All life, all existence is an enigma to the human mind, because the mind is a light which
sees only the surfaces of things or at most a little below the surface and is moreover
limited by its own circumscribed area of vision. It cannot see what is beyond those
limits and yet there are an infinity of things beyond its circle. It cannot see what is
above, it cannot see what is within, it cannot see what is below. But what is on the
surface is never the truth of things; the surface presents us only with facts not with
truths, with phenomena not with realities, with imperfect indications, not with the
realisation of things in themselves. The secret, the truth, the reality of things is above,
within, below, it is not on their surface.

There is a meaning in the universe, an intention in cosmic existence; there is a
significance of the individual, his life is a sign and has a purpose.

The plan, the significance are secret and mysterious to us because we live on the
surface of ourselves and things and are not in touch with either their core or their
height or depths. Science on one side, Religion and Philosophy on the other try to arrive
at the hidden Truth, but each touches and only just touches one end of it and refuses
to go farther and discover the other end or the link and reconciling relation between
these two poles of existence.

It is said in the Veda of Agni, the flame of the creative Will and Force, that he hides his
two extremities; only his middle is patent and visible. The head of Agni is occult in some
superconscient height, his feet are plunged in the abyss of the material Inconscience.
Consciousness emerging in the universe of life and mind is the bridge and link between
the two poles. But our human consciousness is a term in the chain which is aware only
of itself and sees all the rest in its own terms; it cannot identify itself with the other
links and misses their significance and their purpose. It stands on the middle of the
bridge looking all around it, but the bridgeheads are to its sight invisible. It cannot see
what is there, but only speculate, infer or conjecture.

Science questing with its measuring rod of empirical experiment begins to have a dark
glimpse of the Inconscient; it knows the universe as an organised freak that has
emerged from the material Inconscience and will go back to its source. Religion and
Philosophy rise on the wings of spiritual experience or in a balloon of metaphysical logic
into some stratosphere of superconscient Reality, they seem to discover a God or Self or
Spirit or Absolute and try to map it with the intellect or to turn it into a dynamic
spiritual formula. But they are unable to reconcile these three terms of being; their
physical experiments or their spiritual experiences are valid, but each has hold of only
one end of the enigma. Science has discovered Evolution; Religion and Philosophy have
discovered something of that which is involved and evolves in this cosmic Existence.
But the two discoveries have refused to shed light upon each other; each has shut itself
up in its own formulas. This is because each is a creation and activity of Mind. Science
of the concretising experimental mind, Philosophy of the abstracting intellectual mind,
Religion of the dynamic spiritual mind. But Mind is bound always by its partial formulations of the Truth; Mind grasps formulas or images but is itself grasped by its own creations, it cannot get free from them or go beyond them. But the mind's concepts and formulas are only fragmentary representations of Truth or pointers or abstract schemas and images, not her very self and reality. Either a deeper inner soul-vision or a higher overmental or supramental consciousness is needed to discover Truth in her very face and body.

Then only can both ends of the riddle be firmly seized and connected together, the whole of existence seen in one gaze and life compelled to unmask its fathomless significance.(1)

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When the ancient thinkers of India set themselves to study the soul of man in themselves and others, they, unlike any other nation or school of early thought, proceeded at once to a process which resembles exactly enough the process adopted by modern science in its study of physical phenomena. For their object was to study, arrange and utilise the forms, forces and working movements of consciousness, just as the modern physical Sciences study, arrange and utilise the forms, forces and working movements of objective Matter. The material with which they had to deal was more subtle, flexible and versatile than the most impalpable forces of which the physical Sciences have become aware; its motions were more elusive, its processes harder to fix; but once grasped and ascertained, the movements of consciousness were found by Vedic psychologists to be in their process and activity as regular, manageable and utilisable as the movements of physical forces. The powers of the soul can be as perfectly handled and as safely, methodically and puissantly directed to practical life-purposes of joy, power and light as the modern power of electricity can be used for human comfort, industrial and locomotive power and physical illumination; but the results to which they give room and effect are more wonderful and momentous than the results of motorpower and electric luminosity. For there is no difference of essential law in the physical and the psychical, but only a difference and undoubtedly a great difference of energy, instrumentation and exact process. The Supreme Existence which expresses itself equally in soul and matter, moves upon one fundamental principle on all its sevenfold levels, and even by one set of medial processes, but It varies their minute arrangement and organic functioning to suit the material which it is using and the objective which it has set before Itself in Its divine movement.(2)

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In India, for the last thousand years and more, the spiritual life and the material have existed side by side to the exclusion of the progressive mind. Spirituality has made terms for itself with Matter by renouncing the attempt at general progress. It has obtained from society the right of free spiritual development for all who assume some distinctive symbol, such as the garb of the Sannyasin, the recognition of that life as man's goal and those who live it as worthy of an absolute reverence, and the casting of society itself into such a religious mould that its most customary acts should be accompanied by a formal reminder of the spiritual symbolism of life and its ultimate destination. On the other hand, there was conceded to society the right of inertia and immobile self-conservation. The concession destroyed much of the value of the terms. The religious mould being fixed, the formal reminder tended to become a routine and to lose its living sense. The constant attempts to change the mould by new sects and religions ended only in a new routine or a modification of the old; for the saving element of the free and active mind had been exiled. The material life, handed over to the
Ignorance, the purposeless and endless duality, became a leaden and dolorous yoke from which flight was the only escape.

The schools of Indian Yoga lent themselves to the compromise. Individual perfection or liberation was made the aim, seclusion of some kind from the ordinary activities the condition, the renunciation of life the culmination. The teacher gave his knowledge only to a small circle of disciples. Or if a wider movement was attempted, it was still the release of the individual soul that remained the aim. The pact with an immobile society was, for the most part, observed.

The utility of the compromise in the then actual state of the world cannot be doubted. It secured in India a society which lent itself to the preservation and the worship of spirituality, a country apart in which as in a fortress the highest spiritual ideal could maintain itself in its most absolute purity unoverpowered by the siege of the forces around it. But it was a compromise, not an absolute victory. The material life lost the divine impulse to growth, the spiritual preserved by isolation its height and purity, but sacrificed its full power and serviceableness to the world. Therefore, in the divine Providence the country of the Yogins and the Sannyasins has been forced into a strict and imperative contact with the very element it had rejected, the element of the progressive Mind, so that it might recover what was now wanting to it.

We have to recognise once more that the individual exists not in himself alone but in the collectivity and that individual perfection and liberation are not the whole sense of God's intention in the world. The free use of our liberty includes also the liberation of others and of mankind; the perfect utility of our perfection is, having realised in ourselves the divine symbol, to reproduce, multiply and ultimately universalise it in others.

Therefore from a concrete view of human life in its threefold potentialities we come to the same conclusion that we had drawn from an observation of Nature in her general workings and the three steps of her evolution. And we begin to perceive a complete aim for our synthesis of Yoga.

Spirit is the crown of universal existence; Matter is its basis; Mind is the link between the two. Spirit is that which is eternal; Mind and Matter are its workings. Spirit is that which is concealed and has to be revealed; mind and body are the means by which it seeks to reveal itself. Spirit is the image of the Lord of the Yoga; mind and body are the means He has provided for reproducing that image in phenomenal existence. All Nature is an attempt at a progressive revelation of the concealed Truth, a more and more successful reproduction of the divine image.

But what Nature aims at for the mass in a slow evolution, Yoga effects for the individual by a rapid revolution. It works by a quickening of all her energies, a sublimation of all her faculties. While she develops the spiritual life with difficulty and has constantly to fall back from it for the sake of her lower realisations, the sublimated force, the concentrated method of Yoga can attain directly and carry with it the perfection of the mind and even, if she will, the perfection of the body. Nature seeks the Divine in her own symbols: Yoga goes beyond Nature to the Lord of Nature, beyond universe to the Transcendent and can return with the transcendent light and power, with the fiat of the Omnipotent.

But their aim is one in the end. The generalisation of Yoga in humanity must be the last victory of Nature over her own delays and concealments. Even as now by the
progressive mind in Science she seeks to make all mankind fit for the full development of the mental life, so by Yoga must she inevitably seek to make all mankind fit for the higher evolution, the second birth, the spiritual existence. And as the mental life uses and perfects the material, so will the spiritual use and perfect the material and the mental existence as the instruments of a divine self-expression.[3]

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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, 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.[4]

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Yoga is a means by which one arrives at union with the Truth behind things through an inner discipline which leads us from the consciousness of the outward and apparent to the consciousness of the inner and real. Yoga consciousness does not exclude the knowledge of the outer apparent world but it sees it with the eyes of an inner, not an outer seeing and experience, alters and sets right all its values in the light of an inner deeper greater truer consciousness and applies to it the Law of the reality, exchanging the law of the creature’s Ignorance for the rule of a divine Will and Knowledge.

A change of consciousness is the whole meaning of the process of Yogi.[5]

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A spiritual evolution, an unfolding here of the Being within from birth to birth, of which man becomes the central instrument and human life at its highest offers the critical turning-point, is the link needed for the reconciliation of life and spirit; for it allows us to take into account the total nature of man and to recognise the legitimate place of his triple attraction, to earth, to heaven and to the supreme Reality. …The terrestrial ideal, which has been so powerful in the modern mind, restored man and his life on earth and the collective hope of the race to a prominent position and created an insistent demand for a solution; this is the good it has accomplished. But by overdoing and exclusiveness it unduly limited man’s scope, it ignored that which is the highest and in the end the largest thing in him, and by this limitation it missed the full pursuit of its own object.

Mind and life themselves cannot grow into their fullness except by the opening up of the larger and greater consciousness to which mind only approaches. Such a larger and greater consciousness is the spiritual, for the spiritual consciousness is not only higher than the rest but more embracing. Universal as well as transcendent, it can take up mind and life into its light and give them the true and utmost realisation of all for which they are seeking: for it has a greater instrumentality of knowledge, a fountain of deeper power and will, an unlimited reach and intensity of love and joy and beauty.[6]
References


Endnotes

1 Sri Aurobindo, Essays Divine and Human, CWSA 12:286-87.
5 Sri Aurobindo, Essays Divine and Human, CWSA 12:327.