elevating this realisation to the supramental level. We already find in the Gita a perfect synthesis of spiritual knowledge, love and will. And yet from Sri Aurobindo's point of view, its perfection is not perfect. Though the Gita has shown that the way of will and action can be both means of attaining true self-knowledge and God-knowledge and an expression of the state of union of the liberated soul with the Divine, the work to which God appoints liberated **karmayogins** is **loka-samgraha**, the maintenance of the worlds and peoples according to Dharma. But its ultimate call to the aspiring soul is to the Beyond, to the supreme refuge, the Lord, from which there is no return to this world. The world is still left as it always has been and no integral fulfilment or the individual in all the parts of his being and nature nor a new collective existence and life is envisaged. The fact that its philosophy and yoga are so comprehensive and synthetic is due to this that the state of realisation represented by it belongs to a plane higher than the pure mind, that it is not perfectly integral is because the realization is on plane lower than the Supermind.

Talking about evolution of the spiritual man, Sri Aurobindo clearly shows the difference of spirituality from refined morality, high idealism, philanthropy, charity and such other noble things which the mind of man easily mistakes as spirituality. Spirituality is nothing short of the pursuit of the direct experience of the Spirit. Such experience may express itself in philanthropy, charity, etc., but these latter can be manifested in man without there being spirituality. When man turns to spirituality, says Sri Aurobindo,

an awareness comes perhaps of an inner light, of a guidance or a communion, of a greater control than the mind and will to which something in us obeys; but all is not yet recast in the mould of that experience. But when these intuitions and illuminations grow in insistence and canalise themselves, make a strong inner formation and claim to govern the whole life and take over the nature, then there begins the spiritual formation of the being; there emerges the saint, the devotee, the spiritual sage, the seer, the prophet, the servant of God, the soldier of the spirit. All these take their stand on one part of the natural being lifted

up by a spiritual light, power or ecstasy. The sage and seer live in the spiritual mind, their thought or their vision is governed and moulded by an inner or a greater divine light of knowledge; the devotee lives in the spiritual aspiration of the heart, its self-offering and its seeking? the saint is moved by the awakened psychic being in the inner heart grown powerful to govern the emotional and vital being; the others stand in the vital kinetic nature driven by a higher spiritual energy and turned by it towards an inspired action, a God-given work or mission, the service of some divine Power, idea or ideal. The last or highest emergence is the liberated man who has realised the Self and Spirit within him, entered into the cosmic consciousness, passed into union with the Eternal and, so far as he still accepts life and action, acts by the light and energy of the Power within him, working through his human instruments of Nature. The largest formulation of this spiritual change and achievement is a total liberation of soul, mind, heart and action, a casting of them all into the sense of the cosmic Self and the Divine Reality. The spiritual evolution of the individual has then found its way and thrown up its range of Himalayan eminences and its peaks of highest nature. Beyond this height and largeness there opens only the supramental ascent or the incommunicable Transcendence.¹²

Of the integral realisation there is another characteristic feature on which something, however briefly, must be said. The realisation is to be by the whole being and nature of man, not only by the spiritual soul in him but also by his mind, vital and body. Since everything is a formulation and formation of consciousness, there is not only in mind and life but also in the body a secret consciousness waiting to be manifested. The "unconscious consciousness" or the physical consciousness in the body can be made, according to Sri Aurobindo, by the integral yoga, conscious in such a way that it can know its own truth, namely, that it is a formation of Consciousness, an image of God. For this the present nature of mind, life and body have to be transformed and after the realisation of the true individual self, the cosmic Self and the Lord of all universal manifestation by the aspiring soul, through the Supermind, the transforming power of the supermind must be brought down to mind, life and body, radically to change their substance, structure and function.

12. Sri Aurobindo adds in a footnote: 'This is the essence of the spiritual ideal and realization held before us by the Gita.'

An inevitable, though possibly a distant, consequence of this supramental realisation will also be a new spiritual collective existence. For the Divine is also the Soul of the collectivity. The collective soul too in the course of evolution is bound to emerge and manifest as the leading power of communal life. Not the mind, however refined and enlightened and ethically inspired, but the soul will be the natural leader of the society. To see the Divine not only in the individual but also in the community and eventually in humanity is an important element of the supramental realisation and manifestation. The supramental realisation of God implies both vertical and horizontal opening of consciousness. It is a heightening as much as a widening of our consciousness and needless to say that an inward turn towards the spiritual soul in us is indispensable. All that is in Nature is from the Divine but not divine. To bring out the inner Divinity in all things and in all movements of consciousness on all levels is the aim of the integral realisation which can come via the Supermind alone. The one who does this intimately and always is a superman, the crown of creation.