

Lectures to University Students

Part 4 of 7

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Dr. Merchant and Fellow Students:

Once again we meet this morning as I just finished with a talk a few minutes ago. But before taking up specifically the subject of Sri Aurobindo, I wish to say something concerning a certain context in which he will be approached. We're dealing on a level where the means of knowledge is that function which is known as Realization. Whereas our ordinary research as it's known in the scientific world is by the use of two functions, namely, sensuous perception and conceptual cognition, the penetration into deeper levels of knowledge and to an understanding of that which is unseen most of the time depends on other functions and the process is called Realization, most commonly. I have also called it Recognition in the sense of "recognition"—a knowing again that which formerly was known.

Now, if you have divergent concepts in the field of scientific work—such as, there's a famous contradiction between the Newtonian dynamics and the Einsteinian dynamics—you proceed to prove that one is right and the other wrong. It's a procedure by dialectic or even formal proof that opens the way for a point of view or a theory by destroying that which was there before. On the level of Realization we take a further step. We do not admit that a Realization can be false, but only that it can be incomplete, that there are steps in the ladder of wisdom, higher steps replacing lower steps, but that the lower step was necessary to the higher step, and that the perspective becomes different as you rise in the scale. Furthermore, it is found that the domain of reality in its vaster ramifications is not built on any simple either/or pattern affirming that if it is square it can't be circular, or that if it is circular it can't be square. Thus, it is realized that the Ultimate is many-faceted and, indeed, appears to be inexhaustible; and we cannot close the door to the possibility that a great . . . ¹ may find a truth which alters completely the truth as known today by even our greatest sages. Not that the knowledge of these sages is in error, but simply that it is incomplete.

Now, there's a reason for bringing in these different remarks, for I shall briefly speak of a very important contrast, namely that between Gautama Buddha and Sri Aurobindo. There is a difference of mind here. Sri Aurobindo, as is obvious from the reading of him, but also definitely recognized by himself in certain letters, is oriented to one great *Avatar* known as Krishna. Krishna is the one presented as the charioteer in the *Bhagavad Gita* who gives the instructions to Arjuna. And I wish you to note a certain thing that is emphasized in the *Bhagavad Gita*; it is action in the world. Arjuna is not to refrain from the frightful actions of the war because it troubles him, but he must perform

¹ Ellipses have been inserted into this transcription to indicate missing text due to the poor quality of the audio recording.

to the best of his abilities his *Dharma* as a warrior in order that the people of the earth may not be injured by the *Adharma* that had arisen and was that which was carried by the enemy in the conflict. The picture there is of a real war, and it is so interpreted by Aurobindo in his *Essays*—a struggle between light and darkness that is not simply symbolic or imagined, not a dream battle, but one which is in some sense quite real. Aurobindo continues in the terms of this . . . , and I may say that here is a stream flowing forth from the inexhaustible force of eternal wisdom; a stream which I fully recognize and accept. But we are not all oriented to the same lines and the same stream, for out of that illimitable Source there are other streams and lines to which I wish especially to direct your attention, and that is the stream that we identify with the Great Buddha. These two streams do not in all respects run parallel, and there arises a problem.

In the view of life formulated by the Buddha, or at least so far as the record of him tells us, he has said that the . . . of life is like unto a dream, a phantasm, a dream world, glistening dew, or a lightning flash, and it should be so contemplated. The world of pain, the world of suffering, a phantasm; and awakening from that phantasm is Enlightenment and the goal clearly *Nirvana*. Not so with Aurobindo. And following Buddha, according to the esoteric story, there's another incarnation. The Brahmins, who felt themselves the monopolistic custodians of the Truth, were very angry with the Buddha for telling to all men a wisdom which they felt was their private possession. And so they persecuted the followers of the Buddha. But the Buddha in his great compassion said, "They have sinned, so I shall come to them." His compassion included not only the victims of wrong, but the wrongdoer as well. So it is said that fifty-two years later he came in a *tulku* incarnation as Sri Shankaracharya. *Tulku*, because it is said he had no natural birth since, where he raised a body from childhood, but always someone else since then had performed that work, presumably a *chela* who had the rare opportunity to supply a vehicle. And this one, Sri Shankaracharya came only to the Brahmins and was the supreme formulator of what is known as the Mayavada, or as Aurobindo puts it, the doctrine of universal illusionism. So that when Aurobindo in his *Life Divine* was preparing the way for his doctrine of universal realism, he had to mount a dialectic attack upon Sri Shankaracharya. And if you're interested, take the second chapter on illusionism in *The Life Divine*.

Now, it is seen easily that between the quotation of Buddha and the Mayavada of Shankara there is only a difference of completeness of statement, but the same conception is maintained. This world of pain is the snake that is seen in the rope, when it is seen for what it really is, namely, *Parabrahm*, then the snake disappears and only the rope, symbolizing reality, remains, and that is the state of *Moksha* or *Nirvana*—the state of complete release.

Now, the terms of my acceptance of Sri Aurobindo are these: that I do not, because I cannot reject either Buddha or Sri Shankaracharya. I don't mean this merely as persons, but as philosophers. And it posed a problem of an apparent, head-on collision, for how are you to reconcile universal illusionism with universal realism? I think I found the answer; I outlined it last time I was here in Dr. Merchant's house. The point is that whenever you deal with teachings, philosophies that comes forth from the fount of Realization, you're dealing with Truth, not the whole Truth, but let us say a facet; and as one ascends the ladder of Realization, these facets become comprehended

in a larger whole, therefore, the solution of this contradiction must be sought in an integrating Realization.

I gave ten years to Sri Aurobindo. I first met him in reading his book, he called it *The Meeting of the Mind*—you don't need to meet a person to meet a mind—and then I received as a Christmas present in 1949 *The Life Divine*, and on looking through the table of contents, I came across a chapter heading that made my eyes bulge out: “Knowledge by Identity.”² I had some years previously, in fact in 1936, invented the title “Knowledge through Identity” for expressing a certain state of cognition; and this was the first writing that I found any language like that anywhere and I was immensely interested. So, of course, that led to ten years of saturation in the literature of Aurobindo, and I've given many lectures, and I've tried to communicate something of his yoga to the *sadhakas*, because I don't care whether one follows the yoga that I followed or not. I only care that Realization shall be attained by any way that may work, and there is no one way that is the sole path for all creatures.

One thing that stands out in the writings of Sri Aurobindo is a picture of enormous complexity. Dilip Kumar Roy, who was said to have been his favorite disciple, once complained, “You are so complex,” he said, “it's hard to understand.” And Aurobindo said, “I can't help it. It is that way.” And on that point I must say that my own experiences contrast pretty strongly, for I would say that in the events that were reported in *Pathways*, the key was the perception of a simplicity so great that it was almost incognizable. More than one way; more than one picture. And furthermore, if you are oriented to being rather than to becoming, being impresses you as a vast simplicity, and becoming as an enormous, well-nigh incomprehensible complexity. You can see my own temperament parallels that of Buddha and Shankara, oriented naturally to being and with becoming as a great boredom. That's a personal confession, but isn't that . . .

Now we come to the picture of Aurobindo's psychology, cosmology, and ontology, and I find terms that are developed in Western metaphysics that are not typical of Oriental metaphysics. They approach the subject in a different way. And this was a language that was developed by the rationalists and became crystallized in the philosophy of Christian Wolff. I contribute one thing, a diagram for kind of locking this whole thing together into one whole. The diagram was not made by Aurobindo but all of the ideas are his, and that's about all I'll use the blackboard for.

Now, since there are no . . . , I'll try to make . . . supposed to represent a human being. And here are three zones that . . . They are zones of consciousness. The spaces between the lines represent mental consciousness up here, then you have your vital consciousness down here, and the physical consciousness behind. This is in our field of knowledge and all these zones . . . in our Western depth psychology it is called the “unconscious” . . . of Aurobindo's psychology at this point. But behind, the picture of the other zones . . . which is mental, vital, physical. The subtle physical world . . . corresponding to the body but also the . . . the vital plane.

² Wolff misspoke here, as he mentions in the audio recording “Mathematics, Philosophy, and Yoga,” part 4, that he first learned of Aurobindo in Vincent Sheean's book *Lead, Kindly Light: Gandhi and the Way to Peace*, which was published in 1949.

Incidentally, this is the plane . . . which diseases come from. The disease is a hostile entity. It's not bacteria that cause disease; the bacteria are only the instruments by which a mischievous entity strikes at individuals. Now, the yogic power of handling sickness in most of us consists in observing the subtle entering symptoms of a disease before it has become grossly physical and rejecting them. Also, isolating within yourself a heavy part of the vital nature that loves the sickness. Now, most people will say there's nothing in them that welcomes the sickness. That merely means they haven't found this heavy part of the vital. Yes, we love some sickness and because we do we are sick many times when we don't have to be. But, when these symptoms are subtle, reject them and make, by an austere act of the will, this portion of the vital reject them also. And the next morning the symptoms are gone. I've done this many times.

Now, one thing is implied here, you must have gone far enough in yoga to have isolated the "witness"—the witness is your own true Self, not your ego—and established a relationship in consciousness so you're aware of its presence all the time. And the witness observes what goes on and catches these subtle symptoms before they have become grossly objective. But, it's not wholly available, but practice yoga and it becomes available.

This he calls the "subliminal" . . . called the "subconscious" or "subconscient"—very irrational, very dense consciousness. Incidentally, he mentions dreams come from some level of the subconscious dreamer. But it may happen that you have an authentic experience while asleep which is not a dream, in which case, however, it does have to come through, let us say, up to the dotted line, into the consciousness so that it becomes colored by the subconscious as it passes through. One way to distinguish between an authentic experience during sleep as contrasted to a dream is that it leaves an effect that will last for some time upon your own consciousness. It may be something that . . . , something like a powerful determination that has complete objective and rational validity. That's one of the distinguishing features. But, such events do happen and this is part of Aurobindo's psychology.

Now, this mental part is a portion of the mind that's connected with the brain, our intellectual mind, although there are several branches of mind lower than that. A certain marriage of the mind with the vital nature becomes "vital mind." And I think that most of the manifestations we find in the world around us—most human beings are not too intellectual—are really manifestations of the vital mind. Wish fulfillment is vital mind, not true intellectual mind. And I would guess that most thinking is wishful thinking and therefore no more than . . . vital mind . . . the physical mind and the mechanical mind, but those are minor matters.

Over the mind associated with the brain is the level of "higher mind." I think I can give some idea of its function. I have been at times—a thought was developing itself in my mind that seemed very, very clear, I thought it was verbal, and then when I tried to put it into words I found I had to work very hard, that this was not really fully verbal. It was only a verbal shorthand . . . considerable gaps that were not cast into verbal form at all, and that the translating into verbal form required real work. A . . . transcription . . . and the verbal concepts never quite fit any of your thinking, and yet, this was thinking. Perhaps, it's not as easy as actual thinking.

Above that you have “illuminative mind,” which may be associated with the quality of light. Now, this is . . . in the realm of mystical experience. All of this down here is ordinary. Everybody has, well not everybody a great deal of it, but more or less of intellectual ability. Around this institution, for instance, there should be . . . This is the inspirational mind. There could be the experience of color there, in terms of light and so forth, in terms of . . . that are meaningful.

Then above that, the “intuition”—the true intuition. The intuitive function is one that’s difficult to understand and there is a tendency to class under the heading of intuition functions that may be otherwise classified, as for instance, inspirational mind or even higher mind. But it’s characteristic of the true action of intuition that it comes as a brilliant light of consciousness. Now, I don’t mean that this is a seen light with the visible eye or any other, even with the subtle eye, but it is a strong sense of a clear seeing, perhaps of an idea—a brilliant luminosity, but covering a restricted area. Now, let’s notice . . . the connections out here are dark, not illuminated. And, it has the quality akin to perception, the same kind of immediacy that’s very . . . of perception, but it may be perception in many different ways. It may be a perception of relationships between ideas, which would be a fairly abstract intuition. What Aurobindo calls the logic of intuition equivalent to our logic of external thought. I might elaborate a bit here because intuition is quite important because it’s our only door during the passage to the higher domain of cognition. It is a power that is, in fact, at the same time impressive and frustrating. Intuitives swing from being impossibly right to ridiculously wrong. If you’ve lived with them a good deal, there are times when you want to pull your hair out or theirs. But all the while, they come up with an impossible . . . to something that you couldn’t have reached by the ordinary processes of ratiocination. Now, what we’re dealing with is the imperfect development of the intuitive power. A thinker is apt to correct his intuitions by rational judgment, but Aurobindo points out that you prevent the full development of intuition if you do this. Rather, you use intuition to correct intuition. You wait after a preliminary intuition for another intuition to elaborate its relationships to something else, and so on, until it perfects its own structure and gradually you become a reliable intuitive. It even includes, as I said, an intuitive function like that of relating ideas which is the function of logic. In the Upanishads there is a reference to intuition as like a lightning flash and that certain bodies of knowledge are built by massed lightning—many, many flashes. I’ll suggest that by an extended field in which—imagine it filled up so full of these dots that finally it seems like a solid mass all illumined. But it still is granular. Now, I’m making that point because we’re going to take a further step in the lineup of these functions where you come to a consciousness that is a continuum and not granular. But, when we have our field sufficiently full of points of light, it may seem like a continuous light, and that is massed lightning—the figure of the Upanishads . . .

Above that, “overmind.” It appears that we’re getting up very high now. The ruling power of the cosmos, the knowledge principle of *Sachchidananda* acting as the ruling power that guides the cosmos in its action. We’re getting up pretty high. But, so far we’ve only covered the lower hemisphere. All the great mysteries lie above. This is only the lower half of the manifestation.

As we go on up, I’ll have room for those circles . . . You have four . . . Supermind, which he has identified with the Sanskrit word ‘*Vijnana*’. The Root Principle or Ground in Buddhism is sometimes called “*Alaya Vijnana*.” This is the English word Aurobindo uses

to represent that. We're moving now at a level of consciousness that's always in the Light; where intuitive messages came down as this granular . . . this is a wholly conscious continuum. Its representative color is gold. To suggest anything of that which corresponds to what we would call . . . on the supramental level, calls for images that are drawn from Cantor's transfinite numbers. I won't take you into that now, for you have to then begin to think in terms of infinities as entities. That's more than a lecture . . . But what Aurobindo has said about the function of the supramental principle can be symbolized or represented, and only way so far as I know, by the language which we have gained through the development of the transfinite by Dedekind and Cantor. How can you . . . an infinity and not be depleted at all? You have to use a mystic language dealing with infinity. And yet the mathematician says, since the works of Dedekind and Cantor, that an infinite manifold is such that you can take from it an infinite number of infinite manifolds without reducing it at all. And so goes the metaphysics concerning *Parabrahm*, that he casts from a portion of himself this whole universe and is not reduced at all. Language heretofore that we would have thought of as wholly irrational, that . . . on the mind, now we can figure thanks to the help of modern mathematics.

Above this, "*ananda*." This—that's *Sachchidananda* . . . Now, this corresponds to ontology up here, that's why I made that statement. This is that which is beyond the manifestation. This is that through which the unmanifested can become kinetic. It's the activating power of the unmanifest. All of mind in here is a reflection of this, so that the color of mind is often given as yellow—supermind as gold. But since we're dealing both macrocosmically and microcosmically—we're talking about the universe and we're also talking about the individual, what happens in the individual is a duplication of what happens in the universe. So we're having ontology, cosmology, and psychology all at the same time. They're not different departments. And that is important. From the lowest dregs of consciousness settled down here in the lowest subconscious to the highest, a state of Realization is known which is wholly . . . The Light, which can be so powerful, that if its full force were to be felt by these physical organisms, they would be burned up. A marvel of delight that can be carried in a gross organism as a vehicle . . . Here, this has been called consciousness-force by Aurobindo, and that, pure Being, or even more abstractly, Be-ness.

This is Vedantic in its orientation. Aurobindo acknowledges himself as being primarily oriented to the Vedanta, but bringing in something of the Tantra, which is a subject which I am not very familiar.

When are we supposed to stop, about ten minutes to four? I understand the time is up. I better finish what I have in mind to say and I wish to express my pleasure in meeting you again. I like this group very much. I can talk a little better with this group, and maybe we'll meet sometime again in the future . . .

Merchant: Thank you very much Dr. Wolff for giving us such a delightful presentation and lots of food for thought. We'll see you next time, same time, same place.