

# On the Meaning of Realization

## Part 13 of 16

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Tonight we propose to consider Sri Aurobindo in relation to the present world situation. Many, if not most of us, are rather grimly aware of the fact that we are passing through a more than usual critical and trying period. To introduce this and to present immediately the seriousness of Sri Aurobindo's own view, I'll read a short portion of an answer in one of his . . . correspondent.

I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort—for the present at least—to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things are bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible—and anything, however paradoxical, seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of, if a new and better world was at all to come into being: it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is, as in yoga, where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember too that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern, and that it must come by other means—from within and not from without; so the best way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for the new world, whatever the form it may take.<sup>1</sup>

This confirms the feeling of extreme gravity which many of us have shared with respect to what we now face. In order to present just what the world situation is, let us make a brief survey of factors which we can see operating. First of all, I'll ask you to assume certain primary points of view as a starting point, postulates if you please, that are nonetheless principles or truths from certain levels of Realization, but which are not definitely known by everyone. The first principle or postulate will be this: that the underlying basis of the evolution, and of all, as a matter of fact, is consciousness in some sense. Second, that the evolutionary process follows this general principle: that at the beginning, at the starting point, we have an involution of spirit into a state of profound trance, if you please, but a state that seems to us like profound inconscience.

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<sup>1</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 22 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 1611-1612.

Then there is an urge immanent in this involved spirit, or divinity, to emerge. And corresponding to that urge there is a descent from the fully conscious transcendent spirit or divine above which reach towards the immanently emerging principle—this happening in critical steps from time to time with interludes between that are more or less continuous in their development. Evolution, then, thus proceeds through a series of crises intercalated between intervals of more or less quiet continuous development. The critical periods, the periods when some new principle, operating principle is to emerge, involve the stirring into activity of forces that are adverse to the emerging quality or principle. It would seem that always there are collateral powers, finite in their nature, that somehow have sprouted off of the main stem of the evolutionary course. These powers have an entrenched interest in what we might call the *status quo* of any particular existent stage in the evolution. When a new impulse for a new emergence comes, these forces oppose it, resist it with all that they have, and they are the first elements to make themselves conspicuous upon the surface. The result is that the enemy, the opponent, the hostile force in any great crisis is the feature that is most obvious. But the underlying operating force, the relatively unseen force, save to those whose spiritual vision is awakened, is an evolutionary drive and a spiritual descent.

Briefly, we may say that certain very important stages have been past in the history through which our being has grown: life emerged from matter; the desire and desire-mind such as we see in the animal emerged from life; from this a higher phase of mind which differentiates man; and then beyond that the next step, which so far only the very few pioneers in the race have taken, is an emergence of a spiritual being. This that happens in the evolution of the individual is paralleled by a similar development in collective being which goes over its steps also. Evolution may be viewed as a basic process of which the integral yoga, not all yoga but integral yoga, is a duplicate speeding up the process so that steps which normally left to the course of nature would take untold thousands of years may be covered by the individual in the short period of a life or two. But the collective development moves not by this special power of yoga which applies to the individual but by the forces of nature in her massive sense. The significance of the present situation is this: that we're in the midst of an impingement, a special impingement, of spiritual energy from above and of a yearning, driving force from within the nature itself to emerge into some other vaster and different status and dynamic phase.

Now, as we look across the world we can see some of the signs of this special effort. Those of you who can look back fifty years, who are old enough to have been observers as much as fifty years ago, can note certain very impressive facts. You can note this, that if we go back to 1900, take into account the total technological development of man up to that point, put that on one side, and then his technological development since 1900 on the other side, we'll find that the total development of power under man's control from the beginning of history up to 1900 is only a fraction of the power which he has released in the past fifty years. In the fields of communication the same truth applies. In the development of various gadget instrumentations the same thing applies. In other words, we are face to face with a period of extremely strong development in forms that change our way of life, putting a pressure upon all of us to change old life habits, old mental habits, old ways of feeling, old moral codes. Now, you must remember that our forefathers had a background of habit forms—intellectual, physical, and emotional—that had the benefit of centuries for their establishment, forms that because of changes that are

taking place now, no longer make them valid. This puts a pressure upon man's nervous system, his mental nature, his soul nature, that in some cases actually breaks the individual. There is increase of insanity under the pressure. It means that we must be able to rise under this pressure to another way of life, another way of valuation, another way of conscious movement, or else go under.

Now, that much we can see from just watching this purely technological side of things. Let us look at another phase. We say we see old political and social institutions being overturned in a worldwide sense. There is a revolutionary pressure that has been abroad. I'm talking, of course, of the span of fifty years or so, not merely of the last four or five, because in these massive movements of nature fifty years is a very short time. The Orient is not what the Orient was. She's no longer content to be what she was. She's insisting of coming out into life in a modern sense. The West is no longer what it was in the nineteenth century. It's also acting under this yeast that's driving it. We can see it in the religious field as well—old religious forms losing their vitality; new religious forms coming in.

But the features that are most impressive and strike the eye most forcefully are the negative ones. It wasn't long ago, along about 1911 or '12, that Dr. Jordan, the late Dr. Jordan who was then president of Stanford University, organized the first academic course on international peace and arbitration. In that course he built the thesis, very carefully documented in many ways, the time had come when man was too intelligent to use the destructive agency of war which was doing him untold damage in many ways but particularly in his biologic evolution, and he thought the time had come when war and violence had become obsolete. It was only a few years after that that the Great War that began in 1914 broke out. We have seen since manifestations of violence that perhaps have not been known in world history heretofore. We have all been shocked by the things which races and nations which had reached an unusual level of culture were capable of doing. Brutalities that are limited only by the imagination of man were employed, often with scientific skill, for effecting power—control. That was true throughout the development of the Nazi manifestations, the Fascists, and so on; it's still true in a form that is even more systematic, more massive, more completely conscious of what it's doing, in the Marxist development in the world.

Now, one looking at these features might conclude the world is declining—declining morally and spiritually, declining in dignity, and beauty, and virtue. And that is a part truth, but the important fact underneath is that there is a pressure seeking to bring to birth a new and a higher power in the world which in doing so threatens the sovereignty of these negative powers, which heretofore have largely lain latent in the consciousness of human beings, races, and nations—are now brought to the surface in an effort to resist this new development so that they may retain their power and even their life, for that is threatened. We can measure the momentousness of the change by the intensity of the resistance to it.

Now, the principle leader, the principle leader all along, of this resistance has been the Marxist movement. It has been so not for the reasons that are generally given, namely, those of a certain economic and political theory or of a certain methodology, but for a reason that is much more profound. It is a fully conscious, systematic, dynamic, religiously intense form of materialism meaning to root out of the world every iota of

spiritual light that there may be anywheres—knowing what they’re doing, consciously intending that, and very competent in their methods of implementing what they intend to do. It is for this reason that we can recognize in this movement the prime opposing force to the spiritual drive that is acting hidden and underneath. The *asuric* force has in this movement revealed its hand, and there’s no assurance, no certainty, that it may not achieve a temporary success—not a permanent success. Nature can rise again even though every spiritual light in the world were driven completely underground. Nature yet can find a way to rise again and the spiritual light could come forth, but it might be thousands of years hence; meanwhile, humanity passing through the shadow of a darkest of dark nights beside which the Dark Ages of some fifteen hundred years ago would be a small interlude of a relatively light twilight. That could happen.

Aurobindo recognizes that possibility; that, therefore, the world is facing a battle that’s real, a spiritual battle that’s more serious than any known within the limits of all history—right now—far more serious than the battle of the *Mahabharata* though that was the occasion of the descent of Sri Krishna. The reason this is serious—serious in a sense that the resistance to Christianity by the Roman world were only minor—is that the leaders in this movement know what they’re doing. They deliberately take the premise that matter is primary and consciousness only an effect, essentially a helpless effect in the nature of being.

Now, for a person to be a theoretical materialist is not a serious business necessarily, if he’s content to let others hold opposed philosophies. If he advances it as merely one among possible theories, meets upon the open forum for the discussion of his point of view. He may contribute something of value. He is not a force of harm. The quarrel is not with that kind of materialistic theorizing. It is with the materialism that is dynamic, fanatical, and means to overthrow in the world all possibility of a spiritual movement, of a spiritual philosophy, of the activity of the enlightened souls that might be incarnated in this world. And they work with great powers.

I’ll mention one: probably the best students of hypnotism today are the Russian police. They’re the most advanced operators. There are forms of hypnotic control that no man can resist. There are violent forms. The techniques are basically simple. You wear a person down by systematic starvation; keep him from being able to rest; keep him in a condition of suspense; confine him in cells that have dimensions of three by three, possibly about five feet high; keep him half fed so he actually doesn’t have enough calories coming in to supply him; keep him in absolute isolation and silence where he doesn’t even know that there’s another prisoner around. Then you submit him occasionally to questioning. Your questioner apparently being sympathetic with his experience, pretending that it must be some mistake, offering some alleviation, but none coming as a matter of fact. You get a man finally into a position where you can make him confess to anything? Those that have gone through this have testified of what happens to them. You lose the power to hold on to any conviction that you have; you’re helpless, worn down; you just become little more than a lump of clay. And just to get relief from the sheer torture of the thing you would confess that you were the man that blew up the moon—anything. You would abandon your philosophy of life. You abandon your religion. The outer consciousness is brought under such a severe control that the inner being would be thrust way back, be helpless, couldn’t come through.

You have systematic education of all of the young people, starting from childhood, that grounds them in the materialistic thesis and outlook, and permit them to come under no influence that suggests a spiritual actuality. Children separated from their parents, and so on—the old parents who cannot be converted to a new order either directly liquidated, used for labor purposes by methods that destroy them in about three years, or just put out to rot. The children are taken. That sort of thing aiming at world control, entering every country, seeking to get this grip upon every people whatsoever, including Tibet, the mountain fastnesses, could cut off humanity from consciousness of its spiritual roots until nature slowly emerged again after thousands of years.

Now, there's the reason why the present world situation is so grimly serious. In a certain sense, Aurobindo stands as the central focus of the force opposed to this negative *asuric* power. I'm not going to be able to justify that statement to your satisfaction—partly a matter of seeing into this whole situation. There are, however, external evidences that he does stand in a position of a leadership in this evolution—still leading though his body has been dropped, still here in the field of the human consciousness, not less than he was while still living. And one can contact this consciousness; can know it as a power. Aurobindo is not primarily a retired philosopher. He's a dynamic, militant, heroic force. The crux of his work is actually spiritually martial. He's a fighter through and through. Certain sides of his nature are preeminently gentle; you can hardly believe this—one who is very gentle in his rebuking of *sadhakas*—but in his collective force sense, a terrific spiritual power. In a certain sense, the two poles between the divine and the *asuric* are preeminently represented by Sri Aurobindo and Joseph Stalin. The *asuric* force being the force that is opposed to the spiritual principle coming in and taking over the world; therefore, it is the enemy.

Now, the battle that we face lies on several levels: one phase of it is just straight military; a deeper, subtler, more difficult phase is ideological and essentially religious; and there are inner phases that are hardly touched by the consciousness of most human beings. But concerning even actual battle, we face a principle enunciated by Sri Aurobindo that may be surprising to many spiritually oriented students and is quite different from the view taken by Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi enunciated a noble principle of power when he formulated the principle of *satyagraha*, which means acting in the world through the power or force of truth or soul alone unsupported by any act of violence. You can find this principle as fundamental in the morality of Buddhism and in the morality recommended and lived by in the case of the Christ. It is a lofty moral principle; it is the normal moral principle of a spiritually evolved human being. But if we take this principle and advocate it as a general rule of conduct for all men regardless of their state of evolution, it becomes actually more destructive than it is constructive; and that's the shocking thing that Aurobindo has convincingly demonstrated. The problem is this: what hope have you of imposing the morality of a saint upon the conduct of a tiger? None whatsoever. The tiger has ages to evolve before the moral code of a saint could be his code of life. The most that a tiger can hope to achieve is the next step in its evolution. He might become a little more of a gentleman in his expression of violence but he's going to be violent for a long time. Now, the morality of mass humanity, as reflected in the nations, is a good deal closer to the morality of the tiger than it is to the morality of the saint. Nations at war, as Dr. Carl G. Jung pointed out, essentially move on the level of the tiger if they are reasonably descent, and if not, on the level of the alligator. Just

watch, just watch the moral code of the soldier in action, of the nation in war, and see that you don't find that that is so. Your attitude toward the other fellow is a dead ringer for that of the tiger and that of the alligator; good to kill by foul means and all of that sort of thing. That's the sort of thing that's taught in armies. What chance is there of teaching *satyagraha* to a humanity that on average stands on that level? If by personal influence you can get an unevolved individual to try to live by it, as Gandhi did succeed in the case of some pathons—pathons being individuals about on the moral level of savages—you only get a repression of a violent nature; you do not get its transformation. And all repressions sooner or later imply an upheaval in the nature into an explosion of greater violence. Hence, in the battle that's upon us, the spiritual warrior will have to move often with the instruments of violence as did Arjuna.

Many students of the *Bhagavad Gita*, in the interpretation of that book, have tried to make the instruction of Krishna purely symbolic as representing an inner relationship in the life of the individual. Aurobindo points out that the *Bhagavad Gita* is not such a symbolic text, but a typical text—quite convincingly he points this out—and that what is there presented is a poetic representation of an historic event involving the actual descent of the *avatar* talking to an actual warrior presented with a battle, physical, on this plane, where he had to oppose an enemy consisting of not only friends, but of relatives, of companions, and of teachers, and the requirement of his duty was that he should go forth and slay as he could these. Do you remember how his heart became faint? An emotional sympathy arose in him for these. It's better that I should die than that I should go forth and slay these. What good if victorious if these whom I have loved I have slain? And then Krishna begins his discourse and points out that his is the *dharma* of the warrior; that here is a crisis in world affairs; that there are forces that threaten to overthrow the order, the divine order in being, the *dharma*; and that it is the destiny, the *swadharma*, of Arjuna and those lined up with him to resist these forces and do everything he can to enthrone the forces that favor righteousness instead of these dark forces being victorious in the world. In the end Arjuna is convinced. But in that discourse we have the best formulation of the yoga of action. The true warrior goes forth with fighting without attachment, without seeking the fruits of his action, without hatred of his foe; but proceeds in the performance of his duty passionlessly, detached, selflessly. And in so doing he makes for himself no *karma*. The same principle would apply in our present world situation.

Now, that doesn't mean that there isn't a need, and a deep need, for those who will carry the force of *satyagraha*. As a matter of fact, the part played by the conscientious objector upon the fields of these battles is an even greater part than that of the natural warrior, since, if he's a true conscientious objector, he fights on a different level. He will take risks as others take them, and perhaps greater, but opposes one line of force by another that's on a higher plane. This is for those who in their evolution in the development of consciousness are evolved to this point, and the world grievously needs these. But it's not the path for all. Not everyone that calls himself conscientious objector is conscientious objector to violence. It's only a convenient device behind which cowardice hides itself. It calls for more courage than the path of the material warrior. But this is not the way of the mass of human beings. And here is another thing: he, or the race, or the nation that destroys one who is acting through soul-force acquires a simply terrific *karma*. A race that destroyed one such being could well suffer through centuries, and as an act of compassion for these weak, unevolved,

material, human beings who cannot yet rise up to the level of *satyagraha*, therefore the warrior should meet him with lesser weapons—the weapons that belong to his level. Now, here is a thesis that Aurobindo has developed in his essays on the *Bhagavad Gita* with a very compelling force, and you can see in the history of the world how the injudicious use of *satyagraha* has brought forth aggravated violence sooner or later as reaction to it. It is a grievous problem.

Now, there is a deeper problem of ideology. The more serious level of the battle before us is on the plane of ideas, of philosophies, of ways of life. Here we are not doing so well. We of the West, naturally perhaps because we are largely content with our way of life, have not felt the necessity of taking an active part in the ideological warfare. We're beginning to recognize it. This must be faced, but there is the deeper phase, and that is taking the spiritual step. Precisely in this day which is perhaps the blackest morally in the world's history, when there is a threat aimed at all of our best values, just precisely in this day it is easier to make the spiritual crossing. The superior power is closer in the crisis, and he who aims at Realization will find there a helping force that is closer to him, more urgently active and crowding him, than at any ordinary time. It is a period of opportunity. But he who makes progress in Realization, or toward Realization, performs the largest task, renders the greatest service, in this battle which the *asuric* forces are fighting for the control of the world. But few respond and few labor on this level. But it is the supreme level of the war that is before us. You might say that we seek most of all recruits in this battle for a world, on this level.

Wolff: Yes the basic conception is that before there can be an unfolding, a development, there must be an infolding. That's the basic conception of evolution as understood in all yogic philosophies that are evolutionary in form. It's quite different from the Darwinian conception which is essential materialistic.

Participant: [Difficult to hear.]

Wolff: Yes, it's a maturing process; maturing in this sense: that that which was hidden, bound, restricted in the veil of ignorance, gradually comes out until it is fully revealed in the end, and that I would certainly call a maturing process at least from our point of view in values. There is a higher point of view where you can say there is no such thing as maturing or youth, but that's a consciousness that is immobile.

Any other questions?

Participant: Does the Voice of America to try to make use of Aurobindo's concept of spirituality versus materiality . . . ?

Wolff: I don't know that it does. I have not heard so, but I'm not informed on what it does.

Participant: [Difficult to hear.]

Wolff: I think the point is generally neglected, that there is not an appreciation by our leaders that the underlying battle is a battle between spirit and matter, or rather not so much between spirit and matter as between a spiritual orientation and radical, dynamic materialism; that that's the real issue and everything else is secondary, subordinate to that. I know that there are philosophers who in their criticism of Marxism pass lightly

over that phase, like Dr. Northrop for instance, which I conceive as by far the most critical phase in the whole issue.

Participant: . . . people become aware that appeasement just doesn't work, why that will . . .

Wolff: Oh you mean kismet or fate—that it doesn't work?

Participant: I mean appeasement . . .

Wolff: Oh, oh I see appeasement.

Participant: . . . that is more along the line . . .

Wolff: Oh, yeah. Gandhi's attitude was not that of appeasement. It was rather that one should take a stand against unrighteousness but without use of violence. It is a principle of violating an unrighteous law, for instance, and accepting the punishment in your own person—not trying to avoid that punishment, but arguing your case, presenting it, and being defenseless, non-resisting before those who would punish you, but still insisting on your position, going ahead; a method of self-suffering rather than imposing suffering on others. That's the meaning of Gandhi. Now, when you come down to the lesser matter of appeasement, of course that's obviously a fallacy that you can ever hope to satisfy the ambitions of an *asuric* power by appeasing its lusts. If it is satisfied for the moment, it grows to a greater urge for power; and there's no end to that. No, it's not a rational force. It's not a reasonable or moral force. It is an endless lust for egoic power—egoistic power.

Participant: Dr. Wolff, I'm trying to appreciate your position in the light of consistency, but I have this difficulty. You remarked that at least in certain turmoils throughout the world is due to a technological impingement or impact upon man's history that changed very little up to the turn of the century in that we had a result, moral, and spiritual, and economic in its composition that the world . . .

Wolff: Yeah.

Participant: Now, then why condemn as devils people throughout the world where they're trying to liberate themselves from the shackles of these forces?

Wolff: The question's too long for me to restate it so I'll go into what I have to say without restatement. First of all, I brought in that example of technological development as an illustration of the force of change being active in the world, one of the signs that there is a force working, and as one of the causes of dislocation, but a minor cause. It was not intended as the major cause but as one of the external signs of something happening. The efforts of peoples to throw off shackles is not the essence of the *asuric* force; it's quite the reverse. The *asuric* force takes the shibboleth of those that seek freedom as a means of building power intending to establish greater shackles than ever before. I'm not condemning any of the efforts from below to move towards freedom, but I'm aiming it all at this one thing—an intelligent, conscious, diabolic power which seeks to . . . and distort the aspirations of simple people, among other things, to the end of founding a monstrous power. Its ways have been manifested to us in the Nazi, in the Fascist, but most preeminently, and most fundamentally, and fundamentally first of all, in the Marxist. The others are really reactions to Marxism. If you read *Mein Kampf* you'll find where Hitler achieved his methodology out of his



acquaintance with Marxism; and that was the first thing that aroused him—his a reaction to it. The primary force was Marxism.

Participant: Don't you believe that the modern cycles of violence . . .

Wolff: Well, I don't know what institution you're referring to.

Participant: . . . you referred to *Mein Kampf*, and Hitler in there definitely seeks to use the . . . of the Roman Catholic Church as the example of . . . And Stalin was a priest.

Wolff: Stalin was a priest, of course, but repudiated the priestly attitude or the priestly idea. But if you mean to say that the violence of the Romans exemplified in the history of the Roman Catholic Church was a feature, I'd say that that isn't enough; that the violence goes back much further than that. It goes back as far as history goes. If we want to find real violence, in its most extreme form heretofore, we'd have to go to something that looks very much like Stalin, namely, Genghis Khan. And it had nothing to do with the Roman Catholic Church or even . . . There you can learn violence in its purity. But you can't learn it in any Western manifestation up . . . except the present time. No, the lesson of violence is about us on all sides throughout all history. That the necessity exists to transcend violence is unquestionable; but, if we now were to lie down, were to expose our breasts in the spirit of *satyagraha* before this *asuric* force, they would trample over us. The power of *satyagraha* supposes that there is a soul-power in the one that you're dealing with, that it will arouse the good that's in the other fellow. But when you're dealing with thorough evil, conscious evil, a darkness that is absolute, there's nothing that you can appeal to there. And that's what we're dealing with here—a darkness that's conscious and absolute. And it would ride over the saints with no compunction whatsoever. Now, the riding over isn't a simple killing and making martyrs of them; it's driving them insane with modern techniques applied—far more vicious than the old. And how is the saint to stand when his whole instrument of consciousness, his whole mind, his whole nervous organism, has been racked to the point of insanity? This is the sort of thing that's done by this monster. And don't let—people that permit their idealism to fool them are merely the victims of this power that knows how to grab people through their ideals. It knows perfectly well what it does. It has no use for your ideals. You're merely a plaything. It's naked power, dark, black, fully conscious, absolutely soulless, and it's seeking to rule this world, to capture it, as is true in no other point in history . . . It's world crisis as world crisis has never been . . .