

Chapter III

The Two Negations

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The Refusal of the Ascetic

All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman and the Self is fourfold.

Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still.

Mandukya Upanishad.1

AND STILL there is a beyond.

For on the other side of the cosmic consciousness

there is, attainable to us, a consciousness yet more transcendent,—

transcendent not only of the ego, but of the Cosmos

itself,—against which the universe seems to stand out like a

petty picture against an immeasurable background. That supports

the universal activity,—or perhaps only tolerates it; It

embraces Life with Its vastness,—or else rejects it from Its

infinite.

If the materialist is justified from his point of view in insisting

on Matter as reality, the relative world as the sole thing of

which we can in some sort be sure and the Beyond as wholly

unknowable, if not indeed non-existent, a dream of the mind,

an abstraction of Thought divorcing itself from reality, so also

is the Sannyasin, enamoured of that Beyond, justified from his

point of view in insisting on pure Spirit as the reality, the one thing free from change, birth, death, and the relative as a creation of the mind and the senses, a dream, an abstraction in

1 Verses 2, 7.

the contrary sense of Mentality withdrawing from the pure and eternal Knowledge.

What justification, of logic or of experience, can be asserted in support of the one extreme which cannot be met by an equally cogent logic and an equally valid experience at the other end?

The world of Matter is affirmed by the experience of the physical senses which, because they are themselves unable to perceive anything immaterial or not organised as gross Matter, would persuade us that the suprasensible is the unreal. This vulgar or rustic error of our corporeal organs does not gain in validity by being promoted into the domain of philosophical reasoning.

Obviously, their pretension is unfounded. Even in the world of Matter there are existences of which the physical senses are incapable of taking cognisance. Yet the denial of the suprasensible as necessarily an illusion or a hallucination depends on this constant sensuous association of the real with the materially perceptible, which is itself a hallucination. Assuming throughout what it seeks to establish, it has the vice of the argument in a circle and can have no validity for an impartial reasoning.

Not only are there physical realities which are suprasensible, but, if evidence and experience are at all a test of truth, there are also senses which are supraphysical² and can not only take cognisance of the realities of the material world without the aid of the corporeal sense-organs, but can bring us into contact with other realities, supraphysical and belonging to another world— included, that is to say, in an organisation of conscious experiences that are dependent on some other principle than the gross Matter of which our suns and earths seem to be made.

Constantly asserted by human experience and belief since the origins of thought, this truth, now that the necessity of an exclusive preoccupation with the secrets of the material world no longer exists, begins to be justified by new-born forms of scientific research. The increasing evidences, of which only the most obvious and outward are established under the name of

² Su^{ks}.ma indriyas, subtle organs, existing in the subtle body (su^{ks}.ma deha), and the means of subtle vision and experience (s^{uks}.ma dr.s.t.i).

telepathy with its cognate phenomena, cannot long be resisted except by minds shut up in the brilliant shell of the past, by intellects limited in spite of their acuteness through the limitation of their field of experience and inquiry, or by those who confuse enlightenment and reason with the faithful repetition of the formulas left to us from a bygone century and the jealous conservation of dead or dying intellectual dogmas.

It is true that the glimpse of supraphysical realities acquired by methodical research has been imperfect and is yet ill-affirmed; for the methods used are still crude and defective. But these rediscovered subtle senses have at least been found to be true witnesses to physical facts beyond the range of the corporeal organs. There is no justification, then, for scouting them as false witnesses when they testify to supraphysical facts beyond the domain of the material organisation of consciousness. Like all evidence, like the evidence of the physical senses themselves, their testimony has to be controlled, scrutinised and arranged by the reason, rightly translated and rightly related, and their field, laws and processes determined. But the truth of great ranges of experience whose objects exist in a more subtle substance and are perceived by more subtle instruments than those of gross physical Matter, claims in the end the same validity as the truth of the material universe. The worlds beyond exist: they have their universal rhythm, their grand lines and formations, their self-existent laws and mighty energies, their just and luminous means of knowledge. And here on our physical existence and in our physical body they exercise their influences; here also they organise their means of manifestation and **commission their messengers** and their witnesses.

But the worlds are only frames for our experience, the senses

only instruments of experience and conveniences. Consciousness is the great underlying fact, the universal witness for whom the world is a field, the senses instruments. To that witness the worlds and their objects appeal for their reality and for the one world or the many, for the physical equally with the supraphysical we have no other evidence that they exist. It has been argued that this is no relation peculiar to the constitution of humanity and its outlook upon an objective world, but the very nature of existence itself; all phenomenal existence consists of an observing consciousness and an active objectivity, and the Action cannot proceed without the Witness because **the universe exists only in or for the consciousness that observes and has no independent reality.** It has been argued in reply that the material universe enjoys an eternal self-existence: it was here before life and mind made their appearance; it will survive after they have disappeared and no longer trouble with their transient strivings and limited thoughts the eternal and inconscient rhythm of the suns. The difference, so metaphysical in appearance, is yet of the utmost practical import, for it determines the whole outlook of man upon life, the goal that he shall assign for his efforts and the field in which he shall circumscribe his energies. For it raises the question of the reality of cosmic existence and, more important still, the question of the value of human life.

If we push the materialist conclusion far enough, we arrive at an insignificance and unreality in the life of the individual and the race which leaves us, logically, the option between either a feverish effort of the individual to snatch what he may from a transient existence, to "live his life", as it is said, or a dispassionate and objectless service of the race and the individual, knowing well that the latter is a transient fiction of the nervous mentality and the former only a little more long-lived collective form of the same regular nervous spasm of Matter. We work or enjoy under the impulsion of a material energy which deceives us with the brief delusion of life or with the nobler delusion of an ethical aim and a mental consummation. **Materialism like spiritual Monism arrives at a Maya that is and yet is not,—is, for it is present and compelling, is not, for it is phenomenal and transitory in its works.** At the other end, if we stress too much the unreality of the objective world, we arrive by a different road at similar but still more trenchant conclusions,—the fictitious character of the individual ego, the unreality and purposelessness of human existence, the return into the Non-Being or the relationless Absolute as the sole rational escape from the meaningless tangle of phenomenal life.

And yet the question cannot be solved by logic arguing on the data of our ordinary physical existence; for in those data

there is always a hiatus of experience which renders all argument inconclusive. We have, normally, neither any definitive experience of a cosmic mind or supermind not bound up with the life of the individual body, nor, on the other hand, any firm limit of experience which would justify us in supposing that our subjective self really depends upon the physical frame and can neither survive it nor enlarge itself beyond the individual body. Only by an extension of the field of our consciousness or an un hoped-for increase in our instruments of knowledge can the ancient quarrel be decided.

The extension of our consciousness, to be satisfying, must necessarily be an inner enlargement from the individual into the cosmic existence. For the Witness, if he exists, is not the individual embodied mind born in the world, but that cosmic Consciousness embracing the universe and appearing as an immanent Intelligence in all its works to which either world subsists eternally and really as Its own active existence or else from which it is born and into which it disappears by an act of knowledge or by an act of conscious power. Not organised mind, but that which, calm and eternal, broods equally in the living earth and the living human body and to which mind and senses are dispensable instruments, is the Witness of cosmic existence and its Lord.

The possibility of a cosmic consciousness in humanity is coming slowly to be admitted in modern Psychology, like the possibility of more elastic instruments of knowledge, although still classified, even when its value and power are admitted, as a hallucination. In the psychology of the East it has always been recognised as a reality and the aim of our subjective progress.

The essence of the passage over to this goal is the exceeding of the limits imposed on us by the ego-sense and at least a partaking, at most an identification with the self-knowledge which broods secret in all life and in all that seems to us inanimate.

Entering into that Consciousness, we may continue to dwell, like It, upon universal existence. Then we become aware,— for all our terms of consciousness and even our sensational experience begin to change,— of Matter as one existence and of bodies as its formations in which the one existence separates itself physically in the single body from itself in all others and again by physical means establishes communication between these multitudinous points of its being. Mind we experience similarly, and Life also, as the same existence one in its multiplicity, separating and reuniting itself in each domain by means appropriate to that movement. And, if we choose, we can proceed farther and, after passing through many linking stages, become aware of a supermind whose universal operation is the

key to all lesser activities. Nor do we become merely conscious of this cosmic existence, but likewise conscious in it, receiving it in sensation, but also entering into it in awareness. In it we live as we lived before in the ego-sense, active, more and more in contact, even unified more and more with other minds, other lives, other bodies than the organism we call ourselves, producing effects not only on our own moral and mental being and on the subjective being of others, but even on the physical world and its events by means nearer to the divine than those possible to our egoistic capacity. **(Identifying with others in their mind, life and body is considered matured stage of sadhana before which one must learn to identify and unify with others in their soul in cosmic consciousness.)**

Real then to the man who has had contact with it or lives in it, is this cosmic consciousness, with a greater than the physical reality; real in itself, real in its effects and works. And as it is thus real to the world which is its own total expression, so is the world real to it; but not as an independent existence. For in that higher and less hampered experience we perceive that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness, all consciousness is selfexistence, eternal in itself, real in its works and neither a dream nor an evolution. **The world is real precisely because it exists only in consciousness**; for it is a Conscious Energy one with

Being that creates it. It is the existence of material form in its own right apart from the self-illuminated energy which assumes the form, that would be a contradiction of the truth of things, a phantasmagoria, a nightmare, an impossible falsehood.

But this conscious Being which is the truth of the infinite supermind, is more than the universe and lives independently in Its own inexpressible infinity as well as in the cosmic harmonies.

World lives by That; That does not live by the world. And as we can enter into the cosmic consciousness and be one with all cosmic existence, **so we can enter into the world-transcending consciousness and become superior to all cosmic existence.** And then arises the question which first occurred to us, whether this transcendence is necessarily also a rejection. **What relation has this universe to the Beyond?**

For at the gates of the Transcendent stands that mere and perfect Spirit described in the Upanishads, luminous, pure, **sustaining the world** but inactive in it, without sinews of energy, without flaw of duality, without scar of division, unique, identical, free from all appearance of relation and of multiplicity, —the pure Self of the Advaitins,³ the inactive Brahman, the transcendent Silence. And the mind when it passes those gates suddenly, without intermediate transitions, **receives a sense of the unreality of the world and the sole reality of the Silence**

which is one of the most powerful and convincing experiences of which the human mind is capable. (thus the Mayavada, Illusionism is born) Here, in the perception of

this pure Self or of the Non-Being behind it, we have the starting point for a second negation,—parallel at the other pole to the materialistic, but more complete, more final, more perilous in its effects on the individuals or collectivities that hear its potent call to the wilderness,—the refusal of the ascetic.

It is this revolt of Spirit against Matter that for two thousand years, since Buddhism disturbed the balance of the old Aryan world, has dominated increasingly the Indian mind. Not that the sense of the cosmic illusion is the whole of Indian thought; there are other philosophical statements, other religious aspirations. Nor has some attempt at an adjustment between the two terms been wanting even from the most extreme philosophies. But all have lived in the shadow of the great Refusal and the final end of life for all is the garb of the ascetic. The general conception of existence has been permeated with the Buddhistic theory of the

3 The Vedantic Monists.

chain of Karma and with the consequent antinomy of bondage and liberation, bondage by birth, liberation by cessation from birth. Therefore all voices are joined in one great consensus that not in this world of the dualities can there be our kingdom of heaven, but beyond, whether in the joys of the eternal

Vrindavan⁴ or the high beatitude of Brahmalo⁵, beyond all manifestations in some ineffable Nirvana⁶ or where all separate experience is lost in the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence.

And through many centuries a great army of shining witnesses, saints and teachers, names sacred to Indian memory and dominant in Indian imagination, have borne always the same witness and swelled always the same lofty and distant appeal,—renunciation the sole path of knowledge, acceptance of physical life the act of the ignorant, cessation from birth the right use of human birth, the call of the Spirit, the recoil from Matter.

A renunciation of life and release into the Spirit of the Ascetic creates an exaggeration of the impulse of liberation, more complete and more final, more perilous in its effects on the individuals and collectivities, which destroyed the symmetry and disturbed the balance of ancient Indian Vedic culture and cut it into two irreconcilable movements of life, the normal life of interests and desires with ethical and religious colouring and supernormal inner life by rejection of surface living. An Integral Ascetic retains the old Aryan synthesis of reconciling human perfection through normal and natural mental development with his Spiritual evolution. The full liberation can come by liberation of all the parts of Soul and Nature, universal detachment from all things, universal awareness of Knowledge and aesthesis and yet opens him to the touch of Spiritual Sympathy, Compassion and Oneness.

For an age out of sympathy with the ascetic spirit—and throughout all the rest of the world the hour of the Anchorite may seem to have passed or to be passing—it is easy to attribute this great trend to the failing of vital energy in an ancient race tired out by its burden, its once vast share in the common

advance, exhausted by its many-sided contribution to the sum of human effort and human knowledge. But we have seen that it corresponds to a truth of existence, a state of conscious realisation which stands at the very summit of our possibility.

In practice also the ascetic spirit is an indispensable element in human perfection and even its separate affirmation cannot be avoided so long as the race has not at the other end liberated its intellect and its vital habits from subjection to an always insistent animalism.

“I would myself say that no man can be **spiritually complete** if he cannot live ascetically or follow a life as bare as the barest anchorites.” Sri Aurobindo/On Himself

We seek indeed a larger and completer affirmation. We perceive that in the Indian ascetic ideal the great Vedantic formula,

4 Goloka, the Vaishnava heaven of eternal Beauty and Bliss.

5 The highest state of pure existence, consciousness and beatitude attainable by the soul without complete extinction in the Indefinable.

6 Extinction, not necessarily of all being, but of being as we know it; extinction of ego, desire and egoistic action and mentality.

“One without a second”, has not been read sufficiently in the light of that other formula equally imperative, “All this is the Brahman”. The passionate aspiration of man upward to the Divine has not been sufficiently related to the descending movement

of the Divine leaning downward to embrace eternally Its manifestation. Its meaning in Matter has not been so well understood as Its truth in the Spirit. The Reality which the Sannyasin seeks has been grasped in its full height, but not, as by the ancient Vedantins, in its full extent and comprehensiveness. But in our completer affirmation we must not minimise the part of the pure spiritual impulse. As we have seen how greatly Materialism has served the ends of the Divine, **so we must acknowledge the still greater service rendered by Asceticism to Life.** We shall preserve the truths of material Science and its real utilities in the final harmony, even if many or even if all of its existing forms have to be broken or left aside. An even greater scruple of right preservation must guide us in our dealing with the legacy, however actually diminished or depreciated, of the Aryan past.

In Integral Yoga, the Ascetic or the latter Vedantic formula of attaining the Spirit's height, "One without the second," *ekamevadvityam* is sufficiently linked with the other complementary ancient Vedantic formula of comprehensiveness and illumining the Matter's depth, "all this is the Brahman," *Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman*. Thus the ascent of consciousness to explore the height of the Spirit is followed by descent of consciousness to explore the depth of Matter is realised.

Summary:

Just as the materialist on the one end of the spectrum deems the Spirit as unknowable or a dream or figment of the imagination, on the other end of the spectrum, the ascetic or later Vedhantins hold that the spirit alone is real, free from birth and death and the earth bound life a dream, **illusion of sense instinct**, mirage and merely the superimposition of some maya on the

permanent consciousness/Brahman. So there are no linkages between the two ends of the spectrum, no ascending and descending steps that will reconcile them.

The materialist who argues that the spirit does not exist/ imagined because his current instruments are unable to grasp it is mistaken. The ascetic who argues that the universe exists only so far as there is a witnessing consciousness and therefore does not exist in its absence is also mistaken (my Gita teacher used to make this argument – I used to find it very unsatisfactory/unacceptable – now after coming to Sri Aurobindo, I now understand my inner being needed something far more), for he does not understand that before life and mind, the universe enjoyed a self existence. Both paths inevitably end up leading to a maya of one sort or the other. As the Lord says

“Only by an extension of the field of our consciousness or an

unhoped-for increase in our instruments of knowledge can the

ancient quarrel be decided” Cosmic consciousness has the power to link the Matter and the Spirit and the Unknowable can be known wholly by exploring the whole range of consciousness from Inconscient to Supremind.

and He harmonises both ends by saying

“For the Witness, if he exists, is not the

individual embodied mind born in the world, but that cosmic

Consciousness embracing the universe and appearing as an immanent

Intelligence in all its works to which either world subsists

eternally and really as Its own active existence or else from which

it is born and into which it disappears by an act of knowledge

or by an act of conscious power.”

As we enlarge our consciousness to the ranges of the cosmic mind and the supermind beyond we arrive at the great harmonising state of existence where

“For in that higher and less hampered experience we perceive that consciousness and being are not different from each other, but all being is a supreme consciousness, all consciousness is selfexistence, eternal in itself, real in its works and neither a dream nor an evolution.”

The Lord gives credit to the ascetic (as He has to the materialist) for that view of life and the world has allowed mankind to pull itself out of its base animalistic instincts and pure lower vital way of living. In many ways the materialist and the ascetic’s counterbalancing view points are excellent methods of churning the current consciousness so that something higher may manifest.

In summary both the materialist and ascetic seem to be children in school (one perhaps a bit older) who with limited knowledge and growth of consciousness are convinced of their own positions and only an enlargement of their consciousness **through development of Intuition** can help the harmonisation of their positions. **(Good discernment.)**

OM TAT SAT

