

Sri Aurobindo on Subliminal Consciousness

Compiled and introduced by U. Mohrhoff

A compilation of passages from two of the major works of Sri Aurobindo, concerning the subliminal regions of our consciousness, with biographical sketches of Sri Aurobindo and of F. W. H. Myers, who coined the term “subliminal consciousness” and introduced the subject into scientific psychology. In *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*, Kelly et al. (2006) argued that the subliminal parts of our consciousness hold the key to all or most of the phenomena we tend to label as “paranormal.” According to Sri Aurobindo, they also hold the key to all or most of the phenomena studied by “ordinary” psychology. Through the subliminal we can enter non-physical planes of existence, whose *raison d'être* is explained.

1 Introduction

F. W. H. Myers

The authors of *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* (Kelly et al., 2006) have marshaled evidence for a large variety of psychological phenomena that are extremely difficult, and in many cases clearly impossible, to account for in conventional physicalist terms. (See the summary and review of this outstanding volume in *AntiMatters* Vol. 1, No. 1, 2007, pp. 161–191.) Kelly et al. chose to frame the relevant issues in the context of the work of F. W. H. Myers, a largely forgotten genius of scientific psychology.

Like many of the intellectual leaders of the mid-19th century, Myers rejected the Christianity in which he had been raised. However, the assumption that mind is a byproduct of purely material processes seemed to him just as gratuitous. To examine it along novel lines of empirical research, Myers helped found the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882, whose founders and early members included such prominent scientists and intellectual leaders as Arthur and Gerald Balfour, W. F. Barrett, W. E. Gladstone, Sir Oliver Lodge, Lord Rayleigh, John Ruskin, F. C. S. Schiller, Henry and Eleanor Sidgwick, Balfour Stewart, Lord Tennyson, and J. J. Thomson.

For the first two decades of the SPR's existence, Myers was one of its most active investigators and prolific writers. His model of human personality, which he began to formulate in the early 1880s and then presented in detail in the 1890s, became the theoretical framework for psychical research and remained so for decades. In fact, much of William James's later work, including *Varieties of Religious Experience* and *A Pluralistic Universe*, can be viewed as the systematic application of Myers's central theoretical ideas to problems in religion, epistemology, and metaphysics.

Between the formation of the SPR in 1882 and his death in 1901, Myers and his colleagues published in their *Proceedings* and *Journal* over 10,000 pages of reports on supernatural phenomena, including not only extended field observations with mediums and heavily documented studies of spontaneous cases, but early attempts to study telepathy and kindred phenomena experimentally and quantitatively. Gauld echoes James¹ when he writes, “The industry, thoroughness, and care manifest in these publications is unsurpassed in any scientific literature known to me” (Kelly et al., 2006, p. 353). Aldous Huxley (1961, pp. 7–8), comparing Myers’s (1903) posthumously published *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*² (HP) to better-known writings on the “unconscious” by Freud and Jung, justly wondered:

How strange and how unfortunate it is that this amazingly rich, profound, and stimulating book should have been neglected in favor of descriptions of human nature less complete and of explanations less adequate to the given facts!

And in his review of Myers’s (1903), James (1903) wrote:

Myers’s theory, so far, is simple enough. It only postulates an indefinite inward extension of our being, cut off from common consciousness by a screen or diaphragm not absolutely impervious but liable to leakage and to occasional rupture. The “scientific” critic can only say it is a pity that so vast and vaguely defined a hypothesis should be reared upon a set of facts so few and so imperfectly ascertained.

A century later, it isn’t the case any longer that the relevant facts are “so few” and that all or even most of these facts are “imperfectly ascertained.” Many of Myers’s observations have been powerfully confirmed, reinforcing the need for a theory of human personality which — like his — encompasses the full range of human experience.

It was Myers who introduced the term “subliminal consciousness” into scientific psychology. His huge body of published writings is essentially an elaboration of the view that certain phenomena of psychology, particularly of abnormal psychology and psychical research, demonstrate that human personality is far more extensive than we ordinarily realize. For Myers, our ordinary waking consciousness amounts to a relatively small selection of psychological elements and processes from a more extensive consciousness, the subliminal self. Thus Myers suggested — to give an example — that genius should be regarded as a power of utilizing a wider than normal range of faculties, “a power of appropriating the results of subliminal mentation to subserve the supraliminal stream of thought” (HP, vol. 1, p. 71). He described the “inspiration of genius” (his own quotes) as

1 “In fact, were I asked to point to a scientific journal where hard-headedness and never-sleeping suspicion of sources of error might be seen in their full bloom, I think I should have to fall back on the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*.” (James, 1910, pp. 304-305)

2 *Irreducible Mind* comes with a CD-ROM containing this hard-to-find work.

a subliminal uprush, an emergence into the current of ideas which the man is consciously manipulating of other ideas which he has not consciously originated, but which have shaped themselves beyond his will, in profounder regions of his being. I shall urge that there is here no real departure from normality. . . but rather a fulfilment of the true norm of man, with suggestions, it may be, of something supernormal; – of something which transcends existing normality as an advanced stage of evolutionary progress transcends an earlier stage. (HP, vol. 1, p. 71)

To Myers, genius represents the norm of the future. Ordinary supraliminal perceptual and cognitive processes reveal only relatively superficial aspects of a far wider and deeper environment, mostly unknown, in which we are immersed. Evolution consists “not only of gradual self-adaptation to a known environment, but of discovery of an environment, always there, but unknown” (HP, vol. 1, p. 95). This discovery leads to the progressive mobilization of faculties initially subliminal. “Man is in course of evolution,” Myers wrote anticipating Sri Aurobindo, and “it may be in his power to hasten his own evolution in ways previously unknown” (HP, vol. 1, p. 23).

Kelly et al. (2006) aim to carry Myers’s project forward in the context of relevant substantive and methodological achievements of the intervening century, predicting that the psychology of the 21st Century will be a “psychological filter theory of the Myers/James sort.” James had pointed out that “[w]hen we think of the law that thought is a function of the brain, we are not required to think of productive function only; we are entitled also to consider permissive or transmissive function” (James, 1898/1900, p. 15). Most subsequent advocates of James’s analysis have favored its “transmission” thread, so much so that the whole picture is now widely known by that name. In the view of Kelly et al. (2006, p. 607), it is actually the other thread – permission – that is theoretically the more promising:

by thinking of the brain as an organ which somehow constrains, regulates, restricts, limits, and enables or permits expression of the mind in its full generality, we can obtain an account of mind-brain relations which potentially reconciles Myers’s theory of the Subliminal Self with the observed correlations between mind and brain, while circumventing the conceptual difficulties. . . in transmission models.

Within the framework recommended by Kelly et al. (2006, p. 637–638),

human personality would be pictured as a complex system made up of the same kind of ‘stuff’ throughout. The system consists of a hierarchy of levels or strata of the types recognized in particular by Myers, James, and the wisdom traditions. Each level is characterized by its own form of psychophysical organization and has both interior and exterior aspects that allow it to participate in some form of experienced world appropriate to itself. The activities of these different strata are somehow interconnected, and coordinated in greater or lesser degree, by something like Myers’s Subliminal Self, or by a consciousness that somehow underlies or pervades the whole structure. . . We need to chart more fully and accurately the natural history of these “higher” or “deeper” subliminal realms. How many meaningfully distinguishable states or levels of consciousness actually or potentially exist within us, with what properties and what relationships to each other? Under what sorts of conditions do they occur, and what sorts of consequences do they have? Can we harness the benefits of potentially useful states by developing improved means of facilitating their occurrence?

Sri Aurobindo

We owe to Sri Aurobindo what is arguably the most comprehensive and meticulous cartography of the subliminal realms. Sri Aurobindo is a rare example of an accomplished yogi who received his education in the West, where he imbibed the essence of the modern scientific attitude. Through an original synthesis of yogic methods, he developed psychic, intuitive and spiritual faculties and realizations of the highest order without any loss of intellectual clarity and capacity for systematic observation.

Whereas Sri Aurobindo has been described as a great thinker³ and compared to some of the greatest philosophers,⁴ he himself asserted that his works were produced without the aid of thought, and he emphatically denied being a philosopher. “Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher,” he wrote in a letter to a disciple,⁵

although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. . . How I managed to do it and why? First, because Paul Richard proposed to me to co-operate in a philosophical review⁶ – and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher! (Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, p. 374)

What Sri Aurobindo meant by yoga may be gleaned from the following passage:

In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the secret potentialities latent in the being and – highest condition of victory in that effort – a union of the human individual with the universal and transcendent Existence we see partially expressed in man and in the Cosmos. But all life,

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- 3 “Sri Aurobindo [is] the foremost of Indian thinkers, who has realized the most complete synthesis between the genius of the West and of the East.” – Romain Rolland, Nobel Laureate.
 - 4 “We have Plato, Spinoza, Kant and Hegel, but they do not have the same all-embracing metaphysical structure, they do not have the same vision.” – Frederic Spiegelberg, professor emeritus of Indian civilization and pioneer in comparative religious studies at Stanford.
 - 5 In a biographical note written in 1940 or 1941, Sri Aurobindo (1983) states: “I owed nothing in my philosophy to intellectual abstractions, ratiocinations, or dialectics; when I have used these means it was simply to explain my philosophy and justify it to the intellect of others.”
 - 6 The *Arya*, which ran from August 1914 to January 1921. It contains in serialized form almost all of Sri Aurobindo’s major works, including *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on The Gita*, *The Secret of The Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *The Upanishads*, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *War and Self-determination*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, and *The Future Poetry*.

when we look behind its appearances, is a vast Yoga of Nature who attempts in the conscious and the subconscious to realise her perfection in an ever-increasing expression of her yet unrealised potentialities and to unite herself with her own divine reality. (Sri Aurobindo, 1999, p. 6)

After his return to India in 1893, Sri Aurobindo spent thirteen years in the service of the Maharaja of Baroda, where he acted mostly as Vice-Principal of Baroda College.⁷ During this period Sri Aurobindo worked behind the scenes to establish a revolutionary movement. In 1905 the announcement by the British Government that Bengal would be partitioned provoked unprecedented agitation. Seeing improved prospects for open political action, Sri Aurobindo accepted an offer to become the first principal of the newly founded Bengal National College, went to Calcutta, and plunged into the fray. Between 1905 and 1910 he acted primarily as a political journalist and as one of the leaders of the radical wing of the Indian National Congress. In 1907 a warrant for sedition was served against him as editor of the journal *Bande Mataram*. He was acquitted, but the trial made headlines around the country and brought him to national attention.

While his fame as a nationalist leader was at its height, Sri Aurobindo met a yogin named Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. He explained to him that he wanted to practice yoga in order to obtain spiritual strength for his political work. They retired to a secluded place, and within three days Sri Aurobindo realized the state of consciousness which in India had come to be looked upon as the consummation of all spiritual seeking. In the absolute stillness of his mind there arose “the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality” (Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, p. 87) which was “attended at first by an overwhelming feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world” (ibid., p. 64).

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. . . the only positive reality. . . 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. . . what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was 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

⁷ In addition to Sri Aurobindo’s own writings, I have used the following biographical sources: Heehs, 1989; Purani, 1978.

as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine. (Sri Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 49 – 50.)

While his body at first continued to act as “an empty automatic machine” (Nirodbaran, 1985, p. 187), a new mode of action soon became evident:

something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara and felt himself moved by that in all his Sadhana⁸ and action. (Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, p. 86)

Before the two parted company, Lele told Sri Aurobindo to surrender to the guide within him. If he could do this completely, he would have no further need of a human guru. Sri Aurobindo accepted the advice. At least once, however, he took no heed of the inner guide. When a call came to him to put aside his political activity and go into seclusion, he was unable to accept it. About a month later he found himself in solitary confinement as a prisoner under trial. During his imprisonment, Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual realization enlarged itself into an all-encompassing awareness of the Divine. The bars of the cell, the high prison walls, the thieves and the murderers, the magistrate and the prosecution counsel — all became forms of the omnipresent Godhead.

After his acquittal, Sri Aurobindo carried on his political and journalistic activities for another nine months, but with a shift of emphasis. He no longer regarded the liberation of India as a goal in itself. If India must become a great and independent nation, it was to give to humanity the spiritual knowledge that a long line of Rishis, saints and Avatars had developed and perfected in the seclusion of the Indian peninsula.

One evening in 1910 Sri Aurobindo received an inner command to go to the French settlement of Chandernagore. This time he obeyed at once. About a month later he moved on to Pondicherry where he remained until his passing in 1950. He originally thought to return to politics after completing his yoga in a year or two at most. But before long “the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him” (Sri Aurobindo, 1972a, p. 37). It was no longer a question of revolt against the British government; he was now waging “a revolt against the whole universal Nature” (Purani, 1982, p. 37).

What follows are excerpts from two of Sri Aurobindo’s major works, *The Life Divine* (LD) and *The Synthesis of Yoga* (SY).

2 Subliminal consciousness

The difficulties which arise from the imperfect poise of Consciousness and Force in man in his present status of mind and life are principally three. First, he is aware only of a small part of his own being: his surface mentality, his surface life, his sur-

⁸ The practice of yoga.

face physical being is all that he knows and he does not know even all of that; below is the occult surge of his subconscious and his subliminal mind, his subconscious and his subliminal life-impulses, his subconscious corporeality, all that large part of himself which he does not know and cannot govern, but which rather knows and governs him. For, existence and consciousness and force being one, we can only have some real power over so much of our existence as we are identified with by self-awareness; the rest must be governed by its own consciousness which is subliminal to our surface mind and life and body. And yet, the two being one movement and not two separate movements, the larger and more potent part of ourselves must govern and determine in the mass the smaller and less powerful; therefore 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. (LD 212)



A superficial observation of our waking consciousness shows us that of a great part of our individual being and becoming we are quite ignorant; it is to us the Inconscient, just as much as the life of the plant, the metal, the earth, the elements. But if we carry our knowledge farther, pushing psychological experiment and observation beyond their normal bounds, we find how vast is the sphere of this supposed Inconscient or this subconscious in our total existence, — the subconscious, so seeming and so called by us because it is a concealed consciousness, — and what a small and fragmentary portion of our being is covered by our waking self-awareness. We arrive at the knowledge that our waking mind and ego are only a superimposition upon a submerged, a subliminal self, — for so that self appears to us, — or, more accurately, an inner being, with a much vaster capacity of experience; our mind and ego are like the crown and dome of a temple jutting out from the waves while the great body of the building is submerged under the surface of the waters.

This concealed self and consciousness is our real or whole being, of which the outer is a part and a phenomenon, a selective formation for a surface use. We perceive only a small number of the contacts of things which impinge upon us; the inner being perceives all that enters or touches us and our environment. We perceive only a part of the workings of our life and being; the inner being perceives so much that we might almost suppose that nothing escapes its view. We remember only a small selection from our perceptions, and of these even we keep a great part in a store-room where we cannot always lay our hand upon what we need; the inner being retains everything that it has ever received and has it always ready to hand. We can form into co-ordinated understanding and knowledge only so much of our perceptions and memories as our trained intelligence and mental capacity can grasp in their sense and appreciate in their relations: the intelligence of the inner being needs no training, but preserves the accurate form and relations of all its perceptions and memories and, — though this is a proposition which may be considered doubtful or difficult to concede in its fullness, — can grasp immediately, when it does not possess already, their significance. And its perceptions are not confined, as are ordinarily

those of the waking mind, to the scanty gleanings of the physical senses, but extend far beyond and use, as telepathic phenomena of many kinds bear witness, a subtle sense the limits of which are too wide to be easily fixed. The relations between the surface will or impulsion and the subliminal urge, mistakenly described as unconscious or subconscious, have not been properly studied except in regard to unusual and unorganised manifestations and to certain morbidly abnormal phenomena of the diseased human mind; but if we pursue our observation far enough, we shall find that the cognition and will or impulsive force of the inner being really stand behind the whole conscious becoming; the latter represents only that part of its secret endeavour and achievement which rises successfully to the surface of our life. To know our inner being is the first step towards a real self-knowledge.

If we undertake this self-discovery and enlarge our knowledge of the subliminal self, so conceiving it as to include in it our lower subconscient and upper superconscient ends, we shall discover that it is really this which provides the whole material of our apparent being and that our perceptions, our memories, our effectuations of will and intelligence are only a selection from its perceptions, memories, activities and relations of will and intelligence; our very ego is only a minor and superficial formulation of its self-consciousness and self-experience. It is, as it were, the urgent sea out of which the waves of our conscious becoming arise. (LD 554-557)



We are aware of our body and know that we have a physical existence, even very largely identify ourselves with it, and yet most of its operations are really subconscious to our mental being; not only does the mind take no part in them but, as we suppose, our most physical being has no awareness of its own hidden operations or, by itself, of its own existence; it knows or rather feels only so much of itself as is enlightened by mind-sense and observable by intelligence.

We are aware of a vitality working in this bodily form and structure as in the plant or lower animal, a vital existence which is also for the most part subconscious to us, for we only observe some of its movements and reactions. We are partly aware of its operations, but not by any means of all or most of them, and rather of those which are abnormal than those which are normal; its wants impress themselves more forcibly upon us than its satisfactions, its diseases and disorders than its health and its regular rhythm, its death is more poignant to us than its life is vivid; we know as much of it as we can consciously observe and use or as much as forces itself upon us by pain and pleasure and other sensations or as a cause of nervous or physical reaction and disturbance, but no more.

Accordingly, we suppose that this vital-physical part of us also is not conscious of its own operations or has only a suppressed consciousness or no-consciousness like the plant or an inchoate consciousness like the incipient animal; it becomes conscious only so far as it is enlightened by mind and observable by intelligence. This is an exaggeration and a confusion due to our identification of consciousness with mentality and mental awareness. Mind identifies itself to a certain extent with the movements

proper to physical life and body and annexes them to its mentality, so that all consciousness seems to us to be mental. But if we draw back, if we separate the mind as witness from these parts of us, we can discover that life and body, — even the most physical parts of life, — have a consciousness of their own, a consciousness proper to an obscurer vital and to a bodily being, even such an elemental awareness as primitive animal forms may have, but in us partly taken up by the mind and to that extent mentalised. Yet it has not, in its independent motion, the mental awareness which we enjoy; if there is mind in it, it is mind involved and implicit in the body and in the physical life: there is no organised self-consciousness, but only a sense of action and reaction, movement, impulse and desire, need, necessary activities imposed by Nature, hunger, instinct, pain, insensibility and pleasure. Although thus inferior, it has this awareness obscure, limited and automatic; but since it is less in possession of itself, void of what to us is the stamp of mentality, we may justly call it the sub-mental, but not so justly the subconscious part of our being. For when we stand back from it, when we can separate our mind from its sensations, we perceive that this is a nervous and sensational and automatically dynamic mode of consciousness, a gradation of awareness different from the mind: it has its own separate reactions to contacts and is sensitive to them in its own power of feeling; it does not depend for that on the mind's perception and response.

The true subconscious is other than this vital or physical substratum; it is the Inconscient vibrating on the borders of consciousness, sending up its motions to be changed into conscious stuff, swallowing into its depths impressions of past experience as seeds of unconscious habit and returning them constantly but often chaotically to the surface consciousness, missioning upwards much futile or perilous stuff of which the origin is obscure to us, in dream, in mechanical repetitions of all kinds, in untraceable impulsions and motives, in mental, vital, physical perturbations and upheavals, in dumb automatic necessities of our obscurest parts of nature.

But the subliminal self has not at all this subconscious character: it is in full possession of a mind, a life-force, a clear subtle-physical sense of things. It has the same capacities as our waking being, a subtle sense and perception, a comprehensive extended memory and an intensive selecting intelligence, will, self-consciousness; but even though the same in kind, they are wider, more developed, more sovereign. And it has other capacities which exceed those of our mortal mind because of a power of direct awareness of the being, whether acting in itself or turned upon its object, which arrives more swiftly at knowledge, more swiftly at effectivity of will, more deeply at understanding and satisfaction of impulse.

Our surface mind is hardly a true mentality, so involved, bound, hampered, conditioned is it by the body and bodily life and the limitations of the nerve-system and the physical organs. But the subliminal self has a true mentality superior to these limitations; it exceeds the physical mind and physical organs although it is aware of them and their works and is, indeed, in a large degree their cause or creator. It is only subconscious in the sense of not bringing all or most of itself to the surface, it works always behind the veil: it is rather a secret intraconscient and circumcon-

scient than a subconscient; for it envelops quite as much as it supports the outer nature.

This description is no doubt truest of the deeper parts of the subliminal; in other layers of it nearer to our surface there is a more ignorant action and those who, penetrating within, pause in the zones of lesser coherence or in the No-man's-land between the subliminal and the surface, may fall into much delusion and confusion: but that too, though ignorant, is not of the nature of the subconscious; the confusion of these intermediate zones has no kinship to the Inconscience.

We might say then that there are three elements in the totality of our being: there is the submental and the subconscient which appears to us as if it were inconscient, comprising the material basis and a good part of our life and body; there is the subliminal, which comprises the inner being, taken in its entirety of inner mind, inner life, inner physical with the soul or psychic entity supporting them; there is this waking consciousness which the subliminal and the subconscient throw up on the surface, a wave of their secret surge.

But even this is not an adequate account of what we are; for there is not only something deep within behind our normal self-awareness, but something also high above it: that too is ourselves, other than our surface mental personality, but not outside our true self; that too is a country of our spirit. For the subliminal proper is no more than the inner being on the level of the Knowledge-Ignorance luminous, powerful and extended indeed beyond the poor conception of our waking mind, but still not the supreme or the whole sense of our being, not its ultimate mystery.

We become aware, in a certain experience, of a range of being superconscient to all these three, aware too of something, a supreme highest Reality sustaining and exceeding them all, which humanity speaks of vaguely as Spirit, God, the Oversoul: from these superconscient ranges we have visitations and in our highest being we tend towards them and to that supreme Spirit. There is then in our total range of existence a superconscience as well as a subconscious and inconscience, overarching and perhaps enveloping our subliminal and our waking selves, but unknown to us, seemingly unattainable and incommunicable.

But with the extension of our knowledge we discover what this Spirit or Oversoul is: it is ultimately our own highest deepest vastest Self, it is apparent on its summits or by reflection in ourselves as Sachchidananda⁹ creating us and the world by the power of His divine Knowledge-Will, spiritual, supramental, truth-conscious, infinite. That is the real Being, Lord and Creator, who, as the Cosmic Self veiled in Mind and Life and Matter, has descended into that which we call the Inconscient and con-

9 Editor's note: Sri Aurobindo adopts the conceptual framework of the original Vedanta of the Upanishads, which relates Brahman — the ultimate reality — to its manifestation as a substance (*sat*) that constitutes, as a consciousness (*chit*) that contains, and as an infinite bliss (*ānanda*) that expresses and experiences itself in finite forms. Sachchidananda = Sat + Chit + Ananda.

stitutes and directs its subconscious existence by His supramental will and knowledge, has ascended out of the Inconscient and dwells in the inner being constituting and directing its subliminal existence by the same will and knowledge, has cast up out of the subliminal our surface existence and dwells secretly in it overseeing with the same supreme light and mastery its stumbling and groping movements.

If the subliminal and subconscious may be compared to a sea which throws up the waves of our surface mental existence, the superconscience may be compared to an ether which constitutes, contains, overroofs, inhabits and determines the movements of the sea and its waves. It is there in this higher ether that we are inherently and intrinsically conscious of our self and spirit, not as here below by a reflection in silent mind or by acquisition of the knowledge of a hidden Being within us; it is through it, through that ether of superconscience, that we can pass to a supreme status, knowledge, experience. Of this superconscient existence through which we can arrive at the highest status of our real, our supreme Self, we are normally even more ignorant than of the rest of our being; yet is it into the knowledge of it that our being emerging out of the involution¹⁰ in Inconscience is struggling to evolve. (LD 558-562)



The subliminal being. . . is not confined like the surface Mind to the interpretation of sense-images and sense-vibrations supplemented by the mental and vital intuition and the reason. There is indeed an inner sense in the subliminal nature, a subtle sense of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste; but these are not confined to the creation of images of things belonging to the physical environment, — they can present to the consciousness visual, auditory, tactual and other images and vibrations of things beyond the restricted range of the physical senses or belonging to other planes or spheres of existence. This inner sense can create or present images, scenes, sounds that are symbolic rather than actual or that represent possibilities in formation, suggestions, thoughts, ideas, intentions of other beings, image-forms also of powers or potentialities in universal Nature; there is nothing that it cannot image or visualise or turn into sensory formations.

It is the subliminal in reality and not the outer mind that possesses the powers of telepathy, clairvoyance, second sight and other supernormal faculties whose occurrence in the surface consciousness is due to openings or rifts in the wall erected by the outer personality's unseeing labour of individualisation and interposed between itself and the inner domain of our being. It should be noted, however, that owing to this complexity the action of the subliminal sense can be confusing or misleading, especially if it is interpreted by the outer mind to which the secret of its operations

¹⁰ Editor's note: According to Sri Aurobindo, evolution presupposes involution both ontologically and temporally; *ontologically* involution is prior to evolution inasmuch as it consists in the manifestation of a series planes of existence only the last of which is evolutionary and physical; *temporally* involution precedes evolution inasmuch as it sets the stage for the drama of evolution.

is unknown and its principles of sign-construction and symbolic figure-languages foreign; a greater inner power of intuition, tact, discrimination is needed to judge and interpret rightly its images and experiences. It is still the fact that they add immensely to our possible scope of knowledge and widen the narrow limits in which our sense-bound outer physical consciousness is circumscribed and imprisoned.

But more important is the power of the subliminal to enter into a direct contact of consciousness with other consciousness or with objects, to act without other instrumentation, by an essential sense inherent in its own substance, by a direct mental vision, by a direct feeling of things, even by a close envelopment and intimate penetration and a return with the contents of what is enveloped or penetrated, by a direct intimation or impact on the substance of mind itself, not through outward signs or figures, — a revealing intimation or a self-communicating impact of thoughts, feelings, forces. It is by these means that the inner being achieves an immediate, intimate and accurate spontaneous knowledge of persons, of objects, of the occult and to us intangible energies of world-Nature that surround us and impinge upon our own personality, physicality, mind-force and life-force.

In our surface mentality we are sometimes aware of a consciousness that can feel or know the thoughts and inner reactions of others or become aware of objects or happenings without any observable sense-intervention or otherwise exercise powers supernormal to our ordinary capacity; but these capacities are occasional, rudimentary, vague. Their possession is proper to our concealed subliminal self and, when they emerge, it is by a coming to the surface of its powers or operations. These emergent operations of the subliminal being or some of them are now fragmentarily studied under the name of psychic phenomena, — although they have ordinarily nothing to do with the psyche, the soul, the inmost entity in us, but only with the inner mind, the inner vital, the subtle-physical parts of our subliminal being; but the results cannot be conclusive or sufficiently ample because they are sought for by methods of inquiry and experiment and standards of proof proper to the surface mind and its system of knowledge by indirect contact. Under these conditions they can be investigated only in so far as they are able to manifest in that mind to which they are exceptional, abnormal or supernormal, and therefore comparatively rare, difficult, incomplete in their occurrence. It is only if we can open up the wall between the outer mind and the inner consciousness to which such phenomena are normal, or if we can enter freely within or dwell there, that this realm of knowledge can be truly explained and annexed to our total consciousness and included in the field of operation of our awakened force of nature. (LD 535 –537)



In the subliminal inner consciousness it is possible to become directly aware of the thoughts and feelings around us, to feel their impact, to see their movements; to read a mind and a heart becomes less difficult, a less uncertain venture. There is a constant mental, vital, subtle-physical interchange going on between all who meet or live together, of which they are themselves unaware except in so far as its impacts

and interpenetrations touch them as sensible results of speech and action and outer contact: for the most part it is subtly and invisibly that this interchange takes place; for it acts indirectly, touching the subliminal parts and through them the outer nature. But when we grow conscious in these subliminal parts, that brings consciousness also of all this interaction and subjective interchange and intermingling, with the result that we need no longer be involuntary subjects of their impact and consequence, but can accept or reject, defend ourselves or isolate. At the same time, our action on others need no longer be ignorant or involuntary and often unintentionally harmful; it can be a conscious help, a luminous interchange and a fruitful accommodation, an approach towards an inner understanding or union, not as now a separative association with only a limited intimacy or unity, restricted by much non-understanding and often burdened or endangered by a mass of misunderstanding, of mutual misinterpretation and error.

Equally important would be the change in our dealings with the impersonal forces of the world that surround us. These we know only by their results, by the little that we can seize of their visible action and consequence. Among them it is mostly the physical world-forces of which we have some knowledge, but we live constantly in the midst of a whirl of unseen mind-forces and life-forces of which we know nothing, we are not even aware of their existence. To all this unseen movement and action the subliminal inner consciousness can open our awareness, for it has a knowledge of it by direct contact, by inner vision, by a psychic sensitiveness; but at present it can only enlighten our obtuse superficiality and outwardness by unexplained warnings, premonitions, attractions and repulsions, ideas, suggestions, obscure intuitions, the little it can get through imperfectly to the surface. The inner being not only contacts directly and concretely the immediate motive and movement of these universal forces and feels the results of their present action, but it can to a certain extent forecast or see ahead their farther action; there is a greater power in our subliminal parts to overcome the time barrier, to have the sense or feel the vibration of coming events, of distant happenings, even to look into the future.

It is true that this knowledge proper to the subliminal being is not complete; for it is a mixture of knowledge and ignorance and it is capable of erroneous as well as of true perception, since it works not by knowledge by identity, but by a knowledge through direct contact and this is also a separative knowledge, though more intimate even in separation than anything that is commanded by our surface nature.

But the mixed capacity of the inner mental and vital nature for a greater ignorance as well as a greater knowledge can be cured by going still deeper behind it to the psychic entity which supports our individual life and body. There is indeed a soul-personality, representative of this entity, already built up within us, which puts forward a fine psychic element in our natural being: but this finer factor in our normal make-up is not yet dominant and has only a limited action. Our soul is not the overt guide and master of our thought and acts; it has to rely on the mental, vital, physical instruments for self-expression and is constantly overpowered by our mind and life-force: but if once it can succeed in remaining in constant communion with its own

larger occult reality, — and this can only happen when we go deep into our subliminal parts, — it is no longer dependent, it can become powerful and sovereign, armed with an intrinsic spiritual perception of the truth of things and a spontaneous discernment which separates that truth from the falsehood of the Ignorance and Inconscience, distinguishes the divine and the undivine in the manifestation and so can be the luminous leader of our other parts of nature. It is indeed when this happens that there can be the turning-point towards an integral transformation and an integral knowledge. (LD 538–540)



Consciousness is one in the subject and the object, and in the contact of existence with existence this identity brings to light or awakens in the self the dormant knowledge of this other self outside it. But while this pre-existent knowledge comes up in the surface mind as a knowledge acquired, it arises in the subliminal as a thing seen, caught from within, remembered as it were, or, when it is fully intuitive, self-evident to the inner awareness; or it is taken in from the object contacted but with an immediate response as to something intimately recognisable. In the surface consciousness knowledge represents itself as a truth seen from outside, thrown on us from the object, or as a response to its touch on the sense, a perceptive reproduction of its objective actuality. Our surface mind is obliged to give to itself this account of its knowledge, because the wall between itself and the outside world is pierced by the gates of sense and it can catch through these gates the surface of outward objects though not what is within them, but there is no such ready-made opening between itself and its own inner being: since it is unable to see what is within its deeper self or observe the process of the knowledge coming from within, it has no choice but to accept what it does see, the external object, as the cause of its knowledge.

Thus all our mental knowing of things represents itself to us as objective, a truth imposed on us from outside; our knowledge is a reflection or responsive construction reproducing in us a figure or picture or a mental scheme of something that is not in our own being. In fact, it is a hidden deeper response to the contact, a response coming from within that throws up from there an inner knowledge of the object, the object being itself part of our larger self; but owing to the double veil, the veil between our inner self and our ignorant surface self and the veil between that surface self and the object contacted, it is only an imperfect figure or representation of the inner knowledge that is formed on the surface.

This affiliation, this concealed method of our knowledge, obscure and non-evident to our present mentality, becomes clear and evident when the subliminal inner being breaks its boundaries of individuality and, carrying our surface mind with it, enters into the cosmic consciousness. The subliminal is separated from the cosmic through a limitation by the subtler sheaths of our being, its mental, vital, subtle-physical sheaths, just as the surface nature is separated from universal Nature by the gross physical sheath, the body; but the circumscribing wall around it is more transparent, is indeed less a wall than a fence. The subliminal has besides a formation of con-

sciousness which projects itself beyond all these sheaths and forms a circumconscient, an environing part of itself, through which it receives the contacts of the world and can become aware of them and deal with them before they enter. The subliminal is able to widen indefinitely this circumconscient envelope and more and more enlarge its self-projection into the cosmic existence around it. A point comes where it can break through the separation altogether, unite, identify itself with cosmic being, feel itself universal, one with all existence. (LD 540-541)



The order of the worlds

The ancient knowledge in all countries was full of the search after the hidden truths of our being and it created that large field of practice and inquiry which goes in Europe by the name of occultism, — we do not use any corresponding word in the East, because these things do not seem to us so remote, mysterious and abnormal as to the occidental mentality; they are nearer to us and the veil between our normal material life and this larger life is much thinner. In India, Egypt, Chaldea, China, Greece, the Celtic countries they have formed part of various Yogic systems and disciplines which had once a great hold everywhere, but to the modern mind have seemed mere superstition and mysticism, although the facts and experiences on which they are founded are quite as real in their own field and as much governed by intelligible laws of their own as the facts and experiences of the material world.

It is not our intention here to plunge into this vast and difficult field of psychical knowledge. But it becomes necessary now to deal with certain broad facts and principles which form its framework, for without them our Yoga of knowledge cannot be complete. We find that in the various systems the facts dealt with are always the same, but there are considerable differences of theoretic and practical arrangement, as is natural and inevitable in dealing with a subject so large and difficult. Certain things are here omitted, there made all-important, here understressed, there over-emphasised; certain fields of experience which are in one system held to be merely subordinate provinces, are in others treated as separate kingdoms. But I shall follow here consistently the Vedic and Vedantic arrangement of which we find the great lines in the Upanishads, first because it seems to me at once the simplest and most philosophical and more especially because it was from the beginning envisaged from the point of view of the utility of these various planes to the supreme object of our liberation.

It takes as its basis the three principles of our ordinary being, mind, life and matter, the triune spiritual principle of Sachchidananda and the link principle of *vijñāna*, supermind, the free or spiritual intelligence, and thus arranges all the large possible poises of our being in a tier of seven planes, — sometimes regarded as five only, because, only the lower five are wholly accessible to us, — through which the developing being can rise to its perfection.

But first we must understand what we mean by planes of consciousness, planes of existence. We mean a general settled poise or world of relations between Purusha and Prakriti, between the Soul and Nature. For anything that we can call world is and can be nothing else than the working out of a general relation which a universal existence has created or established between itself, or let us say its eternal fact or potentiality and the powers of its becoming. That existence in its relations with and its experience of the becoming is what we call soul or Purusha, individual soul in the individual, universal soul in the cosmos; the principle and the powers of the becoming are what we call Nature or Prakriti. But since Being, conscious force and delight of being are always the three constituent terms of existence, the nature of a world is really determined by the way in which Prakriti is set to deal with these three primary things and the forms which it is allowed to give to them.

For existence itself is and must always be the stuff of its own becoming; it must be shaped into the substance with which Force has to deal. Force again must be the power which works out that substance and works with it to whatever ends; Force is that which we ordinarily call Nature. Again the end, the object with which the worlds are created must be worked out by the consciousness inherent in all existence and all force and all their workings, and the object must be the possession of itself and of its delight of existence in the world. To that all the circumstances and aims of any world-existence must reduce themselves; it is existence developing its terms of being, its power of being, its conscious delight of being; if these are involved, their evolution; if they are veiled, their self-revelation. (SY 428-430)



As there is a poise of the relations of Purusha with Prakriti in which Matter is the first determinant, a world of material existence, so there is another just above it in which Matter is not supreme, but rather Life-force takes its place as the first determinant. In this world forms do not determine the conditions of the life, but it is life which determines the form, and therefore forms are there much more free, fluid, largely and to our conceptions strangely variable than in the material world. This life-force is not inconscient material force, not even, except in its lowest movements, an elemental subconscious energy, but a conscious force of being which makes for formation, but much more essentially for enjoyment, possession, satisfaction of its own dynamic impulse. Desire and the satisfaction of impulse are therefore the first law of this world of sheer vital existence, this poise of relations between the soul and its nature in which the life-power plays with so much greater a freedom and capacity than in our physical living; it may be called the desire-world, for that is its principal characteristic. Moreover, it is not fixed in one hardly variable formula as physical life seems to be, but is capable of many variations of its poise, admits many sub-planes ranging from those which touch material existence and, as it were, melt into that, to those which touch at the height of the life-power the planes of pure mental and psychic existence and melt into them. For in Nature in the infinite scale of being there are no wide gulfs, no abrupt chasms to be overleaped, but a melting of one thing into another, a subtle continuity; out of that her power of distinctive experi-

ence creates the orderings, the definite ranges, the distinct gradations by which the soul variously knows and possesses its possibilities of world-existence.

Again, enjoyment of one kind or another being the whole object of desire, that must be the trend of the desire-world; but since wherever the soul is not free, — and it cannot be free when subject to desire, — there must be the negative as well as the positive of all its experience, this world contains not only the possibility of large or intense or continuous enjoyments almost inconceivable to the limited physical mind, but also the possibility of equally enormous sufferings. It is here therefore that there are situated the lowest heavens and all the hells with the tradition and imagination of which the human mind has lured and terrified itself since the earliest ages. All human imaginations indeed correspond to some reality or real possibility, though they may in themselves be a quite inaccurate representation or couched in too physical images and therefore inapt to express the truth of supraphysical realities.

Nature being a complex unity and not a collection of unrelated phenomena, there can be no unbridgeable gulf between the material existence and this vital or desire world. On the contrary, they may be said in a sense to exist in each other and are at least interdependent to a certain extent. In fact, the material world is really a sort of projection from the vital, a thing which it has thrown out and separated from itself in order to embody and fulfil some of its desires under conditions other than its own, which are yet the logical result of its own most material longings. Life on earth may be said to be the result of the pressure of this life-world on the material, inconscient existence of the physical universe. Our own manifest vital being is also only a surface result of a larger and profounder vital being which has its proper seat on the life-plane and through which we are connected with the life-world.

Moreover, the life-world is constantly acting upon us and behind everything in material existence there stand appropriate powers of the life-world; even the most crude and elemental have behind them elemental life-powers, elemental beings by which or by whom they are supported. The influences of the life-world are always pouring out on the material existence and producing there their powers and results which return again upon the life-world to modify it. From that the life-part of us, the desire-part is being always touched and influenced; there too are beneficent and malefic powers of good desire and evil desire which concern themselves with us even when we are ignorant of and unconcerned with them. Nor are these powers merely tendencies, inconscient forces, nor, except on the verges of Matter, subconscient, but conscious powers, beings, living influences.

As we awaken to the higher planes of our existence, we become aware of them as friends or enemies, powers which seek to possess or which we can master, overcome, pass beyond and leave behind. It is this possible relation of the human being with the powers of the life-world which occupied to so large an extent European occultism, especially in the Middle Ages, as well as certain forms of Eastern magic and spiritualism. The “superstitions” of the past — much superstition there was, that is to say,

much ignorant and distorted belief, false explanations and obscure and clumsy dealing with the laws of the beyond, — had yet behind them truths which a future Science, delivered from its sole preoccupation with the material world, may rediscover. For the supra-material is as much a reality as the existence of mental beings in the material universe.

But why then are we not normally aware of so much that is behind us and always pressing upon us? For the same reason that we are not aware of the inner life of our neighbour, although it exists as much as our own and is constantly exercising an occult influence upon us, — for a great part of our thoughts and feelings come into us from outside, from our fellow-men, both from individuals and from the collective mind of humanity; and for the same reason that we are not aware of the greater part of our own being which is subconscious or subliminal to our waking mind and is always influencing and in an occult manner determining our surface existence. It is because we use, normally, only our corporeal senses and live almost wholly in the body and the physical vitality and the physical mind, and it is not directly through these that the life-world enters into relations with us. That is done through other sheaths of our being, — so they are termed in the Upanishads, — other bodies, as they are called in a later terminology, the mental sheath or subtle body in which our true mental being lives and the life sheath or vital body which is more closely connected with the physical or food-sheath and forms with it the gross body of our complex existence. These possess powers, senses, capacities which are always secretly acting in us, are connected with and impinge upon our physical organs and the plexuses of our physical life and mentality. By self-development we can become aware of them, possess our life in them, get through them into conscious relation with the life-world and other worlds and use them also for a more subtle experience and more intimate knowledge of the truths, facts and happenings of even the material world itself. We can by this self-development live more or less fully on planes of our existence other than the material which is now all in all to us.

What has been said of the life-world applies with the necessary differences to still higher planes of the cosmic existence. For beyond that is a mental plane, a world of mental existence in which neither life, nor matter, but mind is the first determinant. Mind there is not determined by material conditions or by the life-force, but itself determines and uses them for its own satisfaction. There mind, that is to say, the psychical and the intellectual being, is free in a certain sense, free at least to satisfy and fulfil itself in a way hardly conceivable to our body-bound and life-bound mentality; for the Purusha there is the pure mental being and his relations with Prakriti are determined by that purer mentality, Nature there is mental rather than vital and physical. Both the life-world and indirectly the material are a projection from that, the result of certain tendencies of the mental Being which have sought a field, conditions, an arrangement of harmonies proper to themselves; and the phenomena of mind in this world may be said to be a result of the pressure of that plane first on the life-world and then on life in the material existence. By its modification in the life-world it creates in us the desire-mind; in its own right it awakes in us the purer

powers of our psychical and intellectual existence. But our surface mentality is only a secondary result of a larger subliminal mentality whose proper seat is the mental plane. This world of mental existence also is constantly acting upon us and our world, has its powers and its beings, is related to us through our mental body. There we find the psychical and mental heavens to which the Purusha can ascend when it drops this physical body and can there sojourn till the impulse to terrestrial existence again draws it downward. Here too are many planes, the lowest converging upon and melting into the worlds below, the highest at the heights of the mind-power into the worlds of a more spiritual existence.

These highest worlds are therefore supramental; they belong to the principle of supermind, the free, spiritual or divine intelligence or gnosis and to the triple spiritual principle of Sachchidananda. From them the lower worlds derive by a sort of fall of the Purusha into certain specific or narrow conditions of the play of the soul with its nature. But these also are divided from us by no unbridgeable gulf; they affect us through what are called the knowledge-sheath and the bliss-sheath, through the causal or spiritual body, and less directly through the mental body, nor are their secret powers absent from the workings of the vital and material existence. Our conscious spiritual being and our intuitive mind awaken in us as a result of the pressure of these highest worlds on the mental being in life and body. But this causal body is, as we may say, little developed in the majority of men and to live in it or to ascend to the supramental planes, as distinguished from corresponding sub-planes in the mental being, or still more to dwell consciously upon them is the most difficult thing of all for the human being. It can be done in the trance of Samadhi, but otherwise only by a new evolution of the capacities of the individual Purusha of which few are even willing to conceive. Yet is that the condition of the perfect self-consciousness by which alone the Purusha can possess the full conscious control of Prakriti; for there not even the mind determines, but the Spirit freely uses the lower differentiating principles as minor terms of its existence governed by the higher and reaching by them their own perfect capacity. That alone would be the perfect evolution of the involved and development of the undeveloped for which the Purusha has sought in the material universe, as if in a wager with itself, the conditions of the greatest difficulty. (SY 432-437)



It is a fact that mankind almost from the beginning of its existence or so far back as history or tradition can go, has believed in the existence of other worlds and in the possibility of communication between their powers and beings and the human race. In the last rationalistic period of human thought from which we are emerging, this belief has been swept aside as an age-long superstition; all evidence or intimations of its truth have been rejected a priori as fundamentally false and undeserving of inquiry because incompatible with the axiomatic truth that only Matter and the material world and its experiences are real; all other experience purporting to be real must be either a hallucination or an imposture or a subjective result of superstitious credulity and imagination or else, if a fact, then other than what it purported to be

and explicable by a physical cause: no evidence could be accepted of such a fact unless it is objective and physical in its character; even if the fact be very apparently supraphysical, it cannot be accepted as such unless it is totally unexplainable by any other imaginable hypothesis or conceivable conjecture.

It should be evident that this demand for physical valid proof of a supraphysical fact is irrational and illogical; it is an irrelevant attitude of the physical mind which assumes that only the objective and physical is fundamentally real and puts aside all else as merely subjective. (LD 771-772)



If it be said that subjective experience or subtle-sense images can easily be deceptive, since we have no recognized method or standard of verification and a too great tendency to admit the extraordinary and miraculous or supernatural at its face-value, this may be admitted: but error is not the prerogative of the inner subjective or subliminal parts of us, it is also an appanage of the physical mind and its objective methods and standards, and such liability to error cannot be a reason for shutting out a large and important domain of experience; it is a reason rather for scrutinising it and finding out in it its own true standards and its characteristic appropriate and valid means of verification. Our subjective being is the basis of our objective experience, and it is not probable that only its physical objectivisations are true and the rest unreliable. The subliminal consciousness, when rightly interrogated, is a witness to truth and its testimony is confirmed again and again even in the physical and the objective field; that testimony cannot, then, be disregarded when it calls our attention to things within us or to things that belong to planes or worlds of a supraphysical experience. At the same time belief by itself is not evidence of reality; it must base itself on something more valid before one can accept it.

It is evident that the beliefs of the past are not a sufficient basis for knowledge, even though they cannot be entirely neglected: for a belief is a mental construction and may be a wrong building; it may often answer to some inner intimation and then it has a value, but, as often as not, it disfigures the intimation, usually by a translation into terms familiar to our physical and objective experience, such as that which converted the hierarchy of the planes into a physical hierarchy or geographical space-extension, turned the rarer heights of subtle substance into material heights and placed the abodes of the gods on the summits of physical mountains. All truth supraphysical or physical must be founded not on mental belief alone, but on experience, — but in each case experience must be of the kind, physical, subliminal or spiritual, which is appropriate to the order of the truths into which we are empowered to enter; their validity and significance must be scrutinised, but according to their own law and by a consciousness which can enter into them and not according to the law of another domain or by a consciousness which is capable only of truths of another order; so alone can we be sure of our steps and enlarge firmly our sphere of knowledge.

If we scrutinise the intimations of supraphysical world-realities which we receive in our inner experience and compare with it the account of such intimations that has continued to come down to us from the beginnings of human knowledge, and if we attempt an interpretation and a summarised order, we shall find that what this inner experience most intimately conveys to us is the existence and action upon us of larger planes of being and consciousness than the purely material plane, with its restricted existence and action, of which we are aware in our narrow terrestrial formula. These domains of larger being are not altogether remote and separate from our own being and consciousness; for, though they subsist in themselves and have their own play and process and formulations of existence and experience, yet at the same time they penetrate and envelop the physical plane with their invisible presence and influences, and their powers seem to be here in the material world itself behind its action and objects.

There are two main orders of experience in our contact with them; one is purely subjective, though in its subjectivity sufficiently vivid and palpable, the other is more objective. In the subjective order, we find that what shapes itself to us as a life-intention, life-impulse, life-formulation here, already exists in a larger, more subtle, more plastic range of possibilities, and these pre-existent forces and formations are pressing upon us to realise themselves in the physical world also; but only a part succeeds in getting through and even that emerges partially in a form and circumstance more proper to the system of terrestrial law and sequence.

This precipitation takes place, normally, without our knowledge; we are not aware of the action of these powers, forces and influences upon us, but take them as formations of our own life and mind, even when our reason or will repudiates them and strives not to be mastered: but when we go inwards away from the restricted surface consciousness and develop a subtler sense and deeper awareness, we begin to get an intimation of the origin of these movements and are able to watch their action and process, to accept or reject or modify, to allow them passage and use of our mind and will and our life and members or refuse it.

In the same way we become aware of larger domains of mind, a play, experience, formation of a greater plasticity, a teeming profusion of all possible mental formulations, and we feel their contacts with us and their powers and influences acting upon our parts of mind in the same occult manner as those others that act upon our parts of life. This kind of experience is, primarily, of a purely subjective character, a pressure of ideas, suggestions, emotional formations, impulsions to sensation, action, dynamic experience. However large a part of this pressure may be traced to our own subliminal self or to the siege of universal Mind-forces or Life-forces belonging to our own world, there is an element which bears the stamp of another origin, an insistent supraterrrestrial character.

But the contacts do not stop here: for there is also an opening of our mind and life parts to a great range of subjective-objective experiences in which these planes present themselves no longer as extensions of subjective being and consciousness,

but as worlds; for the experiences there are organised as they are in our own world, but on a different plan, with a different process and law of action and in a substance which belongs to a supraphysical Nature. This organization includes, as on our earth, the existence of beings who have or take forms, manifest themselves or are naturally manifested in an embodying substance, but a substance other than ours, a subtle substance tangible only to subtle sense, a supraphysical form-matter.

These worlds and beings may have nothing to do with ourselves and our life, they may exercise no action upon us; but often also they enter into secret communication with earth-existence, obey or embody and are the intermediaries and instruments of the cosmic powers and influences of which we have a subjective experience, or themselves act by their own initiation upon the terrestrial world's life and motives and happenings. It is possible to receive help or guidance or harm or misguidance from these beings; it is possible even to become subject to their influence, to be possessed by their invasion or domination, to be instrumentalised by them for their good or evil purpose. At times the progress of earthly life seems to be a vast field of battle between supraphysical Forces of either character, those that strive to uplift, encourage and illumine and those that strive to deflect, depress or prevent or even shatter our upward evolution or the soul's self-expression in the material universe. Some of these Beings, Powers or Forces are such that we think of them as divine; they are luminous, benignant or powerfully helpful: there are others that are Titanic, gigantic or demoniac, inordinate Influences, instigators or creators often of vast and formidable inner upheavals or of actions that overpass the normal human measure.

There may also be an awareness of influences, presences, beings that do not seem to belong to other worlds beyond us but are here as a hidden element behind the veil in terrestrial nature. As contact with the supraphysical is possible, a contact can also take place subjective or objective, — or at least objectivised, — between our own consciousness and the consciousness of other once embodied beings who have passed into a supraphysical status in these other regions of existence. It is possible also to pass beyond a subjective contact or a subtle-sense perception and, in certain subliminal states of consciousness, to enter actually into other worlds and know something of their secrets. It is the more objective order of other-worldly experience that seized most the imagination of mankind in the past, but it was put by popular belief into a gross-objective statement which unduly assimilated these phenomena to those of the physical world with which we are familiar; for it is the normal tendency of our mind to turn everything into forms or symbols proper to its own kind and terms of experience.

This has always been, put into its most generalised terms, the normal range and character of other-worldly belief and experience in all periods of the past of the race; names and forms differ, but the general features have been strikingly similar in all countries and ages. What exact value are we to put upon these persistent beliefs or upon this mass of supernormal experience? It is not possible for anyone who has had these contacts with any intimacy and not only by scattered abnormal accidents, to

put them aside as mere superstition or hallucination; for they are too insistent, real, effective, organic in their pressure, too constantly confirmed by their action and results to be so flung aside: an appreciation, an interpretation, a mental organisation of this side of our capacity of experience is indispensable. (LD 773–777)



As it grows, man's mind enters into relation with new ranges of being and consciousness not at all created by him, new to him, already pre-existent in the All-Existence. In his increasing inner experience he opens up new planes of being in himself; as the secret centres of his consciousness dissolve their knots, he becomes able through them to conceive of those larger realms, to receive direct influences from them, to enter into them, to image them in his terrestrial mind and inner sense. He does create images, symbol-forms, reflective shapes of them with which his mind can deal; in this sense only he creates the Divine Image that he worships, creates the forms of the gods, creates new planes and worlds within him, and through these images the real worlds and powers that overtop our existence are able to take possession of the consciousness in the physical world, to pour into it their potencies, to transform it with the light of their higher being.

But all this is not a creation of the higher worlds of being; it is a revelation of them to the consciousness of the soul on the material plane as it develops out of the Nescience. It is a creation of their forms here by a reception of their powers; there is an enlargement of our subjective life on this plane by the discovery of its true relation with higher planes of its own being from which it was separated by the veil of the material Nescience. This veil exists because the soul in the body has put behind it these greater possibilities in order that it might concentrate exclusively its consciousness and force upon its primary work in this physical world of being; but that primary work can have a sequel only by the veil being at least partially lifted or else made penetrable so that the higher planes of Mind, Life and Spirit may pour their significances into human existence. (LD 778)



We find these higher worlds in our vision and experience of them to be in no way based upon the material universe, in no way its results, but rather greater terms of being, larger and freer ranges of consciousness, and all the action of the material plane looks more like the result and not the origin of these greater terms, derivatory from them, even partly dependent on them in its evolutionary endeavour. Immense ranges of powers, influences, phenomena descend covertly upon us from the Overmind¹¹ and the higher mental and vital ranges, but of these only a part, a selection, as it were, or restricted number can stage and realise themselves in the order of the physical world; the rest await their time and proper circumstance for revelation in

¹¹ Editor's note: Overmind, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, is the highest rung of a series of increasingly illumed states of *mental* consciousness bordering on the infinities of the *supermind*.

physical term and form, for their part in the terrestrial¹² evolution which is at the same time an evolution of all the powers of the Spirit.

This character of the other worlds defeats all our attempts to give the premier importance to our own plane of being and to our own part in the mundane manifestation. We do not create God as a myth of our consciousness, but are instruments for a progressive manifestation of the Divine in the material being. We do not create the gods, his powers, but rather such divinity as we manifest is the partial reflection and the shaping here of eternal godheads. We do not create the higher planes, but are intermediaries by which they reveal their light, power, beauty in whatever form and scope can be given to them by Nature-force on the material plane. It is the pressure of the Life-world which enables life to evolve and develop here in the forms we already know; it is that increasing pressure which drives it to aspire in us to a greater revelation of itself and will one day deliver the mortal from his subjection to the narrow limitations of his present incompetent and restricting physicality. It is the pressure of the Mind-world which evolves and develops mind here and helps us to find a leverage for our mental self-uplifting and expansion, so that we may hope to enlarge continually our self of intelligence and even to break the prison-walls of our matter-bound physical mentality. It is the pressure of the supramental and spiritual worlds which is preparing to develop here the manifest power of the Spirit and by it open our being on the physical plane into the freedom and infinity of the superconscient Divine; that contact, that pressure can alone liberate from the apparent Inconscience, which was our starting-point, the all-conscient Godhead concealed in us. In this order of things our human consciousness is the instrument, the intermediary; it is the point in the development of light and power out of the Inconscience at which liberation becomes possible: a greater role than this we cannot attribute to it, but this is great enough, for it makes our humanity all-important for the supreme purpose of evolutionary Nature.

At the same time there are some elements in our subliminal experience which raise a point of question against any invariable priority of the other worlds to the material existence. One such indication is that in the vision of after-death experience there is a persistent tradition of residence in conditions which seem to be a supraphysical prolongation of earth-conditions, earth-nature, earth-experience. Another is that, in the Life-worlds especially, we find formulations which seem to resemble the inferior movements of earth-existence; here are already embodied the principles of darkness, falsehood, incapacity and evil which we have supposed to be consequent upon the evolution out of the material Inconscience. It seems even to be the fact that the vital worlds are the natural home of the Powers that most disturb human life; this is indeed logical, for it is through our vital being that they sway us and they must therefore be powers of a larger and more powerful life-existence. The descent of

¹² Necessarily, by terrestrial we do not mean this one earth and its period of duration, but use earth in the wider root-sense of the Vedantic Prithivi, the earth-principle creating habitations of physical form for the soul.

Mind and Life into evolution need not have created any such untoward developments of the limitation of being and consciousness: for this descent is in its nature a limitation of knowledge; existence and cognition and delight of being confine themselves in a lesser truth and good and beauty and its inferior harmony, and move according to that law of a narrower light, but in such a movement darkness and suffering and evil are not obligatory phenomena. If we find them existing in these worlds of other mind and other life, even though not pervading it but only occupying their separate province, we must either conclude that they have come into existence by a projection out of the inferior evolution, upward from below, by something in the subliminal parts of Nature bursting there into a larger formation of the evil created here, or that they were already created as part of a parallel gradation to the involutory descent, a gradation forming a stair for evolutionary ascension towards Spirit just as the involutory was a stair of the descent of the Spirit.

In the latter hypothesis the ascending gradation might have a double purpose. For it would contain pre-formations of the good and evil that must evolve in the earth as part of the struggle necessary for the evolutionary growth of the Soul in Nature; these would be formations existing for themselves, for their own independent satisfaction, formations that would present the full type of these things, each in its separate nature, and at the same time they would exercise on evolutionary beings their characteristic influence. These worlds of a larger Life would then hold in themselves both the more luminous and the darker formations of our world's life in a medium in which they could arrive freely at their independent expression, their own type's full freedom and natural completeness and harmony for good or for evil, — if indeed that distinction applies in these ranges, — a completeness and independence impossible here in our existence where all is mingled in the complex interaction necessary to the field of a many-sided evolution leading towards a final integration. For we find what we call false, dark or evil seems there to have a truth of its own and to be entirely content with its own type because it possesses that in a full expression which creates in it a sense of a satisfied power of its own being, an accord, a complete adaptation of all its circumstances to its principle of existence; it enjoys there its own consciousness, its own self-power, its own delight of being, obnoxious to our minds but to itself full of the joy of satisfied desire.

Those life impulses which are to earth-nature inordinate and out of measure and appear here as perverse and abnormal, find in their own province of being an independent fulfilment and an unrestricted play of their type and principle. What is to us divine or titanic, Rakshasic, demoniac and therefore supernatural, is, each in its own domain, normal to itself and gives to the beings that embody these things the feeling of self-nature and the harmony of their own principle. Discord itself, struggle, incapacity, suffering enter into a certain kind of life-satisfaction which would feel itself balked or deficient without them. When these powers are seen in their isolated working, building their own life-edifices, as they do in those secret worlds where they dominate, we perceive more clearly their origin and reason of existence and the reason also for the hold they have on human life and the attachment of man to his

own imperfections, to his life-drama of victory and failure, happiness and suffering, laughter and tears, sin and virtue. Here on earth these things exist in an unsatisfied and therefore unsatisfactory and obscure state of struggle and mixture, but there reveal their secret and their motive of being because they are there established in their native power and full form of nature in their own world and their own exclusive atmosphere. Man's heavens and hells or worlds of light and worlds of darkness, however imaginative in their building, proceed from a perception of these powers existing in their own principle and throwing their influences on him in life from a beyond-life which provides the elements of his evolutionary existence.

In the same way as the powers of Life are self-founded, perfect and full in a greater Life beyond us, so too the powers of Mind, its ideas and principles that influence our earth-being, are found to have in the greater Mind-world their own field of fullness of self-nature, while here in human existence they throw out only partial formations which have much difficulty in establishing themselves because of their meeting and mixture with other powers and principles; this meeting, this mixture curbs their completeness, alloys their purity, disputes and defeats their influence.

These other worlds, then, are not evolutionary, but typical; but it is one though not the sole reason of their existence that they provide things that must arise in the involutory manifestation as well as things thrown up in the evolution with a field of satisfaction of their own significance where they can exist in their own right; this established condition is a base from which their functions and workings can be cast as elements into the complex process of evolutionary Nature. (LD 780-784)



Given the fact that the infinite Reality is free in the play of its consciousness, it is not bound to involve itself in the nescience of Matter before it can at all manifest. It is possible for it to create just the contrary order of things, a world in which the unity of spiritual being is the matrix and first condition of any formation or action, the Energy at work is a self-aware spiritual existence in movement, and all its names and forms are a self-conscious play of the spiritual unity.

Or it might be an order in which the Spirit's innate power of conscious Force or Will would realise freely and directly its own possibilities in itself and not, as here, through the restricting medium of the Life-Force in matter; that realisation would be at once the first principle of the manifestation and the object of all its free and blissful action.

It might be an order, again, in which the free play of an infinite mutual self-delight in a multiplicity of beings conscious not only of their concealed or underlying eternal unity but of their present joy of oneness would be the object; in such a system the action of the principle of self-existent Bliss would be the first principle and the universal condition.

Again, it might be a world-order in which the Supermind would be the dominant principle from the beginning; the nature of the manifestation would then be a multi-

plicity of beings finding through the free and luminous play of their divine individuality all the manifold joy of their difference in oneness.

Nor need the series stop here: for we observe that with us Mind is hampered by Life in Matter and finds all the difficulty possible in dominating the resistance of these two different powers and that Life itself is similarly restricted by the mortality, the inertia and the instability of Matter; but evidently there can be a world-order in which neither of these two disabilities forms part of the first conditions of existence.

There is the possibility of a world in which Mind would be from the first dominant, free to work upon its own substance or matter as a quite plastic material, or where Matter would be quite evidently the result of the universal Mind-Force working itself out in life. It is that even here in reality; but here the Mind-Force is involved from the beginning, for a long time subconscious, and, even when it has emerged, never in free possession of itself, but subject to its encasing material, while there it would be in possession of itself and master of its material, which would be much more subtle and elastic than in a predominantly physical universe.

So too Life might have its own world-order where it would be sovereign, able to deploy its own more elastic and freely variable desires and tendencies, not menaced at every moment by disintegrating forces and therefore occupied chiefly with the care of self-preservation and restricted in its play by this state of precarious tension which limits its instincts of free formation, free self-gratification and free adventure. . .

That could make no difference if all this were only a philosophical possibility or a potentiality in the being of Sachchidananda which it never realises or has not yet realised, or, if realised, has not brought within the scope of the consciousness of beings living in the physical universe. But all our spiritual and psychic experience bears affirmative witness, brings us always a constant and, in its main principles, an invariable evidence of the existence of higher worlds, freer planes of existence. Not having bound ourselves down, like so much of modern thought, to the dogma that only physical experience or experience based upon the physical sense is true, the analysis of physical experience by the reason alone verifiable, and all else only result of physical experience and physical existence and anything beyond this an error, self-delusion and hallucination, we are free to accept this evidence and to admit the reality of these planes. (LD 786-788)



These higher planes are actually at every moment acting upon and in communication with our own plane of being, although this action is naturally not present to our ordinary waking or outer consciousness, because that is for the most part limited to a reception and utilisation of the contacts of the physical world: but the moment we either go back into our subliminal being or enlarge our waking consciousness beyond the scope of the physical contacts, we become aware of something of this higher action. We find even that the human being can project himself partially into these higher planes under certain conditions, even while in the body; a fortiori must he be

able to do it when out of the body, and to do it then completely, since there is no longer the disabling condition of the physical life bound down to the body.

The consequences of this relation and this power of transference are of immense importance. On the one side they immediately justify, at any rate as an actual possibility, the ancient tradition of at least a temporary sojourn of the human conscious being in other worlds than the physical after the dissolution of the physical body. On the other side they open to us the possibility of an action of the higher planes on the material existence which can liberate the powers they represent, the powers of life, mind and spirit for the evolutionary intention inherent within Nature. (LD 788–789)



These planes or systems are then at least coeval and co-existent with that which presents itself to us as the physical universe. We have been led to conclude that the development of Life, Mind and Spirit in the physical being presupposes their existence; for these powers are developed here by two co-operating forces, an upward-tending force from below, an upward-drawing and downward-pressing force from above. For there is the necessity in the Inconscient of bringing out what is latent within it, and there is the pressure of the superior principles in the higher planes which not only aids this general necessity to realise itself, but may very largely determine the special ways in which it is eventually realised.

It is this upward-drawing action and this pressure, this insistence from above, which explain the constant influence of the spiritual, mental and vital worlds upon the physical plane. It is evident that, given a complex universe and seven principles interwoven in every part of its system and naturally therefore drawn to act upon and respond to each other wherever they can at all get at one another, such an action, such a constant pressure and influence, is an inevitable consequence, must be inherent in the very nature of the manifested universe.

A secret continuous action of the higher powers and principles from their own planes upon terrestrial being and nature through the subliminal self, which is itself a projection from those planes into the world born of the Inconscience, must have an effect and a significance. Its first effect has been the liberation of Life and Mind out of Matter; its last effect has been to assist the emergence of a spiritual consciousness, a spiritual will and spiritual sense of existence in the terrestrial being so that he is no longer solely preoccupied with his outermost life or with that and mental pursuits and interests, but has learned to look within, to discover his inner being, his spiritual self, to aspire to overpass earth and her limitations.

As he grows more and more inward, his boundaries mental, vital, spiritual begin to broaden, the bonds that held Life, Mind, Soul to their first limitations loosen or snap, and man the mental being begins to have a glimpse of a larger kingdom of self and world closed to the first earth-life. No doubt, so long as he lives mainly on his surface, he can only build a sort of superstructure ideal and imaginative and ideative upon the ground of his normal narrow existence. But if he makes the inward movement which his own highest vision has held up before him as his greatest spiritual

necessity, then he will find there in his inner being a larger Consciousness, a larger Life. An action from within and an action from above can overcome the predominance of the material formula, diminish and finally put an end to the power of the Inconscience, reverse the order of the consciousness, substitute the Spirit for Matter as his conscious foundation of being and liberate its higher powers to their complete and characteristic expression in the life of the soul embodied in Nature. (LD 790–791)



Sleep and dream

What happens in sleep is that our consciousness withdraws from the field of its waking experiences; it is supposed to be resting, suspended or in abeyance, but that is a superficial view of the matter. What is in abeyance is the waking activities, what is at rest is the surface mind and the normal conscious action of the bodily part of us; but the inner consciousness is not suspended, it enters into new inner activities, only a part of which, a part happening or recorded in something of us that is near to the surface, we remember. There is maintained in sleep, thus near the surface, an obscure subconscious element which is a receptacle or passage for our dream experiences and itself also a dream-builder; but behind it is the depth and mass of the subliminal, the totality of our concealed inner being and consciousness which is of quite another order.

Normally it is a subconscious part in us, intermediate between consciousness and pure inconscience, that sends up through this surface layer its formations in the shape of dreams, constructions marked by an apparent inconsequence and incoherence. Many of these are fugitive structures built upon circumstances of our present life selected apparently at random and surrounded with a phantasy of variation; others call back the past, or rather selected circumstances and persons of the past, as a starting-point for similar fleeting edifices. . . After a time this subconscious activity appears to sink back into complete inconscience and we speak of this state as deep dreamless sleep; thence we emerge again into the dream-shallows or return to the waking surface.

But, in fact, in what we call dreamless sleep, we have gone into a profounder and denser layer of the subconscious, a state too involved, too immersed or too obscure, dull and heavy to bring to the surface its structures, and we are dreaming there but unable to grasp or retain in the recording layer of subconsciousness these more obscure dream-figures. Or else, it may be, the part of our mind which still remains active in the sleep of the body has entered into the inner domains of our being, the subliminal mental, the subliminal vital, the subtle-physical, and is there lost to all active connection with the surface parts of us.

If we are still in the nearer depths of these regions, the surface subconscious which is our sleep-wakefulness records something of what we experience in these depths; but it records it in its own transcription, often marred by characteristic incoherences and always, even when most coherent, deformed or cast into figures drawn from the

world of waking experience. But if we have gone deeper inward, the record fails or cannot be recovered and we have the illusion of dreamlessness; but the activity of the inner dream consciousness continues behind the veil of the now mute and inactive subconscious surface.

This continued dream activity is revealed to us when we become more inwardly conscious, for then we get into connection with the heavier and deeper subconscious stratum and can be aware, — at the time or by a retracing or recovering through memory, — of what happened when we sank into these torpid depths. It is possible too to become conscious deeper within our subliminal selves and we are then aware of experiences on other planes of our being or even in supraphysical worlds to which sleep gives us a right of secret entry. A transcript of such experiences reaches us; but the transcriber here is not the subconscious, it is the subliminal, a greater dream-builder.

If the subliminal thus comes to the front in our dream-consciousness, there is sometimes an activity of our subliminal intelligence, — dream becomes a series of thoughts, often strangely or vividly figured, problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve, warnings, premonitions, indications of the future, veridical dreams replace the normal subconscious incoherence. There can come also a structure of symbol-images, some of a mental character, some of a vital nature: the former are precise in their figures, clear in their significance; the latter are often complex and baffling to our waking consciousness, but, if we can seize the clue, they reveal their own sense and peculiar system of coherence.

Finally, there can come to us the records of happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes of our own being or of universal being into which we enter: these have sometimes, like the symbolic dreams, a strong bearing on our own inner and outer life or the life of others, reveal elements of our or their mental being and life-being or disclose influences on them of which our waking self is totally ignorant; but sometimes they have no such bearing and are purely records of other organised systems of consciousness independent of our physical existence.

The subconscious dreams constitute the bulk of our most ordinary sleep-experience and they are those which we usually remember; but sometimes the subliminal builder is able to impress our sleep consciousness sufficiently to stamp his activities on our waking memory. If we develop our inner being, live more inwardly than most men do, then the balance is changed and a larger dream-consciousness opens before us; our dreams can take on a subliminal and no longer a subconscious character and can assume a reality and significance. It is even possible to become wholly conscious in sleep and follow throughout from beginning to end or over large stretches the stages of our dream-experience; it is found that then we are aware of ourselves passing from state after state of consciousness to a brief period of luminous and peaceful dreamless rest, which is the true restorer of the energies of the waking nature, and then returning by the same way to the waking consciousness.

It is normal, as we thus pass from state to state, to let the previous experiences slip away from us; in the return only the more vivid or those nearest to the waking surface are remembered: but this can be remedied, — a greater retention is possible or the power can be developed of going back in memory from dream to dream, from state to state, till the whole is once more before us. A coherent knowledge of sleep-life, though difficult to achieve or to keep established, is possible.

Our subliminal self is not, like our surface physical being, an outcome of the energy of the Inconscient; it is a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution. There is in it an inner mind, an inner vital being of ourselves, an inner or subtle-physical being larger than our outer being and nature. This inner existence is the concealed origin of almost all in our surface self that is not a construction of the first inconscient World-Energy or a natural developed functioning of our surface consciousness or a reaction of it to impacts from the outside universal Nature, — and even in this construction, these functionings, these reactions the subliminal takes part and exercises on them a considerable influence. There is here a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal unlike the mostly indirect contacts which our surface being maintains with the universe through the sense-mind and the senses. There are here inner senses, a subliminal sight, touch, hearing; but these subtle senses are rather channels of the inner being's direct consciousness of things than its informants: the subliminal is not dependent on its senses for its knowledge, they only give a form to its direct experience of objects; they do not, so much as in waking mind, convey forms of objects for the mind's documentation or as the starting-point or basis for an indirect constructive experience.

The subliminal has the right of entry into the mental and vital and subtle-physical planes of the universal consciousness, it is not confined to the material plane and the physical world; it possesses means of communication with the worlds of being which the descent towards involution created in its passage and with all corresponding planes or worlds that may have arisen or been constructed to serve the purpose of the re-ascent from Inconscience to Superconscience. It is into this large realm of interior existence that our mind and vital being retire when they withdraw from the surface activities whether by sleep or inward-drawn concentration or by the inner plunge of trance.

Our waking state is unaware of its connection with the subliminal being, although it receives from it, — but without any knowledge of the place of origin, — the inspirations, intuitions, ideas, will-suggestions, sense-suggestions, urges to action that rise from below or from behind our limited surface existence. Sleep like trance opens the gate of the subliminal to us; for in sleep, as in trance, we retire behind the veil of the limited waking personality and it is behind this veil that the subliminal has its existence. But we receive the records of our sleep experience through dream and in dream figures and not in that condition which might be called an inner waking and which is the most accessible form of the trance state, nor through the supernormal clarities of vision and other more luminous and concrete ways of communication de-

veloped by the inner subliminal cognition when it gets into habitual or occasional conscious connection with our waking self. (LD 422–426)



Religion and the occult

Evolutionary Nature in her first awakening of man to a rudimentary spiritual consciousness must begin with a vague sense of the Infinite and the Invisible surrounding the physical being, a sense of the limitation and impotence of human mind and will and of something greater than himself concealed in the world, of Potencies beneficent or maleficent which determine the results of his action, a Power that is behind the physical world he lives in and has perhaps created it and him, or Powers that inform and rule her movements while they themselves perhaps are ruled by the greater Unknown that is beyond them. He had to determine what they are and find means of communication so that he might propitiate them or call them to his aid; he sought also for means by which he could find out and control the springs of the hidden movements of Nature. This he could not do at once by his reason because his reason could at first deal only with physical facts, but this was the domain of the Invisible and needed a supraphysical vision and knowledge; he had to do it by an extension of the faculty of intuition and instinct which was already there in the animal.

This faculty, prolonged in the thinking being and mentalised, must have been more sensitive and active in early man, though still mostly on a lower scale, for he had to rely on it largely for all his first necessary discoveries: he had to rely also on the aid of subliminal experience; for the subliminal too must have been more active, more ready to upsurge in him, more capable of formulating its phenomena on the surface, before he learned to depend completely on his intellect and senses. The intuitions that he thus received by contact with Nature, his mind systematised and so created the early forms of religion.

This active and ready power of intuition also gave him the sense of supraphysical forces behind the physical, and his instinct and a certain subliminal or supernormal experience of supraphysical beings with whom he could somehow communicate turned him towards the discovery of effective and canalising means for a dynamic utilisation of this knowledge. So were created magic and the other early forms of occultism. At some time it must have dawned on him that he had something in him which was not physical, a soul that survived the body; certain supernormal experiences which became active because of the pressure to know the invisible, must have helped to formulate his first crude ideas of this entity within him.

It would only be later that he began to realise that what he perceived in the action of the universe was also there in some form within him and that in him also were elements that responded to invisible powers and forces for good or for evil; so would begin his religio-ethical formations and his possibilities of spiritual experience. An amalgam of primitive intuitions, occult ritual, religio-social ethics, mystical knowledge or experiences symbolised in myth but with their sense preserved by a secret

initiation and discipline is the early, at first very superficial and external stage of human religion. In the beginning these elements were, no doubt, crude and poor and defective, but they acquired depth and range and increased in some cultures to a great amplitude and significance.

But as the mental and life development increased, — for that is Nature's first preoccupation in man and she does not hesitate to push it forward at the cost of other elements that will need to be taken up fully hereafter, — there is a tendency towards intellectualisation, and the first necessary intuitive, instinctive and subliminal formations are overlaid with the structures erected by a growing force of reason and mental intelligence. As man discovers the secrets and processes of physical Nature, he moves more and more away from his early recourse to occultism and magic; the presence and felt influence of gods and invisible powers recedes as more and more is explained by natural workings, the mechanical procedure of Nature: but he still feels the need of a spiritual element and spiritual factors in his life and therefore keeps for a time the two activities running together.

But the occult elements of religion, though still held as beliefs or preserved but also buried in rites and myths, lose their significance and diminish and the intellectual element increases; finally, where and when the intellectualising tendency becomes too strong, there is a movement to cut out everything but creed, institution, formal practice and ethics. Even the element of spiritual experience dwindles and it is considered sufficient to rely only on faith, emotional fervour and moral conduct; the first amalgam of religion, occultism and mystic experience is disrupted, and there is a tendency, not by any means universal or complete but still pronounced or visible, for each of these powers to follow its own way to its own goal in its own separate and free character. A complete denial of religion, occultism and all that is supraphysical is the last outcome of this stage, a hard dry paroxysm of the superficial intellect hacking away the sheltering structures that are refuges for the deeper parts of our nature.

But still evolutionary Nature keeps alive her ulterior intentions in the minds of a few and uses man's greater mental evolution to raise them to a higher plane and deeper issues. In the present time itself, after an age of triumphant intellectuality and materialism, we can see evidences of this natural process, — a return towards inner self-discovery, an inner seeking and thinking, a new attempt at mystic experience, a groping after the inner self, a reawakening to some sense of the truth and power of the spirit begins to manifest itself; man's search after his self and soul and a deeper truth of things tends to revive and resume its lost force and to give a fresh life to the old creeds, erect new faiths or develop independently of sectarian religions. The intellect itself, having reached near to the natural limits of the capacity of physical discovery, having touched its bedrock and found that it explains nothing more than the outer process of Nature, has begun, still tentatively and hesitatingly, to direct an eye of 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.

Occultism is associated in popular idea with magic and magical formulae and a supposed mechanism of the supernatural. But this is only one side, nor is it altogether a superstition as is vainly imagined by those who have not looked deeply or at all at this covert side of secret Nature-Force or experimented with its possibilities. Formulas and their application, a mechanisation of latent forces, can be astonishingly effective in the occult use of mind-power and life-power just as it is in physical Science, but this is only a subordinate method and a limited direction. For mind and life forces are plastic, subtle and variable in their action and have not the material rigidity; they need a subtle and plastic intuition in the knowledge of them, in the interpretation of their action and process and in their application, — even in the interpretation and action of their established formulas. An overstress on mechanisation and rigid formulation is likely to result in sterilisation or a formalised limitation of knowledge and, on the pragmatic side, to much error, ignorant convention, misuse and failure.

Now that we are outgrowing the superstition of the sole truth of Matter, a swing backward towards the old occultism and to new formulations, as well as to a scientific investigation of the still hidden secrets and powers of Mind and a close study of psychic and abnormal or supernormal psychological phenomena, is possible and, in parts, already visible. But if it is to fulfil itself, the true foundation, the true aim and direction, the necessary restrictions and precautions of this line of inquiry have to be rediscovered; its most important aim must be the discovery of the hidden truths and powers of the mind-force and the life-power and the greater forces of the concealed spirit. Occult science is, essentially, the science of the subliminal, the subliminal in ourselves and the subliminal in world-nature, and of all that is in connection with the subliminal, including the subconscious and the superconscious, and the use of it as part of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and for the right dynamisation of that knowledge. (LD 865-867)



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