

## FROM PERSONALITY TO PERSON — THE IMPERATIVE SHIFT

Menaka Deorah



*Spiritual significance: Integral opening to the Light.*

*Author's Note: This is an attempt to take a closer look at the burning need and relevance of such a shift and some of the unique dimensions that characterize its effectuation in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.*

### Part 1. Need and relevance of the shift

#### What is the shift?

Much has been achieved on the material plane but on the personal front man continues to be trapped, impaired and afflicted endlessly. Distress and discontent have become the norm. His subjective life seems no less than a tragic dead end. The verdict from all sides is that man as he is, with his grossly one-sided existence, is plainly incapable of any real solution, any true perfection, any lasting happiness. Something is amiss. The West, with its modern findings, acknowledging only the apparent physical side of life, fails miserably to alleviate his pain. The east too, oblivious of its own spiritual past, fails to deal adequately with the blinding material present, and its crashing consequences. The search is at its most frantic, there has to be a connection, a nexus between what we are and what we ought to be, between reality and the hope of perfection we harbor secretly. The inner and the outer, spirit and matter, soul and nature, are the primal dualities of our life and the source of all the contradiction and discord of our daily life; the opposite poles that man seeks constantly to fathom and bridge. The pillars upon which rests all the success of life, world and god;

To arrive somehow at a working harmony of the two extremes, because it seems that thus alone can be found the way to his perfection and joy, is the challenge and the solution that man must achieve. Life is but a laboratory for the fulfillment of this purpose. All our imperfection is seated in our nature or personality and all our potential perfection is concealed in our soul or the real Person. In the current scenario the personality is all we know for we have never met the real person. The wise have told us that it is the inner Person that must be given the charge of the governance of life. The shift from personality to person is our only hope. In Sri Aurobindo's words,

The fact is not only there, it determines our whole existence, it is the one fact that is really important to us as human beings with a will and an intelligence and a subjective existence which makes all our happiness and suffering. The whole problem of life resolves itself into this one question,—What are we to do with this soul (person) and nature (personality) set face to face with each other?...The whole of human philosophy, religion, science is really nothing but an attempt to get at the right data upon which it will be possible to answer the question and solve, as satisfactorily as our knowledge will allow, the problem of our existence. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 428-429)

In the outer appearance of things man and world are only what we call nature or Prakriti, "a force that operates as the whole law and mechanism of being, creates the world which is the object of our mind and senses." (*Essays on the Gita*, p. 573) What is not known is the fact that the mind and senses are also created by Nature "as a means of relation between the creature and the world he lives in." (*ibid.*) In this external view of things man with his soul, mind and body appears to be a product of Nature "differentiated from others by a separation of his body, life and mind and especially by his ego-sense—that subtle mechanism constructed for him that he may confirm and centralize his consciousness of all this strong separateness and difference." (*ibid.*) Man's whole being is driven by Nature's laws and he cannot function outside of it. Even the so-called freedom that he assigns to his personal will and ability to choose and decide for himself is actually nothing but the will of his ego, which is most strictly a puppet of Nature. "...as is the nature of his ego, so will be the nature of its will and according to that he must act and he can no other." (*ibid.*, pp. 573-574) This is how bound we are and this therefore the root of the whole problem.

"There is, however, something in man's consciousness which does not fall in with the rigidity of this formula..." (*ibid.*, p. 574) As he develops and evolves he begins to feel the existence of an inner reality, separate from his outer nature, untouched and unaffected from the surface turbulent movements of personality and with a semblance of infinite knowledge, peace and power. In this inner view of things it is no longer Nature but Soul or Spirit that dominates. It is Purusha rather than Prakriti that governs. It is the presence of an absolute

Person rather than a relative personality. The whole truth is that Nature is creative power of the Soul. Soul is Nature's basis and upholder. Nature works out and manifests what Soul wills for its delight. Nature and soul are two aspects of the same reality, one inferior but dynamic and creative, the other superior but static and self-contained. The two were separated from and out of the One Supreme Reality for creation and manifestation of the universe. "The Purusha & Prakriti are therefore not only the Witness & the Activity Witnessed, but the Lord & his executive energy. Purusha is Ishwara, Prakriti is His Shakti." (*Essays Divine and Human*, p. 195) The universe is nothing but a play of the two with each other.

Sri Aurobindo says that "The real soul and self of us is hidden from our intelligence by its ignorance of inner things, by a false identification, by an absorption in our outward mechanism of mind, life and body." (*Essays on the Gita*, p. 574) Without knowledge of the real basis of our self we are no more than little crippled creatures circling hopelessly to achieve a very tiny inconsequential part of what seems to us the whole reality. The picture is grossly incomplete without the admittance of the soul. "If the active soul of man can once draw back from its identification with its natural instruments, if it can see and live in the entire faith of its inner reality, then all is changed to it, life and existence take on another appearance, action a different meaning and character." (*ibid.*)

## A closer look

In the lower terms of existence it is the personality/nature aspect that dominates but as we realize the inadequacy of this functioning and dissatisfied, decide to move within towards something more potent, more conscious, towards soul or purusha, nature too evolves and begins to assume her true role, that of Shakti, that of which she is a lesser formulation and purusha too grows in the process, from a silent witness self to the mighty master and Lord, Ishwara. The combined working of Ishwara and Shakti in the individual forms the basis of an integral perfection by preparing the grounds, enabling, empowering and upgrading the system of mental man to usher in the next evolutionary principle, the supramental Gnostic consciousness, that which is the ultimate aim of all this terrestrial life.

But this metamorphosis can begin only when we become convinced, either in one part of our being or in all of it, of the first imperative shift, and arrive at the mind soul within, the part in us that steps back and watches uninvolved all this play of the surface. It is to this mind soul, the part of the inner purusha seated behind the surface mind with the hallmark human capacity to observe silently, that we assign the work of the triple yoga of works, knowledge and devotion. This triple movement of the initial purification and liberation of our mentality, emotion and action, is considered in the Integral Yoga, as the fastest

means and basis of the great shift, so that when the higher principle does descend into us for the final transformation, it finds in us a suitable, sufficiently wide, universalized and strong adhara. One that is firm and stable in its inner foundations.

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga psychology offers the shortest possible way to the largest human perfection ever envisaged. The key to man's problems and man's maximum potential lies in something beyond his mind and nature—it lies in his soul. From surface to depth, from relative to absolute, from temporary to permanent, from fragmented to united, from chaos to harmony, from becoming to being, from personality to person: This is the imperative shift we are to make before any significant change can take place. Nothing short of it will suffice anymore.

This requires an intense personal effort. As Sri Aurobindo says,

The development of the experience in its rapidity, its amplitude, the intensity and power of its results, depends primarily, in the beginning of the path and long after, on the aspiration and personal effort of the sadhaka. The process of Yoga is a turning of the human soul from the egoistic state of consciousness absorbed in the outward appearances and attractions of things to a higher state in which the Transcendent and Universal can pour itself into the individual mould and transform it. The first determining element of the siddhi is, therefore, the intensity of the turning, the force that directs the soul inward. The power of aspiration of the heart, the force of the will, the concentration of the mind, the perseverance and determination of the applied energy are the measure of that intensity. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 58)

It is only then, we may say, that the shift from personality to person has been established.

The difficulty is always the in first stage of the shift, the stage of the fundamental uprooting of the old formulations and the old tendencies of the personality, one that nature herself had created to achieve the first formed human individuality out of the animal; this movement in the opposite direction, against the gravity of the ego, driven by a new unknown inner force and power, is bound to be shattering. Any orbital change needs huge velocity and huge power; and here we are talking of the greatest orbital shifts of all, that of ego to soul, that of personality to person. Sri Aurobindo tells us that all human effort is an image of the divine Tapas, that all mighty burning divine will and energy that makes anything possible and that consumes in its fold any opposition whatsoever. The question is to what extent and degree we align ourselves with the divine plan now that we know it. The good news is that times are particularly favorable for those who are ready to take on this journey, ready to synchronize their intention and purpose of life with that of Nature herself,

ready to take the first plunge towards the next future of evolution. Everything in the universe will now conspire unanimously to aid the individual in his new goal, the only goal worth having, for it incorporates and fulfills all others.

As we commit ourselves to this goal the need for personal effort reduces and the process naturally turns to autopilot mode in which the individual and divine Will merge substantially for an effective advance.

## Why the shift ?

“Man is a transitional being”, says Sri Aurobindo (*SABCL*, Vol. 17, p. 7). He is not the final in the evolutionary ladder. Nature cannot rest satisfied with a creature as imperfect as man. She now labors to formulate this new being out of man but without his knowledge and consent. From the inadequate mind principle it is now time to move to the perfection of the supermind principle. Man is the only creature capable of a voluntary participation in his own evolution to the next species. Sri Aurobindo came to tell us that it is now time and the evolutionary intent for man to accelerate his evolution by a conscious and willed self-exceeding. The process of this self-exceeding is the Integral Yoga Psychology.

Man’s passage from the external ego where there is suffering and limitation to the real inner self where there is joy and mastery, is the focus of this shift and is essential not only for his individual perfection but for the perfection of the world too. How long shall we remain ignorant of our divine destiny! In Sri Aurobindo’s magnificent words,

...man’s importance in the world is that he gives to it that development of consciousness in which its transfiguration by a perfect self-discovery becomes possible. To fulfill God in life is man’s manhood. He starts from the animal vitality, but a divine existence is his objective...(*The Life Divine*, p. 36)

The liberation of the individual soul is therefore the keynote of the definite divine action; it is the primary divine necessity and the pivot on which all else turns. It is the point of Light in which the intended complete self-manifestation in the many begins to emerge. (*ibid.*, p. 40)

If this be the divine game plan would it not be in our best interest to abandon all personal games and join it right away! To remain where we are now, in the ignorant superficiality we know as our self, to continue as part of Nature’s Evolution is not only to be content with mediocrity and imperfection, but it is a grave denial and contradiction of the will of evolution. There is growth in the old way of Nature, she leads us ahead all the time in spite of our self, through difficulty and pain, but this growth is retarded and sullied, it is thrust upon us. It can never arrive, as will confirm our personal experience, at anything

absolute and perfect. Moreover, it is Nature's secret desire that man should now break away from her and commence his own evolution by coming in contact with the his real self, which he can find within and above himself, and become the mighty master he is destined to be. There is a tremendous force at work all around us urging and goading us to make the shift. All personal and world events are pointing in the same direction. Everything seems to resonate the same message. We must be utterly impaired not to see it, grossly inert not to hear it. Every moment calls, every instant beckons.

## **When the Shift**

All life is a preparation towards this pivotal shift. Everything that happens, all experience is a means for growth leading to this momentous turning point. This is the secret blueprint of life and the reason why things happen the way they do. To assign any other motive or cause to life's occurring is childish. We search different avenues until we are ready for the real thing. Then the call comes. It is loud and clear, unmistakable. It is impossible then to be content with the old standards, the old pulls and pushes, the old ways. Something consents within almost in spite of us. It is then time to work out in the personality what has been decided by the inner person. We are now ready to make the shift.

Nature and ego have brought us this far but can take us no further. It is time now for our soul to take charge and work out the next future. It is by a conscious and rigorous personal effort of mind and life that we must recognize, acknowledge and hand over the reins of our life to the supremacy of the soul. An honest integral consent is all that is needed; the rest shall be made to unfold in spite of us.

## **Part 2: The uniqueness of the shift**

### **Aim and character**

Most past yoga's and systems advocate this shift as the necessary first step for any self-development but the final aim has always been an individual liberation from nature and world and a singular, linear, inward or upward union with some abstract and silent divine. In the Integral yoga too it is essential to make the shift from nature to soul, but not for the sake of personal fulfillment alone, rather for an integral and total perfection of the whole of life and world. Union not only with the silent Brahman but a mighty bringing down of its dynamism and splendour, a radical conversion of the lower into the higher, a tangible realization of God in everything from the most material to the most abstract, from the most mundane to the most exotic. A horizontal unity with the one in all and then a vertical unity with the one above all. This is the new formula

that leaves nothing outside its scope. It is Sri Aurobindo's ruthless synthesis of the largest order and uncompromising harmony of the biggest dimension that characterizes this shift. Nothing is left out, no matter how contradictory or how irreconcilable. Every opposition promises a new order, every discord points at a new alignment.

It is this widest worldview that gives the process of this shift a radically different hue. It brings in a never before enthusiasm, optimism, energy, love and delight of life, of world, of god, something that correlates magnificently with newness, modernity, globalization, power and all that belongs and characterizes this new world that is surging today. Contradictions vanish, boundaries and divisions disappear, extremes have no room anymore, everything finds its natural place in this largest scheme of things; all theories and practices, all ways and all views are accepted into a universal embrace; narrowness removed and broadened, all is prepared to be transformed until a new unimaginably luminous and powerful order consumes everything in its ultimate perfection.

God is no more ethereal but real, no more far and silent but near and intimate, no more unreachable but waiting to reach out in every nook and corner, in every gaze and smile, in every word and phrase. It is not we who seek God anymore; it is the Hour when god seeks us. The tables have turned. It is time to prepare ourselves for the carnival of God. Sri Aurobindo confirms most grandiosely what our ancient Vedic seers affirmed.

In other words, if Brahman has entered into form and represented Its being in material substance, it can only be to enjoy self-manifestation in the figures of relative and phenomenal consciousness. Brahman is in this world to represent Itself in the values of Life. Life exists in Brahman in order to discover Brahman in Itself... (*The Life Divine*, p. 36)

This is the true role and unique privilege of our human existence... Shall we not be stuck if we spend ourselves doing and knowing everything other than the thing that really matters, that for which life is actually meant.

The uniqueness of this shift lies in the comprehensiveness of this view. It is an integral perfection we seek of life and world through an individual illumination and liberation from nature to an individual illumination and arrival in soul. Sri Aurobindo came to tell that this is not only possible but most awaited and the only way to advance. All we need is a conviction and consent in all our being that this is the thing we want and nothing else.

No heavenly promises, no afterlife rewards, no solemn oaths, God is either here and now in the thick of life or never again. Every single thing that we experience whether internal or external is God concealed. There exists nothing else. To be able to see, know, love and become this secret Divinity is the trick. It comes from a certain discipline and conviction. Then we are on the roll,

unstoppable, we meet God in every moment and in every movement. Life becomes what it is meant to be, a constant ecstatic discovery of the One in the field of the Many. Even pain becomes the touch of God and is met with love and thankfulness until in every single thing we feel only joy and see only His smiling face.

Based on the profoundest universal Truths and interpreted in the widest possible manner Sri Aurobindo's yoga seems very consistent with today's trends. Top of the line and extremely user friendly! All-inclusive and super adaptive! The fastest, most comprehensive and foolproof operating system ever!

Dynamic, fast, powerful, radical, total, integral, whole, entire, all, universal, life, earth, here, and now, are the keywords of this yoga. As Sri Aurobindo puts it:

...a complete fulfillment of our being and consciousness, a complete transformation of our nature—and this implies a complete perfection of life here and not only a return to an eternal perfection elsewhere. This is the object but in the method also there is the same integrality, for the entirety in the object cannot be accomplished without an entirety in the method, a complete turning, opening, self giving of our being and nature in all its parts, ways, movements to that which we realize...

This is the character of the integral Yoga. (*Essays Divine and Human*, p. 150)

## The inspiration

The Mother in her simple style has given us the formula for this integral change:

We don't want life as it is any longer,...we don't want falsehood and ignorance any longer,...we don't want suffering and unconsciousness any longer,... we do not want disorder and bad will any longer, because Sri Aurobindo has come to tell us: It is not necessary to leave the earth to find the Truth, it is not necessary to leave life to find one's soul, it is not necessary to give up the world to enter into relation with the Divine. The Divine is everywhere, in everything and if he is hidden, it is because we do not take the trouble to discover him.

We can simply by a sincere aspiration open a sealed door in us and find... that Something which will change the whole significance of life, reply to all our questions, solve all our problems and lead us to the perfection we aspire for without knowing it, to that Reality alone which can satisfy us and give us lasting joy, equilibrium, strength, life...



The starting point : to want it, truly want it, to need it. The next step : to think, above all, of that...

That is the one thing which counts. And then...Something will happen. Surely something will happen. For each one it will take a different form. (*Questions and Answers 1957-58*, pp. 374-375)

Mother's formula is quite simple. Conviction in the mind, a burning need in the heart and a constant remembering and thinking. The rest will happen by a greater Power. Her assurance, Her sanction is as certain as the rising of the sun.

## Composition and structure of our Being

It is important to the efficiency of the shift that we know our being well, its parts, its functions and the laws that govern it. We should know exactly what is happening, how to deal with it and the right attitudes towards every movement that demands our attention.

Our being is a complex amalgam of many different parts. Very broadly there are two divisions in the human being. The outer being, which constitutes the personality (from the Latin *persona*, "mask"), and the inner being, the true Being or the Person who uses the outer mask of the personality. The outer being, made up of the outer mind, vital and physical, is only an instrument and a means of expression for the inner being to use. It is not our real self. However, ordinarily we are identified with the outer being and regard it as our real self. Therefore all our life is an expression of our outer being and not that of the inner being as is meant to be. Herein lies the whole problem. How can life be anything close to perfect when it is driven by the part that was designed to serve, not command?

Here is a brief description of the three parts of the outer being, the mind, the vital and the physical from the writings of A.S. Dalal (*Looking from Within*, pp. vi-vii)

The physical (being): It is the consciousness in the body which regulates the complex workings of the different bodily organs and physiological systems. Though the mind exhibits a higher form of consciousness and intelligence than that of the body, it cannot but marvel at the wisdom of the body expressed in the various processes which maintain the body in health and heal it in illness or accident. However, physical consciousness, as compared to mental consciousness, is seen to be relatively inert, obscure, narrow or limited, and automatic or mechanical in its functionings. Thus attitudes which are characterised by rigidity, narrowness, conservatism or slowness to, change, indifference or boredom, and habitual or routine modes of action and reaction are related to the physical part of our being.

The vital (being): Intermediate between the physical and the mental is the vital, made up of life-energies, sensations (pleasure, pain, etc.), instincts and impulses (anger, fear, lust, etc.), desires, feelings and emotions... The vital consciousness is characterised by likes and dislikes, the search for pleasure and enjoyment, and the avoidance of pain and discomfort, desire to possess and to accumulate... Besides the quest for pleasure these attitudes are characterised by a need for perpetual variety and change, ambitiousness, attachment and repulsion, aggression, fear and impulsiveness.

The mental (being): This is the part of our make-up which has to do with thoughts and ideas, facts and, knowledge. Reason and intellect are the most developed expressions of the mental consciousness. In contrast to the vital which is governed by the pleasure principle, the mental is guided by what accords with reason and is deemed to be true and good. Therefore when the mental consciousness is predominant in an individual, the attitudes of the individual are characterised by a rational outlook and are based on moral and intellectual principles.

In the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy, the outer and the inner divisions of the being are called Prakriti (Nature) and Purusha (Person) respectively. Prakriti functions through the ego and the three gunas, satwa, rajas, tamas in the outer personality. Her secret intention is to go beyond these, arrive at the Purusha and become a conscious and perfect instrument of the Purusha. This she hopes to accomplish with our conscious collaboration and not any more through the old law of obscure causality in which the individual is only a puppet with no actual power.

A clear awareness of this division of the outer and the inner is the first prerequisite. Only then can we hope to reconcile the two and consciously start making the shift.

The part that was made to govern, the all powerful and luminous inner being, lies dormant, inactive, closed, unknown to our active consciousness. It is not difficult to identify the inner being for it seeks to be uncovered all the time, sending intimations and suggestions at every possible opening in the outer being. It is a strange and ill-founded notion from the past that the inner being is difficult to attain to and meant only for the realized one or a few chosen ones. We are all without an exception, chosen and destined to realize the inner being. It is not about some ultimate far reaching moment of illumination that is the aim but rather the first conviction, the first moment of wow, the first thrills of a first contact, it is what we can do now that matters; it is the now that will open up the next and so forth... no future realization is the object of this shift, we seek what we can achieve now even if it is only a mental affirmation or the tiny unshaking faith in the heart. The one that can happen now is what we seek.

The inner being consists of an inner personality, the swadharma and swabhava of our scriptures, comprising of our inner mental, inner vital and our inner physical. This inner personality reflects the unique divine possibilities of our true individuality. It is the higher aspects of our external personality. At the centre of our inner being is the inner Person, the Psychic being, the Purusha, the real master and governor of our life and being, under whose luminous action we are ordained to work out the dreams of god here upon Earth, making this aching material life the joyous field of divine perfection. Again, this shift from the outer being to the inner being is not some imaginary human utopia we are talking about, it is as real and practical as anything else, the very purpose of life and the reason why the world still moves ahead in spite of all the disasters, falsehood, ugliness and sorrow that exists. It is the saddest fact of all that this reality of life is not common knowledge, is not the thing we think about all the time, and is not our main preoccupation. How shall we make the shift if we don't even know that life the aim of life of life and not all the other useless things that we live for.

To be liberated from the outer and the lower self, to live in the inner and the higher self, in order to transform the lower into the higher, is the larger aim of this shift. Here we shall not abandon the outer after having reached the inner; here we shall reach the inner for the love of the outer, for the love of a total union and a total perfection.

## **Mind, the preferred starting point**

When we first pause and step back to relook at our self, when we first withdraw from the surface activities of the nature to go within, we come to the soul behind the mind, the manomaya purusha, the inner mental being, the part in us that watches silently without being involved or affected. This is the witness self, the sakshi of the scriptures. The shift begins from here. This is the part that can take us within or rather, that will lead itself to the supreme mastery and perfection of the innermost being. This witness self is the first critical interface between nature and soul. Sri Aurobindo points out that we are essentially mental creatures and it is through the ability of the mind to detach itself from the sensory inputs and its ability observe dispassionately that we shall arrive most naturally and most easily to that which is beyond it. For we want the fastest and broadest perfection possible.

The predominant character and dynamics of this surface mode is the famous “raag dwesh,” fear-desire or pleasant-unpleasant reactive mechanism. We are so compulsively and helplessly tied to this habit that we can never get past it and arrive at the part where there is no reaction, only a creative silence, from where real progress is possible. This is where most of us either lose interest because of repeated failure and frustration or succumb to the pressure. As the witness consciousness gradually becomes more stable and constant in

us our positive and negative reactions become milder, less frequent and less insistent. Slowly this act of witnessing begins to assume the power to consent or withdraw its sanction from the instinctive movements and reactions of the outer ego-driven personality. This is the first real victory, the beginnings of the orbital change. This is when the sakshi turns to anumanta, the giver of sanction.

Once the sanction is withdrawn from this outward tendency to react to everything, once there is even an initial check on the outward flow of the life energies, the prana, then there is a real hope, a real possibility of making the inner shift and all our being and its old habitual energies are automatically drawn inwards.

As the power to withdraw sanction increases, so the conviction, joy and sense of freedom. This is the beginning of purification, the first stage of the yoga. This will lead to liberation and eventually to transformation, the unique dimension given to us by Sri Aurobindo in his Integral yoga. The past yogas stopped at liberation. It is the aspect of transformation that gives this shift its vastness and wholeness. Although here we attempt to look more closely at the first and second stages, it is in the light of the third that we shall do so.

### **The use of concentration**

There is by now a strong conviction, a resolute faith and a sure glimpse of the inner reality but the difficulty is the inability to remain within, the inability to hold the realization and live constantly in it. Our inward concentration gets distracted, dissipated, dissolved much too easily by the slightest push and pull and we are thrown back almost with vengeance into the surface nature mode with all its old habits and tendencies. And this is the area of our special interest, the first attempts at holding and dwelling in the truths that we have only seen flashes of. Making our inner knowledge a living reality, becoming in all our nature what we know and believe, loosening the knots that tie us down to our old ways, are the biggest difficulties in making the first stable shift. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

It is by thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal; it is by gathering back of the thought into it must draw ourselves back into the real. Concentration has three powers by which this aim can be affected. By concentration on anything whatsoever we are able to know that thing, to make it deliver up its concealed secrets; we must use this power to know not things, but the one Thing-in-itself. By concentration again the whole will can be gathered up for the acquisition of that which is still ungrasped, still beyond us; this power if it is sufficiently trained, sufficiently single-minded, sincere, sure of itself, faithful to itself alone, absolute in faith, we can use for the acquisition of any object whatsoever; but we ought to use it

not for the acquisition of the many objects which the world offers to us, but to grasp spiritually the one object worthy of pursuit which is also the one subject worthy of knowledge. (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 304)

A third process is neither at first to concentrate in a strenuous meditation on the one subject nor in a strenuous concentration of the one object of thought-vision, but first to still the mind altogether. This may be done by various ways; one is to stand back from the mental action altogether not participating in but simply watching it until, tired of its unsanctioned leaping and running, it falls into an increasing and finally an absolute quiet. Another way is to reject the thought-suggestions, to cast them away from the mind whenever they come and firmly hold to the peace of the being, which really and always exists behind the trouble and riot of the mind. When this secret peace is unveiled, a great calm settles on the being and there comes usually with it the perception and experience of the all-pervading silent Brahman, everything else at first seeming to be mere form and eidolon. On the basis of this calm everything else may be built up in the knowledge and experience no longer of the external phenomena of things but of the deeper truth of the divine manifestation. (*ibid.*, pp. 309-310)

A deep understanding of this concentration will make sure that even as we swing from nature to soul, from the external personality mode to the inner person mode, we shall not be flustered and disturbed by it. We shall persist in a quiet faith and turn every dissipation and every distraction into a growing perfection of the inner concentration. Sri Aurobindo assures us that once the mind has glimpsed this concentration it can never be the same again, it would have changed forever and nothing can stop it from a rapid advance.

### **The power of renunciation**

“Renunciation is an indispensable instrument of our perfection,” says Sri Aurobindo (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 311). Renunciation not of life and the objects of life as we is traditionally told but of the great knots of ignorance that tie us down to these objects and make our divine living an impossibility. Desire, attachment and ego are the three massive burdens of our existence that we shall cast out vehemently and forever from our nature and forbid them to resist, retard and come in the way of our inward shift. As Sri Aurobindo says,

...Our renunciation must obviously be an inward renunciation... there is nothing in the world to which we must be attached, not wealth nor poverty, nor joy nor suffering, nor life nor death, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor vice nor virtue, nor friend, nor wife, nor children, nor country, nor our work and mission, nor heaven nor earth, nor all that is within them or beyond them. And this does not mean that there is nothing at all that we shall love, nothing

in which we shall take delight; for attachment is egoism is egoism in love and not love itself, desire is limitation and insecurity in a hunger for pleasure and satisfaction and not the seeking after the divine delight in things. A universal love we must have, calm and yet intense beyond the brief vehemence of the most violent passion; a delight in things rooted in a delight in God that does not adhere to their forms but to that which they conceal in themselves and that embraces the universe without being caught in its meshes. (*ibid.*, pp. 314-315)

In this freedom lies infinite ecstasy and limitless enjoyment; in this liberation lies our true self, our true life. In this freedom of the spirit we make the shift from personality to person.

## **Work, action and living**

The personal element recedes, and the divine presence becomes the focal point. All work and act is made an offering to the divine. All sense of benefit and gain is offered up to the Divine. Action becomes a swift means to realize the divine perfection in life. First we do this through a remembrance of the Divine at the beginning and at the end of all our activity, then it becomes more constant, like a quiet backdrop of divine memory, and finally there comes a point when the consecration to the divine becomes the natural fabric and substance of our being, making it impossible to live without an active communion with the divine in our thoughts, senses and feelings. There remains then no sense of responsibility and ownership of any kind, no expectation of any kind, no initiation or preference of any kind. A tranquil, alert and happy emptiness replaces all personal movements until the Divine will stir again and leads to the next action. As this is glimpsed and stabilized in the individual his passage from personality to person becomes more complete and effective.

## **The search for harmony—our one supreme duty**

“For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony,” (*The Life Divine*, p. 2) is the supreme revelation Sri Aurobindo makes that sums up in one mighty stroke the essence and solution of the whole problem of pain and existence. Everything that we experience as individuals or as a collectivity is essentially a possibility of future perfection in the guise of an event or happening. Everything without exception comes with the clear intention of achieving a particular harmony of differences, a particular reconciliation of opposites, a certain possibility of oneness amidst the variety of multiples. It is our supreme duty, *kartavya*, to put aside the externality of things, rend ourselves of our superficial personality and seek doggedly this harmony in everything we meet whether positive or negative or even apparently trivial or mundane. This is our noblest and worthiest preoccupation and our fastest way to the glory of a divine life. In the beginning it might be arduous to silence

the discord of the ego and find out the harmony in everything but in the end it's a question of conviction and habit. First we may struggle to see only mentally what the situation is here to reconcile but gradually this potential harmony factor in things reveals itself almost before the thing has happened and we gladly surrender to its power and work out actively what it is here to accomplish. We stop looking at things in the mirror of our personal matrix, we detach ourselves from all personal conditioning and all personal preferences, and we do this not out of some heroic stoic personal effort but rather with the simple faith in the power of that universal harmony. Our unceasing eagerness to discover this underlying oneness in things is all that matters, its fruition and completeness is not in our solo capacity. We shall fulfill our duty by an unwavering gaze on the secret harmony in everything. This much at least we owe to our Masters if not anything else.

## **Relations with the Divine**

As we cast away the shackles of personality and move towards the real person, as we get ensnared by the call of the divine flute, we find that our relation with the Divine takes different forms and assumes various bhavas. We also realize in the process that personality is only a hindrance in its crude initial ego-driven stages and our liberation from it only a means to remold it into a divine personality bearing the qualities of the divine nature and governed by our true swabhava and swadharma. We find ourselves turning and responding to the divine or to that imperative need within to become like the divine in various ways according to our readiness and need. The divine we seek everywhere and in all things is the one who seeks us too, who adores us and who lures us all the time through myriad ways into his vast embrace. It is we who fail to see him often. But when we do begin to find him concealed in all things, when we can't be otherwise, he becomes obvious to our senses, he becomes apparent to our understanding and he becomes a constant to our being and living. Sometimes he presents himself as our master and commander whose will we work out as would a warrior with honor and pride. Sometimes he is the friend and confidant who plays with our humanness and leads us by the hand to greater heights of perfection. Sometimes he becomes the mother who soothes an aching heart, who strokes our weary limbs and whose compassionate embrace is as comforting as nothing else in the world. At times he is the guru, the wise advisor, the intuitive sage who by his very existence dissolves all our knots and ignorance, smites asunder all our incapacity and works out in us the impossible. He leans sometimes with outstretched hands to deliver us out of the quagmire that entraps us, as a hero or a magician from heaven; we find it hard to lift our hand to place it in his for we cherish the feel of the mud and refuse to look up to him until the mire is neck deep and all we can do is gasp in despair. He pretends to be the enemy too, fierce and ruthless, goading and lashing if that be the need, so his light pierces the darkness we harbor and his opposition enfeebles the pride of our ego. Then

at last, when we want nothing but him, he smiles like the lover of our being and we lose ourselves forever in the passionate ecstasy of his love, one with his will, one with his need, one with his breath and one with his creation. The shift becomes most easy and most blissful when we fall in love with the divine.

### **Surrender—the master key**

“Remember and offer,” (*Questions and Answers 1929*, p. 23) said the Divine Mother to her children. It is She, the divine Shakti, who works through us, who works out the worlds and who works in spite of us. All power is Her power and all intelligence is her intelligence. To open to her, to call her, to surrender to her is the one solution to all our difficulty. She alone knows what is best for us and she alone can help. She fashions our lives and She lives in us. It is to Her we must offer all our self and all our being. Every step within is a step towards Her. Every victory is Her victory. When we give our difficulty to Her She takes charge of it and turns it into our biggest advantage. A growing surrender to the Shakti is our surest way to the perfection we seek.

### **The shift—a basic summary and definition**

This shift, then, is the conscious and growing recognition of a reality of our being that is the real person, infinitely superior and more capable the body-mind-life-ego existence that we now call our self, a conscious attempt at connecting with it, and gradual station in it and finally the beginnings of a full mastery and perfection of our life under its control and action. The shift is the imperative prerequisite for the next step in evolution, the thing towards which all life is moving secretly and the only way out from suffering and bondage. This superior reality that we term soul is for all practical purposes within us and is a portion of the almighty above but is dormant and inactive except rarely in most of us. Its aim is to become active through our consent and in life use our nature (body, life, mind) for its action in the world. It presents to us constantly, innumerable ways and means of surfacing and overtly manifesting its potential in our life, through our nature, its secret executrix, that uses pain to achieve this end. But the moment we become willing participants in this plan and acknowledge the existence of soul, we begin to acquire oneness with it and its infinite freedom, knowledge and power, reducing the causal play of nature and thereby the necessity of pain. It is up to us to begin looking at ourselves as a soul using body, mind and emotion for its fulfillment and perfection in the world. It is up to us how much we recognize, want and align ourselves with the intent of the soul.

To be motivated every instant by the need and conviction of this shift, to decentralize the being from the ego centre and annihilate the present formations in order to reconstruct our self in the new way is the need of the hour and the way to the great shift.