

SADHANA

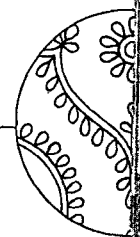
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THE REALIZATION OF LIFE

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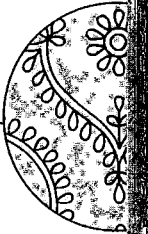
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## SOUL CONSCIOUSNESS



We have seen that it was the aspiration of ancient India to live and move and have its joy in Brahma, the all-conscious and all-pervading Spirit, by extending its field of consciousness over all the world. But that, it may be urged, is an impossible task for man to achieve. If this extension of consciousness is an outward process, then it is endless; it is like attempting to cross the ocean after ladling out its water. By beginning to try to realize all, one has to end by realizing nothing.

But in reality it is not so absurd as it sounds. Man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burdens. His burdens are many, too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load. Whenever they feel too complicated and unwieldy, he knows it is because he has not been able to hit upon the system that would have set everything in place and distributed the weight evenly. This search for system is really a

search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonize the heterogeneous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment. In the search we gradually become aware that to find out the One is to possess the All—that there, indeed, is our last and highest privilege. It is based on the law of that unity which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength. Its living principle is the power that is in truth, the truth of that unity which comprehends multiplicity. Facts are many, but the truth is one. The animal intelligence knows facts, the human mind has power to apprehend truth. The apple falls from the tree, the rain descends upon the earth—you can go on burdening your memory with such facts and never come to an end. But once you get hold of the law of gravity you can dispense with the necessity of collecting facts *ad infinitum*. You have got at one truth that governs numberless facts. This discovery of a truth is pure joy to man—it is a liberation of his mind. For a mere fact is like a blind lane, it leads only to itself—it has no beyond. But a truth opens up a whole horizon, it leads us to the infinite. That is the reason that when a man like Darwin discovers some simple general truth about biology, it does not stop there, but like a lamp shedding its light far beyond the object for which it was lighted, it illumines the whole region of human life and thought, transcending its original purpose. Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts—it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

As in the region of knowledge, so in that of consciousness man must clearly realize some central truth that will give him

an outlook over the widest possible field. And that is the object which the Upanishad has in view when it says, Know thine own soul. Or, in other words, realize the one great principle of unity that there is in every man.

All our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires, obscure our true vision of the soul, for they only indicate our own narrow self. When we are conscious of our soul, we perceive the inner being that transcends our ego and has its deeper affinity with the All.

Children, when they begin to learn each separate letter of the alphabet, find no pleasure in it, because they miss the real purpose of the lesson; in fact, while letters claim our attention only in themselves and as isolated things, they fatigue us. They become a source of joy to us only when they combine into words and sentences and convey an idea.

Likewise, our soul when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance, for its very essence is unity. It can find out its truth only by unifying itself with others, and only then it has its joy. Man was troubled and lived in a state of fear as long as he had not discovered the uniformity of law in nature; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason, which is of the soul of man, and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realizes himself in his surroundings. To understand anything is to find in it something that is our own, and it is the discov-

ery of ourselves outside us that makes us glad. This relation of understanding is partial, but the relation of love is complete. In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfills its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself and that he is at one with the All.

This principle of unity that man has in his soul is ever active, establishing relations far and wide through literature, art, and science, society, statecraft, and religion. Our great revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self, and thus they prove to us the ultimate truth of humanity. We call them mahatmas, "the men of the great soul."

It is said in one of the Upanishads, *It is not that thou lovest thy son because thou desirest him, but thou lovest thy son because thou desirest thine own soul.*\* The meaning of this is that whomever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense. The final truth of our existence lies in this. Paramatma, the supreme soul, is in me as well as in my son, and my joy in my son is the realization of this truth. It has become quite a commonplace fact, yet it is wonderful to think upon, that the joys and sorrows of our loved ones

\* Na va are putrasya kamaya putrah priyo bhavati, atmanastu kamaya putrah priyo bhavati.

are joys and sorrows to us—nay, they are more. Why so? Because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched that great truth which comprehends the whole universe.

It very often happens that our love for our children, our friends, or other loved ones debars us from the further realization of our soul. It enlarges our scope of consciousness, no doubt, yet it sets a limit to its freest expansion. Nevertheless, it is the first step, and all the wonder lies in this first step itself. It shows to us the true nature of our soul. From it we know for certain that our highest joy is in the losing of our egoistic self and in the uniting with others. This love gives us a new power and insight and beauty of mind to the extent of the limits we set around it, but ceases to do so if those limits lose their elasticity and militate against the spirit of love altogether; then our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races. It is like putting a burning light within a sealed enclosure, which shines brightly till the poisonous gases accumulate and smother the flame. Nevertheless, it has proved its truth before it dies, and made known the joy of freedom from the grip of the darkness, blind and empty and cold.

According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God-consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul apart from the self is the first step toward the realization of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by winning mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and

physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul. The chick knows when it breaks through the self-centered isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing; it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow to, it must be burst through, and thereby the freedom of light and air be won and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved. In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice-born. So too the man who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint and high thinking for a period of at least twelve years, who has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit. He is considered to have had his rebirth from the blind envelopment of self to the freedom of soul life, to have come into living relation with his surroundings, to have become at one with the All.

I have already warned my hearers, and must once more warn them, against the idea that the teachers of India preached a renunciation of the world and of self that leads only to the blank emptiness of negation. Their aim was the realization of the soul, or, in other words, gaining the world in perfect truth. When Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," he meant this. He proclaimed the truth that when man gets rid of his pride of self, then he comes into his true inheritance. No more does he have to fight his way into his position in the world; it is secure for him everywhere by the

immortal right of his soul. Pride of self interferes with the proper function of the soul, which is to realize itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world's God.

In his sermon to Sadhu Simha, Buddha says, *It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities, but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts, or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought, and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth.*

The doctrine of deliverance that Buddha preached was the freedom from the thralldom of *avidya*. *Avidya* is the ignorance that darkens our consciousness and tends to limit it within the boundaries of our personal self. It is this *avidya*, this ignorance, this limiting of consciousness, that creates the hard separateness of the ego and thus becomes the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self-seeking. When a man sleeps, he is shut up within the narrow activities of his physical life. He lives, but he knows not the varied relations of his life to his surroundings; therefore he knows not himself. So when a man lives the life of *avidya*, he is confined within his self. It is a spiritual sleep; his consciousness is not fully awake to the highest reality that surrounds him, therefore he knows not the reality of his own soul. When he attains *bodhi*, i.e., the awakening from the sleep of self to the perfection of consciousness, he becomes Buddha.

Once I met two ascetics of a certain religious sect in a village of Bengal. "Can you tell me," I asked them, "wherein lie the special features of your religion?" One of them hesitated for a moment and answered, "It is difficult to define that." The

other said, "No, it is quite simple. We hold that we have first of all to know our own soul under the guidance of our spiritual teacher, and when we have done that we can find him who is the Supreme Soul within us." "Why don't you preach your doctrine to all the people of the world?" I asked. "Whoever feels thirsty will of himself come to the river," was his reply. "But then, do you find it so? Are they coming?" The man gave a gentle smile, and with an assurance that had not the least tinge of impatience or anxiety, he said, "They must come, one and all."

Yes, he is right, this simple ascetic of rural Bengal. Man is indeed abroad to satisfy needs that are more to him than food and clothing. He is out to find himself. Man's history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realization of his immortal self—his soul. Through the rise and fall of empires; through the building up of gigantic piles of wealth and the ruthless scattering of them upon the dust; through the creation of vast bodies of symbols that give shape to his dreams and aspirations, and the casting of them away like the playthings of an outworn infancy; through his forging of magic keys with which to unlock the mysteries of creation, and through his throwing away of this labor of ages to go back to his workshop and work up afresh some new form—yes, through it all man is marching from epoch to epoch toward the fullest realization of his soul, the soul that is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds, the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution. Man's mistakes and failures have by no means been tri-

fling or small; they have strewn his path with colossal ruins. His sufferings have been immense, like birth pangs for a giant child; they are the prelude of a fulfillment whose scope is infinite. Man has gone through and is still undergoing martyrdoms in various ways, and his institutions are the altars he has built to which he brings his daily sacrifices, marvelous in kind and stupendous in quantity. All this would be absolutely unmeaning and unbearable if all along he did not feel that deepest joy of the soul within him, which tries its divine strength by suffering and proves its exhaustless riches by renunciation. Yes, they are coming, the pilgrims, one and all—coming to their true inheritance of the world; they are ever broadening their consciousness, ever seeking a higher and higher unity, ever approaching nearer to the one central Truth, which is all-comprehensive.

Man's poverty is abysmal; his wants are endless till he becomes truly conscious of his soul. Till then, the world to him is in a state of continual flux—a phantasm that is and is not. For a man who has realized his soul, there is a determinate center of the universe around which all else can find its proper place, and from thence only can he draw and enjoy the blessedness of a harmonious life.

There was a time when the earth was only a nebulous mass whose particles were scattered far apart through the expanding force of heat, when she had not yet attained her definiteness of form and had neither beauty nor purpose but only heat and motion. Gradually, when her vapors were condensed into a unified rounded whole through a force that strove to bring all straggling matters under the control of a center, she occupied

her proper place among the planets of the solar system, like an emerald pendant in a necklace of diamonds. So with our soul. When the heat and motion of blind impulses and passions distract it on all sides, we can neither give nor receive anything truly. But when we find our center in our soul by the power of self-restraint, by the force that harmonizes all warring elements and unifies those that are apart, then all our isolated impressions reduce themselves to wisdom, and all our momentary impulses of heart find their completion in love; then all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves inseparably in an internal harmony.

The Upanishads say with great emphasis, Know thou the One, the Soul.\* It is the bridge leading to the immortal being.†

This is the ultimate end of man, to find the One that is in him, that is his truth, that is his soul—the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. His desires are many, and madly they run after the varied objects of the world, for therein they have their life and fulfillment. But that which is one in him is ever seeking for unity—unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purposes of will; its highest joy is when it reaches the infinite one within its eternal unity. Hence the saying of the Upanishad, Only those of tranquil minds, and none else, can attain abiding joy, by realizing within their souls the Being who manifests one essence in a multiplicity of forms.\*

\* Tamevaikam janatha atmanam.

† Amritasyaisha setuh.

‡ Ekam rupam bahudha yah karoti \* \* tam atmastham ye anupacyanti dihras, tesham sukham cacvatam netaresham.

Through all the diversities of the world the one in us is threading its course toward the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy. But by that devious path it could never reach its goal if it had not a light of its own by which it could catch sight of what it was seeking in a flash. The vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole not by breaking it up into parts, but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves. So with the intuition of our soul-consciousness, which naturally and totally realizes its unity in the Supreme One.

Says the Upanishad, This deity who is manifesting himself in the activities of the universe always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul. Those who realize him through the immediate perception of the heart attain immortality.\*

He is vishvakarma; that is, in a multiplicity of forms and forces lies his outward manifestation in nature, but his inner manifestation in our soul is that which exists in unity. Our pursuit of truth in the domain of nature therefore is through analysis and the gradual methods of science, but our apprehension of truth in our soul is immediate and through direct intuition. We cannot attain the supreme soul by successive additions of knowledge acquired bit by bit even through all eternity, because he is one, he is not made up of parts; we can only know him as heart of our hearts and soul of our soul; we can only

\* Esha devo vishvakarma mahatma sada jananam hridaye sannivishtah. Hrida manisha manasabhikripto ya etad viduramritaste bhavanti.

know him in the love and joy we feel when we give up our self and stand before him face-to-face.

The deepest and the most earnest prayer that has ever risen from the human heart has been uttered in our ancient tongue: *O thou self-revealing one, reveal thyself in me.*\* We are in misery because we are creatures of self—the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite. Our self is loud with its own discordant clamor—it is not the tuned harp whose chords vibrate with the music of the eternal. Sighs of discontent and weariness of failure, idle regrets for the past and anxieties for the future, are troubling our shallow hearts because we have not found our souls, and the self-revealing spirit has not been manifest within us. Hence our cry, *O thou awful one, save me with thy smile of grace ever and evermore.*† It is a stifling shroud of death, this self-gratification, this insatiable greed, this pride of possession, this insolent alienation of heart, *Rudra, O thou awful one, rend this dark cover in twain and let the saving beam of thy smile of grace strike through this night of gloom and waken my soul. From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality.*‡

But how can one hope to have this prayer granted? For infinite is the distance that lies between truth and untruth, between death and deathlessness. Yet this measureless gulf is bridged in a moment when the self-revealing one reveals himself in the soul. There the miracle happens, for there is the

\* Aviravirmayedhi.

† Rudra yat te dakshinam mukham tena mam pahi nityam.

‡ Asatoma sadgamaya, tamasoma jyotirgamaya, mrityorma mritangamaya.

meeting ground of the finite and infinite. *Father, completely sweep away all my sins!*\* For in sin man takes part with the finite against the infinite that is in him. It is the defeat of his soul by his self. It is a perilously losing game, in which man stakes his all to gain a part. Sin is the blurring of truth that clouds the purity of our consciousness. In sin we lust after pleasures, not because they are truly desirable but because the red light of our passion makes them appear desirable; we long for things not because they are great in themselves but because our greed exaggerates them and makes them appear great. These exaggerations, these falsifications of the perspective of things, break the harmony of our life at every step; we lose the true standard of values and are distracted by the false claims of the varied interests of life contending with one another. It is this failure to bring all the elements of his nature under the unity and control of the Supreme One that makes man feel the pang of his separation from God and gives rise to the earnest prayer, *O God, O Father, completely sweep away all our sins.*† *Give unto us that which is good,*‡ the good which is the daily bread of our souls. In our pleasures we are confined to ourselves; in the good we are freed and we belong to all. As the child in its mother's womb gets its sustenance through the union of its life with the larger life of its mother, so our soul is nourished only through the good which is the recognition of its inner kinship, the channel of its communication with the infinite by which it is surrounded and fed.

\* Vishvanideva savitar duratani parasuva.

† Vishvani deva savitar duritani parasuva.

‡ Yad bhadram tanna asuva.



Hence it is said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." For righteousness is the divine food of the soul, nothing but this can fill him, can make him live the life of the infinite, can help him in his growth toward the eternal. *We bow to thee from whom come the enjoyments of our life.\* We bow also to thee from whom comes the good of our soul.† We bow to thee who art good, the highest good,‡ in whom we are united with everything, that is, in peace and harmony, in goodness and love.*

Man's cry is to reach his fullest expression. It is this desire for self-expression that leads him to seek wealth and power. But he has to discover that accumulation is not realization. It is the inner light that reveals him, not outer things. When this light is lighted, then in a moment he knows that man's highest revelation is God's own revelation in him. And his cry is for this—the manifestation of his soul, which is the manifestation of God in his soul. Man becomes perfect man, he attains his fullest expression, when his soul realizes itself in the infinite being who is *Avih*, whose very essence is expression.

The real misery of man is in the fact that he has not fully come out, that he is self-obscured, lost in the midst of his own desires. He cannot feel himself beyond his personal surroundings, his greater self is blotted out, his truth is unrealized. The prayer that rises up from his whole being is therefore *Thou, who art the spirit of manifestation, manifest thyself in me.*§ This longing for the

\* Namah sambhavaya.

† Namah cankarayacha.

‡ Namah civayacha, civataraya cha.

§ Aviravirmayedhi.

perfect expression of his self is more deeply inherent in man than his hunger and thirst for bodily sustenance, his lust for wealth and distinction. This prayer is not merely one born individually of him; it is in the depth of all things, it is the ceaseless urging in him of the *Avih*, of the spirit of eternal manifestation. The revelation of the infinite in the finite, which is the motive of all creation, is not seen in its perfection in the starry heavens, in the beauty of the flowers. It is in the soul of man. For there will seek its manifestation in will, and freedom turns to win its final prize in the freedom of surrender.

Therefore, it is the self of man that the great King of the universe has not shadowed with his throne—he has left it free. In his physical and mental organism, where man is related with nature, he has to acknowledge the rule of his King, but in his self he is free to disown him. There our God must win his entrance. There he comes as a guest, not as a king, and therefore he has to wait till he is invited. It is the man's self from which God has withdrawn his commands, for there he comes to court our love. His armed force, the laws of nature, stand outside its gate, and only beauty, the messenger of his love, finds admission within its precincts.

It is only in this region of will that anarchy is permitted, only in man's self that the discord of untruth and unrighteousness holds its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish, "Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God!" Indeed, God has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces open the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the

soul, not through the compulsion of God's power but through love, and thus become united with God in freedom.

He whose spirit has been made one with God stands before man as the supreme flower of humanity. There man finds in truth what he is, for there the *Avih* is revealed to him in the soul of man as the most perfect revelation for him of God, for there we see the union of the supreme will with our will, our love with the love everlasting.

Therefore, in our country he who truly loves God receives such homage from men as would be considered almost sacrilegious in the West. We see in him God's wish fulfilled, the most difficult of all obstacles to his revelation removed, and God's own perfect joy fully blossoming in humanity. Through him we find the whole world of man overspread with a divine homeliness. His life, burning with God's love, makes all our earthly love resplendent. All the intimate associations of our life, all its experience of pleasure and pain, group themselves around this display of the divine love and the drama that we witness in him. The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols aching with a meaning that can never be uttered in words. We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man's soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face-to-face with her eternal lover.

But what is this state? It is like a morning of spring, varied in its life and beauty, yet one and entire. When a man's life, rescued from distractions, finds its unity in the soul, then the con-

sciousness of the infinite becomes at once direct and natural to it, as the light is to the flame. All the conflicts and contradictions of life are reconciled; knowledge, love, and action are harmonized; pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal; the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the One in man, that by its very nature can overcome all limits and find its affinity with the Supreme One. While yet we have not attained the internal harmony and the wholeness of our being, our life remains a life of habits. The world still appears to us as a machine, to be mastered where it is useful, to be guarded against where it is dangerous, and never to be known in its full fellowship with us, alike in its physical nature and in its spiritual life and beauty.