

THE JOURNEY OF ASCENSION

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Spiritual Significance : Ascension
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The appearance of man on the face of the planet is a wondrous phenomenon no matter how banal we treat our existence. This appearance has been replete with high glories and also shameful, catastrophic lows and darkness – there is much confusion, much obscurity in our knowledge of ourselves and more often than not we have either considered ourselves a living dust of materiality or a soul in captive yearning to escape the earthly mould. But in between these two polarities, there exists a vast universe of existences, worlds and planes that interpenetrate man's existence and are in waiting for him to discover them and become their reigning master. In this essay we will look at these planes of existence, the inner reality of the being of man, the full scope of his knowledge, his ascension through these planes, the realisation of his highest potentialities and his final merging into his true supreme nature.

Existence is the play of the Supreme Reality, Sachchidananda – existence, consciousness and bliss, which involves itself first into a multiplicity with unity as its background, then into further differentiation between the multiple centres of consciousness and further still into more separate and lower grades of its own being until the nethermost inconscient depths. The first few involved levels of being, the spiritual planes, constitute the higher regions and the more

differentiated planes starting from mind up to matter and the subconscious constitute the lower hemisphere. This involution, in turn, creates an upward pressure within the lowest grade of consciousness, namely matter, and makes it evolve into a higher expression of itself, first life and then mind. The evolutionary force in nature exists within every level of nature and propels it to manifest a higher level of substance. Thus, it exists within the being of man as well, within his mind, and exerts an upward pressure to rise beyond itself into a supramental existence and further onwards from there. The highest reality – Sachchidanada – is the also Ishwara, the supreme Purusha, the force of his being is Shakti, who in her lower grades of involutory and evolutionary force is Prakriti. All of existence then is a variety of poises or relations between Purusha and Prakriti.

In the lower hemisphere, the soul of man is identified with the three lower principles of matter, life and mind and in each of these it is connected with the worlds associated with each one. The materialised soul identifies completely with matter and sees the universe as a meaningless play of inert energy – this soul's conception of itself is dark, inert and obscure and is characterised by the quality of *tamas*. Next, the soul is identified with the life force animating its physical being, it is in touch with the universal life force and is driven by desire, passions, possession and activity and is characterised by *rajas*. On the level of the mind, the soul identified with mental activity and takes its poise on the thinking, rationalising faculty – the ability to know things, to study things, comprehend their different facets through analysis and to put them together through synthesis. The mentalised soul is gifted with clarity of perception and a certain happiness that comes from being raised above life and body. But it is also limited in its knowledge as its basis of knowing is in division and the separation between things, so it can only know a thing in its parts and arrives only at half-truths; the characteristic quality at this level is *sattwa*. Though the Purusha within each of these three levels is identified with the different grades of Prakriti and is dominated by her, it can still raise itself a little higher than her action and realise its independent nature. So, the materialised Purusha can concentrate on the mental and vital heavens and arrive at a relatively still centre within. But in doing so, it still cannot liberate the dynamic bliss force of the supreme Purusha within him. This dynamism of blissful action gets released in the vital being but it expresses itself in an uncontrolled manner. The vital Purusha can step back from the unceasing activities of the life force and take poise in the mental space, which can then control the otherwise unregulated life force and its indulgences. The mental Purusha in its higher action gives rise to wisdom in a man as opposed to a mere derivative and surface knowledge. It is also in the poise of the mental Purusha that a true detachment from the lower nature of man is possible. Even in their more refined states, the three lower Purushas are under the influence and command of Prakriti and remain clouded under Ignorance. It is only in the higher plane of the knowledge Purusha, or the gnostic soul, that this relation is reversed and there is true knowledge and blissful action.

The knowledge soul is not commonly found among men for it resides in the causal body and this body is not commonly formed in ordinary men. It takes a very refined triple lower Purusha for a human being to ascend into or even make temporary contacts with the higher hemisphere of Truth knowledge. This hemisphere or this spiritual plane exists beyond the mind and is characterised by unity and knowledge through identity. The knowledge soul in man can help him bestow its light on the three lower Purushas and lift them into their higher nature. The gnosis is different from the reason, intellect and even intuition, which are all refined powers but still only different rays of the true knowledge force that gnosis is. Gnosis is the power of knowledge through identity where the object of knowledge, the knower and the act of knowing are all one. Gnosis, essentially, is the light and force of the great Ishwara, which he pours on the individual soul so that it may attain to its true nature and power. It is the plane of the Real Idea, which is the true creatrix of the universe, a plane where knowledge, will and bliss are inseparable unlike imagination in the lower human existence where the three are divided and do not imbue each other with their powers. In the gnostic creation, every particle of existence emanates from joy and lives in self-joy. There are a few conditions to the attainment of the gnosis – firstly, one has to rise above the lower physical, vital and mental nature and expand the boundaries of one's ego self such that the sense of separation from others disappears; this should further lead towards a universality of being and experience where the multitude is held within one's bosom as part of oneself; the centre of focus in one's consciousness should cease to be one's limited egocentric identity but should become an individualised expression of the one universal being. The gnosis takes up all of our lower being and its faculties and transforms them into their higher potential.

Even though the ascent to the gnosis is itself a momentous feat and imbued with an infinity of knowledge, will and bliss, there is still a single most plane of ascension left for the true completion of man's being – that is the plane of Ananda or bliss, the infinite freedom and ecstasy of the Supreme. Ananda is the ultimate experience of oneness and has no individualising centre within it. Here the supreme Purusha and Shakti are one and indivisible, even beyond their biune aspect where they play complementary roles.

This journey of ascension from the mundane existence to the highest truth and bliss is a journey of the transformation of an ordinary, fragmented, discursive knowledge into a divine, whole, unitary self-knowledge, which expresses the true inner nature and potentiality of man. All of the branches of knowledge in the present world, whether history, philosophy, psychology, science, aesthetics or ethics are from the spiritual point of view a lower knowledge – knowledge pertaining to the body, life and mind plane. On the other hand, the knowledge of man's true spiritual nature and self, the knowledge about the true substance and essence of the universe and all that it constitutes, the knowledge of the one absolute Being underlying it all – this, is the higher knowledge pertaining to the supramental planes in existence. Ordinary Yoga

rejects the lower knowledge and seeks a higher knowledge, but is rendered incomplete because it accepts only one aspect of reality and rejects another. It is in Integral Yoga that we find that both these forms of knowledge are accepted as an indivisible whole and expressions of the same supreme Reality. Thus, we see that all forms of worldly knowledge, if looked at from within, into its core, lead us into a spiritual enquiry and concomitant spiritual insights about the evolution of the Divine essence in world nature; the worldly disciplines also refine our being and prepare the foundation for a more evolved seeking and attainment. Indeed, the method of Yoga is different from the method of the lower knowledge in that it seeks meaning and knowledge by going within rather than by sensory inputs or mental reasoning; it employs the threefold discipline of concentration, purification and identification in order to make one's being a clean mirror in which the true inner divinity is revealed, known and then possessed.

My personal sense of this journey of ascension is that it is after lifetimes of foundational refinement of our ordinary being – the physical, vital and mental, that we experience a strong aspiration for the experience of the Divine and through that experience an aspiration for an overall ascension into the divine nature. Once that aspiration has formed in us, it naturally pulls our outer being inwards and propels us towards an inner concentration and purification. As this inner focus deepens and becomes more intense in us, we begin to perceive, feel and become intimately aware of our soul nature, our being above and independent of the body, prana and even our mental processes. There are moments of higher intelligence flashing through our mind and awareness, and sometimes even moments of unexplained bliss and peace. As we get a taste of these sublime states, our yearning for their undiluted form and presence guides us further on to the path of identification. Identification is not a one-time event and may sediment itself over a long period of being in contact with and bringing down the light and force from the higher reality. But no matter how long the process is, the fruits of the journey are strewn all over its length – for the seeking for oneness with the Divine bestows its grace upon all our life, thus, our worldly existence is transformed into a deeply meaningful endeavour of expressing our inmost truths and becomes a beacon of purity and light for those around us as well.

To love God, excluding the world, is to give Him an intense but imperfect adoration.

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