
Status of
SILENCE
in the Infinite

Second Edition

Compilation from
the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother

Compiled by Jamshed M Mavalwalla



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**A Compilation from the Works of
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother**



Sri Aurobindo Society

AUROPUBLICATIONS

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

Status of Silence in the Infinite

Second Edition

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Vijaybhai's Note on Comprehensive Compilation

All over the world, there is a growing interest in spirituality and Yoga. There is a search for the true meaning and purpose of life, for deeper solutions to the problems that confront us all, and for ways in which we can contribute to evolutionary change and progress.

In this search, more and more people are turning to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother for guidance and enlightenment. But in their voluminous writings, they do not know where to find the answers they are looking for.

In this regard the Mother has said,

"It is not by books that Sri Aurobindo ought to be studied but by subjects—what he has said on the Divine, on Unity, on religion, on evolution, on education, on self-perfection, on supermind, etc., etc."

(CWM 12: 206)

On another occasion She said:

"If you want to know what Sri Aurobindo has said on a given subject, you must at least read all he has written on that subject. You will then see that he seems to have said the most contradictory things. But when one has read everything and understood a little, one sees that all the contradictions complement

one another and are organised and unified in an integral synthesis."

(CWM 16: 309–310)

While several compilations are now available, many sincere spiritual seekers have felt the need for Comprehensive Compilations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on specific subjects, in which the contents are further organised into sub-topics, so that one can find everything one is looking for in one place.

This compilation is an effort to fulfil this need and thus help spiritual seekers in their journey and sadhana. We hope that this compilation will help us gain greater mental clarity about a subject so that we can channel our efforts in the right direction. For Sri Aurobindo has written:

"It is always better to make an effort in the right direction; even if one fails the effort bears some result and is never lost."

(CWSA 29: 87)

We will be glad to receive suggestions and feedback from the readers.

Vijay

Preface

This compilation, *Status of Silence in the Infinite* is the second and final book in the series of books on Silence.

The Mother emphasizes that, if one wishes always to progress, one must understand more completely what one already knows.

“For those who want always to progress, there are three major ways of progressing:

- (1) To widen the field of one’s consciousness.
- (2) To understand ever better and more completely what one knows.
- (3) To find the Divine and surrender more and more to His Will.” (CWM 16: 435–436)

The purpose of this comprehensive compilation is to help the reader gain an understanding about the status of silence in the Infinite. The headings are intended to guide the reader towards a clearer and deeper understanding. However, it is important to read the quotations themselves, for the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are infused with a consciousness infinitely higher than our own. Therefore, reading these quotations will also help the reader elevate their consciousness.

The quotations in this compilation are taken from the volumes of *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA)

and the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Second Edition. Each quotation is followed by the title of the book, the volume number, and the page number from which it has been taken.

While the passages from Sri Aurobindo are in the original English, most of the passages from the Mother (selections from her talks and writings) are translations from the original French. We must also bear in mind that the excerpts have been taken out of their original context and that a compilation, by its very nature, is likely to have a personal and subjective approach. A sincere attempt, however, has been made to remain faithful to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Those who would like to read the fuller text are advised to consult *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* (CWSA) and the *Collected Works of the Mother* (CWM), Second Edition.

Jamshed M. Mavalwalla

Contents

I—Status of Silence in the Infinite	1
II—What Is Self	12
III—One Aspect of Self Is Pure Silence	20
IV—Silence Is Felt in Realisation of Self	27
V—The Status of the Purusha Is the Silent Self	31
VI—Nirvana Is Absolute Silence in Nameless Infinite	35
VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into Inactive Silence of the Supreme	42
VIII—The Negative Ideal of Losing Oneself in the Silence Is Not the True Essence of Indian Culture	49
IX—Nirvana Is Not the Single and All-Excluding Truth	50
X—Entire Retirement Not the Remedy	52
XI—To Cease in the Pure Silence Is Not the Best Way for Man	54
XII—Sri Aurobindo's Experience of Nirvana	58
XIII—Affirmative Yoga Seeks Transcendence but Not Withdrawal	61
XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action	65
Other Comprehensive Compilations by Jamshed M. Mavalwalla	73

I—Status of Silence in the Infinite

1.

“It is, no doubt, a truth of spiritual experience that there is a status of peace and silence in the Infinite behind the cosmic activity, a Consciousness that is the immobile Witness of the creation; but this is not the whole of spiritual experience, and we cannot hope to find in one side only of knowledge a fundamental and total explanation of the Universe.” (CWSA 21: 415–416)

2.

“Again, we see that there is an infinite pure status and immobile silence of the Spirit; we see too that there is a boundless movement of the Spirit, a power, a dynamic spiritual all-containing self-extension of the Infinite. Our conceptions foist upon this perception, in itself valid and accurate, an opposition between the silence and status and the dynamis and movement, but to the reason and the logic of the Infinite there can be no such opposition. A solely silent and static Infinite, an Infinite without an infinite power and dynamis and energy is inadmissible except as the perception of an aspect; a powerless Absolute, an impotent Spirit is unthinkable: an infinite energy must be the dynamis of the Infinite, an all-power must be the potency of the Absolute, an illimitable force must be the force of the Spirit. But the silence, the status are the basis of the movement, an eternal immobility is the

necessary condition, field, essence even, of the infinite mobility, a stable being is the condition and foundation of the vast action of the Force of being. It is when we arrive at something of this silence, stability, immobility that we can base on it a force and energy which in our superficial restless state would be inconceivable. The opposition we make is mental and conceptual; in reality, the silence of the Spirit and the dynamis of the Spirit are complementary truths and inseparable. The immutable silent Spirit may hold its infinite energy silent and immobile within it, for it is not bound by its own forces, is not their subject or instrument, but it does possess them, does release them, is capable of an eternal and infinite action, does not weary or need to stop, and yet all the time its silent immobility inherent in its action and movement is not for a moment shaken or disturbed or altered by its action and movement; the witness silence of the Spirit is there in the very grain of all the voices and workings of Nature. These things may be difficult for us to understand because our own surface finite capacity in either direction is limited and our conceptions are based on our limitations; but it should be easy to see that these relative and finite conceptions do not apply to the Absolute and Infinite.” (CWSA 21: 351)

3.

“Mind, even at its highest stages far beyond our present mentality, acts yet in its nature by division; it takes the

aspects of the Eternal and treats each aspect as if it were the whole truth of the Eternal Being and can find in each its own perfect fulfilment. Even it erects them into opposites and creates a whole range of these opposites, the Silence of the Divine and the divine Dynamis, the immobile Brahman aloof from existence, without qualities, and the active Brahman with qualities, Lord of existence, Being and Becoming, the Divine Person and an impersonal pure Existence; it can then cut itself away from the one and plunge itself into the other as the sole abiding Truth of existence. ... But beyond this movement of spiritual Mind is the higher experience of the supermind Truth-Consciousness; there these opposites disappear and these partialities are relinquished in the rich totality of a supreme and integral realisation of eternal Being. It is this that is the aim we have conceived, the consummation of our existence here by an ascent to the supramental Truth-Consciousness and its descent into our nature." (CWSA 21: 242)

4.

"The Infinite is at once an essentiality, a boundless totality and a multitude; all these have to be known in order to know truly the Infinite. To see the parts alone and the totality not at all or only as a sum of the parts is a knowledge, but also at the same time an ignorance; to see the totality alone and ignore the parts is also a knowledge

and at the same time an ignorance, for a part may be greater than the whole because it belongs to the transcendence; to see the essence alone because it takes us back straight towards the transcendence and negate the totality and the parts is a penultimate knowledge, but here too there is a capital ignorance. A whole knowledge must be there and the reason must become plastic enough to look at all sides, all aspects and seek through them for that in which they are one.

Thus too, if we see only the aspect of self, we may concentrate on its static silence and miss the dynamic truth of the Infinite; if we see only the Ishwara, we may seize the dynamic truth but miss the eternal status and the infinite silence, become aware of only dynamic being, dynamic consciousness, dynamic delight of being, but miss the pure existence, pure consciousness, pure bliss of being. If we concentrate on Purusha-Prakriti alone, we may see only the dichotomy of Soul and Nature, Spirit and Matter, and miss their unity. In considering the action of the Infinite we have to avoid the error of the disciple who thought of himself as the Brahman, refused to obey the warning of the elephant-driver to budge from the narrow path and was taken up by the elephant's trunk and removed out of the way; 'You are no doubt the Brahman,' said the master to his bewildered disciple, 'but why did you not obey the driver Brahman and get out of the path of the elephant Brahman?' We must not commit the mistake of

emphasising one side of the Truth and concluding from it or acting upon it to the exclusion of all other sides and aspects of the Infinite.” (CWSA 21: 346)

5.

“In the other or dynamic state we feel its dynamism to be perfectly true and natural and are even capable of thinking that no such experience as that of pure consciousness is possible. Yet it is now evident that to the Infinite Consciousness both the static and the dynamic are possible; these are two of its statuses and both can be present simultaneously in the universal awareness, the one witnessing the other and supporting it or not looking at it and yet automatically supporting it; or the silence and status may be there penetrating the activity or throwing it up like an ocean immobile below throwing up a mobility of waves on its surface. This is also the reason why it is possible for us in certain conditions of our being to be aware of several different states of consciousness at the same time. There is a state of being experienced in Yoga in which we become a double consciousness, one on the surface, small, active, ignorant, swayed by thoughts and feelings, grief and joy and all kinds of reactions, the other within calm, vast, equal, observing the surface being with an immovable detachment or indulgence or, it may be, acting upon its agitation to quiet, enlarge, transform it.” (CWSA 21: 360)

6.

“Again, if we remain absorbed in the Silence, the creative Consciousness and her works disappear into the Silence; Nature and the creation for us cease to exist or be real. On the other hand, if we look exclusively at the Being in its aspect of the sole-existent Person and Ruler, the Power or Shakti by which he does all things disappears into his uniqueness or becomes an attribute of His cosmic personality; the absolute monarchy of the one Being becomes our perception of the universe. Both these experiences create many difficulties for the mind due to its nonperception of the reality of the Self-Power whether in quiescence or in action, or to a too exclusively negative experience of the Self, or to the too anthropomorphic character our conceptions attach to the Supreme Being as Ruler.” (CWSA 21: 370–371)

7.

“In the superconscient truth of the Self-Existence these two [the biune aspect of Self and Self-Power] are fused and implied in each other, one and indistinguishable, but in the spiritual-pragmatic truth of the dynamism of the universe, they emerge and become active; the Divine Mother-Energy as the universal creatrix, Maya, Para-Prakriti, Chit-Shakti, manifests the cosmic Self and Ishwara and her own self-power as a dual principle; it is through her that the Being, the Self, the Ishwara, acts and he does

nothing except by her; though his Will is implicit in her, it is she who works out all as the supreme Consciousness-Force who holds all souls and beings within her and as executive Nature; all exists and acts according to Nature, all is the Consciousness-Force manifesting and playing with the Being in millions of forms and movements into which she casts his existence. If we draw back from her workings, then all can fall into quiescence and we can enter into the silence, because she consents to cease from her dynamic activity; but it is in her quiescence and silence that we are quiescent and cease. If we would affirm our independence of Nature, she reveals to us the supreme and omnipresent power of the Ishwara and ourselves as beings of his being, but that power is herself and we are that in her supernature. If we would realise a higher formation or status of being, then it is still through her, through the Divine Shakti, the Consciousness-Force of the Spirit that it has to be done; our surrender must be to the Divine Being through the Divine Mother: for it is towards or into the supreme Nature that our ascension has to take place and it can only be done by the supramental Shakti taking up our mentality and transforming it into her supramentality.” (CWSA 21: 371–372)

8.

“But we need not therefore conclude that the temporary forms are unreal; for the energy of the being is real and

the forms made by it are forms of the being. In any case the status of the being and the eternal dynamis of the being are both real, and they are simultaneous; the status admits of action of dynamis and the action does not abrogate the status. We must therefore conclude that eternal status and eternal dynamis are both true of the Reality which itself surpasses both status and dynamis; the immobile and the mobile Brahman are both the same Reality.

But in experience we find that for us it is, normally, a quiescence that brings in the stable realisation of the eternal and the infinite: it is in silence or quietude that we feel most firmly the Something that is behind the world shown to us by our mind and senses. Our cognitive action of thought, our action of life and being seem to overlay the truth, the reality; they grasp the finite but not the infinite, they deal with the temporal and not the eternal Real. It is reasoned that this is so because all action, all creation, all determining perception limits; it does not embrace or grasp the Reality, and its constructions disappear when we enter into the indivisible and indeterminable consciousness of the Real: these constructions are unreal in eternity, however real they may seem or be in Time. Action leads to ignorance, to the created and finite; kinesis and creation are a contradiction of the immutable Reality, the pure uncreated Existence. But this reasoning is not wholly valid because it is looking at perception and action only as they

are in our mental cognition of the world and its movement; but that is the experience of our surface being regarding things from its shifting motion in Time, a regard itself superficial, fragmentary and delimited, not total, not plunging into the inner sense of things.” (CWSA 22: 475–476)

9.

“The Absolute is not limitable or definable by any one determination or by any sum of determinations; on the other side, it is not bound down to an indeterminable vacancy of pure existence. On the contrary, it is the source of all determinations: its indeterminability is the natural, the necessary condition both of its infinity of being and its infinity of power of being; it can be infinitely all things because it is no thing in particular and exceeds any definable totality. It is this essential indeterminability of the Absolute that translates itself into our consciousness through the fundamental negating positives of our spiritual experience, the immobile immutable Self, the Nirguna Brahman, the Eternal without qualities, the pure featureless One Existence, the Impersonal, the Silence void of activities, the Nonbeing, the Ineffable and the Unknowable.” (CWSA 21: 331)

10.

“The inactive Brahman and the active personal Brahman are two aspects of the Divine. In the Supreme these are fused into each other, not separate.” (CWSA 28: 28)

11.

“In the light of this conception we can perceive the possibility of a divine life for man in the world which will at once justify Science by disclosing a living sense and intelligible aim for the cosmic and the terrestrial evolution and realise by the transfiguration of the human soul into the divine the great ideal dream of all high religions.

But what then of that silent Self, inactive, pure, self-existent, self-enjoying, which presented itself to us as the abiding justification of the ascetic? Here also harmony and not irreconcilable opposition must be the illuminative truth. The silent and the active Brahman are not different, opposite and irreconcilable entities, the one denying, the other affirming a cosmic illusion; they are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative, and each is necessary to the other. It is out of this Silence that the Word which creates the worlds for ever proceeds; for the Word expresses that which is self-hidden in the Silence. It is an eternal passivity which makes possible the perfect freedom and omnipotence of an eternal divine activity in innumerable cosmic systems. For the becomings of that activity derive their energies and their illimitable potency

I—Status of Silence in the Infinite

of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the immutable Being, its consent to this infinite fecundity of its own dynamic Nature.” (CWSA 21: 30–31)

II—What Is Self

1.

“For the highest spiritual Self is not even behind our personality and bodily existence but is above it and altogether exceeds it. The highest of the inner centres is in the head, just as the deepest is the heart; but the centre which opens directly to the Self is above the head, altogether outside the physical body, in what is called the subtle body, *sūkṣma śarīra*. This Self has two aspects and the results of realising it correspond to these two aspects. One is static, a condition of wide peace, freedom, silence: the silent Self is unaffected by any action or experience; it impartially supports them but does not seem to originate them at all, rather to stand back detached or unconcerned, *udāsīna*. The other aspect is dynamic and that is experienced as a cosmic Self or Spirit which not only supports but originates and contains the whole cosmic action—not only that part of it which concerns our physical selves but also all that is beyond it, this world and all other worlds, the supraphysical as well as the physical ranges of the universe. Moreover, we feel the Self as one in all, but also we feel it as above all, transcendent, surpassing all individual birth or cosmic existence. To get into the universal Self—one in all—is to be liberated from ego; ego either becomes a small instrumental circumstance in the consciousness or disappears from our consciousness

altogether. That is the extinction or *nirvāna* of the ego. To get into the transcendent self above all makes us capable of transcending altogether even the cosmic consciousness and action—it can be the way to that complete liberation from the world-existence which is called also extinction, *laya*, *mokṣa*, Nirvana.” (CWSA 30: 325–326)

2.

“The real Self is not anywhere on the surface but deep within and above.” (CWSA 30: 325)

3.

“There is no distinction between the Self and the spirit. The psychic is the soul that develops in the evolution—the spirit is the Self that is not affected by the evolution, it is above it—only it is covered or concealed by the activity of mind, vital and body. The removal of this covering is the release of the spirit—and it is removed when there is a full and wide spiritual silence.” (CWSA 28: 105)

4.

“It is the Atman, the spiritual being above the mind—the first experience of it is a silence and calm (which one perceives afterwards to be infinite and eternal) untouched by the movements of mind and life and body. The higher consciousness lives always in touch with the Self—the

lower is separated from it by the activities of the Ignorance.” (CWSA 30: 391)

5.

“That [*state of vast peace and calm*] is the basic experience of the higher consciousness—it is what is called the realisation of the Atman (the Self).” (CWSA 30: 391)

6.

“When one becomes aware of the Self calm, silent, wide, universal, it is no longer covered over by the ignorance; when one identifies with the Self and not with the mind, life and body and their movements or with the small ego, that is the release of the Self.” (CWSA 30: 391)

7.

“And how is the outer nature to rise into the higher Prakriti before you realise the Self? The higher nature is that of the higher consciousness of which the first basis is the peace and wideness and realisation of the Self, the One that is all.” (CWSA 30: 391)

8.

“The gaining of peace makes it easier to get the experience of the pure and free Self.” (CWSA 30: 391)

9.

If not aspiration, at least keep the idea of what is necessary—(1) that the silence and peace shall become a wideness which you can realise as the Self, (2) the extension of the silent consciousness upwards as well so that you may feel its source above you, (3) the presence of peace etc. all the time. These things need not all come at once, but by realising what has to be in your mind, any falling towards a condition of inertia can be avoided.” (CWSA 30: 392)

10.

“The vastness, the overwhelming calm and silence in which you feel merged is what is called the Atman or the silent Brahman. It is the whole aim of many Yogas to get this realisation of Atman or silent Brahman and live in it. In our Yoga it is only the first stage of the realisation of the Divine and of that growing of the being into the higher or divine Consciousness which we call transformation.” (CWSA 30: 393)

11.

“A sadhak of integral Yoga who stops short at the Impersonal is no longer a sadhak of integral Yoga. Impersonal realisation is the realisation of the silent Self, of the pure Existence, Consciousness and Bliss in itself without any perception of an Existent, Conscient, Blissful.

It leads therefore to Nirvana. In the integral knowledge the realisation of the Self and of the impersonal Sachchidananda is only a step, though a very important step, or part of the integral knowledge. It is a beginning, not an end of the highest realisation.” (CWSA 30: 393)

12.

“The experience described in your letter is a glimpse of the realisation of the true Self which is independent of the body. When this settles itself there is the liberation (*mukti*). Not only the body, but the vital and mind are felt to be only instruments and one’s self is felt to be calm, self-existent and free and wide or infinite. It is then possible for the psychic being to effect in that freedom the full transformation of the nature. All your former experiences were preparing for this, but the physical consciousness came across. Now that you have had the glimpse of the self separate from the body, this physical difficulty may soon be overcome.” (CWSA 30: 393)

13.

“The experience you have is the experience of the true self. Untouched by grief and joy, desire, anxiety or trouble, vast and calm and full of peace, it observes the agitations of the outer being as one might the play of children. It is indeed the divine element in you. The more you can live in that, the firmer will be the foundation of the sadhana. In this

II—What Is Self

self will come all the higher experiences, oneness with the Divine, light, knowledge, strength, Ananda, the play of the Mother's higher forces. It does not always become stable from the first, though for some it does; but the experience comes more and more frequently and lasts till it is no longer covered by the ordinary nature." (CWSA 30: 394)

14.

"The Cosmic Spirit or Self contains everything in the cosmos—it upholds cosmic Mind, universal Life, universal Matter as well as the Overmind. The Self is more than all these things which are its formulations in Nature." (CWSA 30: 396)

15.

"What you saw in the vision was the wide and luminous infinite of what is called the universal Self or spirit. It is that which is one of the fundamental things into which one enters when one reaches the higher consciousness and goes above. The personal being naturally feels itself as something very small and insignificant in that Infinite." (CWSA 30: 396)

16.

"The Self is met first on the level of the Higher Mind, but it is not limited to one station—it is usually felt as something outspread in wideness, but one may also feel a centralising

consciousness in the Sahasrara or above it.” (CWSA 30: 397)

17.

“In the self or pure existence there is no time or space—except spiritual space or wideness.” (CWSA 30: 397–398)

“Yes—in the silence of the self there is no time—it is *akāla*.” (CWSA 30: 398)

“Yes, that is correct. In the first realisation of silence in the higher consciousness there is no Time—there is only the sense of pure existence, consciousness, peace or a strong featureless Ananda. If anything else comes in it is a minor movement on the surface of this timeless self-existence. This and the sense of liberation that comes with it is the result of the mind’s quiescence. At a higher level this peace and liberation remain, but can be united with a greater and freer dynamic movement.” (CWSA 30: 398)

18.

“For the psychic being came into Nature from the Self, the Divine, and it can turn back from Nature to the silent Divine through the silence of the Self and a supreme spiritual immobility. Again, an eternal portion of the Divine, this part is by the law of the Infinite inseparable from its Divine Whole, this part is indeed itself that Whole, except in its

II—What Is Self

frontal appearance, its frontal separative self-experience; it may awaken to that reality and plunge into it to the apparent extinction or at least the merging of the individual existence. ... All these are great and splendid achievements of our spiritual self-finding, but they are not necessarily the last end and entire consummation; more is possible.”
(CWSA 21: 241)

III—One Aspect of Self Is Pure Silence

1.

“The Self has two aspects, passive and active. In the first it is pure silence, wideness, calm, the inactive Brahman—in the second it is the Cosmic Spirit, universal not individual. One can feel in it union or oneness with the Mother. Intimacy is a feeling of the individual, therefore of the psychic being.” (CWSA 32: 60)

2.

“Self and Nature are in the end one thing; a total and perfect spirituality makes us one with all the Divine in self and in nature. In fact this becoming Brahman, this assumption into the self of eternal silence, *brahma-bhūya*, is not all our objective, but only the necessary immense base for a still greater and more marvellous divine becoming, *madbhāva*. And to get to that greatest spiritual perfection we have indeed to be immobile in the self, silent in all our members, but also to act in the power, Shakti, Prakriti, the true and high force of the Spirit. And if we ask how a simultaneity of what seem to be two opposites is possible, the answer is that that is the very nature of a complete spiritual being; always it has this double poise of the Infinite. The impersonal self is silent; we too must be inwardly silent, impersonal, withdrawn into the spirit. The impersonal self looks on all action as done not by it but by

III—One Aspect of Self Is Pure Silence

Prakriti; it regards with a pure equality all the working of her qualities, modes and forces: the soul impersonalised in the self must similarly regard all our actions as done not by itself but by the qualities of Prakriti; it must be equal in all things, *sarvatra*. And at the same time in order that we may not stop here, in order that we may eventually go forward and find a spiritual rule and direction in our works and not only a law of inner immobility and silence, we are asked to impose on the intelligence and will the attitude of sacrifice, all our action inwardly changed and turned into an offering to the Lord of Nature, to the Being of whom she is the self-power, *svā prakṛtiḥ*, the supreme Spirit. Even we have eventually to renounce all into his hands, to abandon all personal initiation of action, *sarvārambhāḥ*, to keep our natural selves only as an instrument of his works and his purpose.” (CWSA 19: 530–532)

3.

“The quiescent impersonal Self is a truth,—it is the truth of the calm of the Godhead, the silence of the Eternal, the freedom of the Lord of all birth and becoming and action and creation, his calm infinite freedom of self-existence not bound, troubled or affected by his creation, not touched by the action and reaction of his Nature.” (CWSA 19: 456)

4.

“Certainly, peace, purity and silence can be felt in all material things—for the Divine Self is there in all.” (CWSA 29: 152–153)

5.

“If not aspiration, at least keep the idea of what is necessary—(1) that the silence and peace shall become a wideness which you can realise as the Self, (2) the extension of the silent consciousness upwards as well so that you may feel its source above you, (3) the presence of peace etc. all the time. These things need not all come at once, but by realising what has to be in your mind, any falling towards a condition of inertia can be avoided.” (CWSA 30: 392)

6.

“Yes, this is the time when you have to persist till you are quite settled in the inner consciousness and the persistence of the silence and peace is a sign that it is now possible. When one feels this kind of silence, peace and wideness, one may be sure that it is that of the true being, the real self, penetrating into the mind and vital and perhaps also the physical consciousness (if it is complete). The restlessness of the physical is probably due to the peace and silence having touched the physical but not yet penetrated the material or body consciousness. The old restlessness is there in the body struggling to remain,

although it cannot invade either mind or vital or even in a general way the physical consciousness as a whole. If the peace descends there, this restlessness will disappear.” (CWSA 31: 400)

7.

“There is no thought in the pure Impersonal, it is silent—but it is true that divine Truth can manifest in the background of the silence. This is of course the truth of things up to the Overmind.” (CWSA 28: 28)

8.

“The realisation of the Yoga of Knowledge is when one feels that one lives in the wideness of something silent, featureless and universal (called the Self) and all else is seen as only forms and names; the Self is real, nothing else. The realisation of ‘*my* self in other forms’ is a part of this or a step towards it, but in the full realisation the ‘*my*’ should drop so that there is only *the* one Self or rather only the Brahman. For the Self is merely a subjective aspect of the Brahman, just as the Ishwara is its objective aspect. That is the Vedantic ‘Knowledge’. Its result is peace, silence, liberation. As for the active Prakriti, (mind, vital, body), the Yoga of Knowledge does not make it its aim to transform them—that would be no use as the idea is that if the liberation has come, it will all drop off at death. The only change wanted is to get rid of the idea of ego and

realise as true only the supreme Self, the Brahman.”
(CWSA 35: 165–166)

9.

“Our surface existence is only a surface and it is there that there is the full reign of the Ignorance; to know we have to go within ourselves and see with an inner knowledge. All that is formulated on the surface is a small and diminished representation of our secret greater existence. The immobile self in us is found only when the outer mental and vital activities are quieted; for since it is seated deep within and is represented on the surface only by the intuitive sense of self-existence and misrepresented by the mental, vital, physical ego-sense, its truth has to be experienced in the mind’s silence. But also the dynamic parts of our surface being are similarly diminished figures of greater things that are there in the depths of our secret nature. The surface memory itself is a fragmentary and ineffective action pulling out details from an inner subliminal memory which receives and records all our world-experience, receives and records even what the mind has not observed, understood or noticed.” (CWSA 22: 541)

10.

“When one follows after the impersonal Self, one is moving between two opposite principles—the silence and purity of

III—One Aspect of Self Is Pure Silence

the impersonal inactive Atman and the activity of the ignorant Prakriti. One can pass into the Self, leaving the ignorant Nature or reducing it to silence. Or else, one can live in the peace and freedom of the Self and watch the action of Nature as a witness. Even one may put some sattwic control, by tapasya, over the action of the Prakriti; but the impersonal Self has no power to change or divinise the Nature. For that one has to go beyond the impersonal Self and seek after the Divine who is both personal and impersonal and beyond these two aspects.” (CWSA 28: 11–12)

11.

“It is possible to remain in a Nirvana of all individuality, to stop at a static realisation or, regarding the cosmic movement as a superficial play or illusion imposed on the silent Self, to pass into some supreme immobile and immutable status beyond the universe. But another less negative line of supernormal experience also offers itself; for there takes place a large dynamic descent of light, knowledge, power, bliss or other supernormal energies into our self of silence, and we can ascend too into higher regions of the Spirit where its immobile status is the foundation of those great and luminous energies. It is evident in either case that we have risen beyond the mind of Ignorance into a spiritual state; but, in the dynamic movement, the resultant greater action of Consciousness-

III—One Aspect of Self Is Pure Silence

Force may present itself either simply as a pure spiritual dynamis not otherwise determinate in its character or it may reveal a spiritual mind-range where mind is no longer ignorant of the Reality,—not yet a supermind level, but deriving from the supramental Truth-Consciousness and still luminous with something of its knowledge.” (CWSA 21: 291)

IV—Silence Is Felt in Realisation of Self

1.

“The Self or Atman is inactive, Nature (Prakriti) or Shakti acts. When the Self is realised it is first an infinite existence, wideness, silence, freedom, peace that is felt—that is called Atman or Self. When action takes place, it is according to the realisation either felt as forces of Nature working in that wideness, as the Divine Shakti working or as the cosmic Divine or various powers of him working. It is not felt that the Self is acting.” (CWSA 28: 32)

2.

“Brahman the Reality is the self-existent Absolute and Maya is the Consciousness and Force of this self-existence; but with regard to the universe Brahman appears as the Self of all existence, Atman, the cosmic Self, but also as the Supreme Self transcendent of its own cosmicity and at the same time individual-universal in each being; Maya can then be seen as the self-power, Atma-Shakti, of the Atman. It is true that when we first become aware of this Aspect, it is usually in a silence of the whole being or at the least in a silence within which draws back or stands away from the surface action; this Self is then felt as a status in silence, an immobile immutable being, self-existent, pervading the whole universe, omnipresent in all, but not dynamic or active, aloof from the ever mobile energy of

Maya. In the same way we can become aware of it as the Purusha, separate from Prakriti, the Conscious Being standing back from the activities of Nature. But this is an exclusive concentration which limits itself to a spiritual status and puts away from it all activity in order to realise the freedom of Brahman the self-existent Reality from all limitation by its own action and manifestation: it is an essential realisation, but not the total realisation. For we can see that the Conscious-Power, the Shakti that acts and creates, is not other than the Maya or all-knowledge of Brahman; it is the Power of the Self; Prakriti is the working of the Purusha, Conscious Being active by its own Nature: the duality then of Soul and World-Energy, silent Self and the creative Power of the Spirit, is not really something dual and separate, it is biune. As we cannot separate Fire and the power of Fire, it has been said, so we cannot separate the Divine Reality and its Consciousness-Force, Chit-Shakti." (CWSA 21: 361–362)

3.

"The Self is everywhere and by entering into full detachment and silence, or even by either detachment or silence, one can get anywhere some glimpse, some reflection, perhaps even a full reflection, or a sense of the Self's presence or of one's own immergence in that which is free, wide, silent, eternal, infinite.

... This self can be obviously dynamic as well as silent; or else you may say that, even though still and immobile, from its silence it originates the dynamism of Nature.” (CWSA 28: 70)

4.

“The Jiva [Jivatman] is realised as the individual Self, Atman, the central being above the Nature, calm, untouched by the movements of Nature but supporting their evolution though not involved in it. Through this realisation silence, freedom, wideness, mastery, purity, a sense of universality in the individual as one centre of this divine universality become the normal experience.” (CWSA 28: 106)

5.

“A complete silence makes realisation of the Self more possible—but that can be had on the Higher Mind level far below Overmind.” (CWSA 30: 397)

6.

“One has first to become aware of the Self and its wide silence and eternal peace and acquire the cosmic consciousness in which one is aware of the whole universe as one with oneself and to live in that. One has at the same time to be aware—it becomes possible when one lives in the cosmic consciousness, cosmic Self and cosmic

Nature,—of the different beings in oneself, psychic, mental, vital, physical, and then there appears also the central being which stands above all of them and is the source of all the surface personalities. It is only then that one can know the aspect or bhava one is intended to manifest.” (CWSA 30: 396)

7.

“What one feels first [*in the silence*] is the pure existence of the self, without any idea, characteristic or movement—existence pure and simple, Sat Brahman—or else one feels that and a vast peace and wideness. Afterwards other things are felt such as Ananda, but always with this as the basis.” (CWSA 30: 392)

V—The Status of the Purusha Is the Silent Self

1.

“For, beyond the soul manifest in Nature and bound up with its action, is another status of the Purusha, which is entirely a status and not at all an action; that is the silent, the immutable, the all-pervading, self-existent, motionless Self, *sarvagatam acalam*, immutable Being and not Becoming, the Akshara. In the Kshara the Soul is involved in the action of Nature, therefore it is concentrated, loses itself, as it were, in the moments of Time, in the waves of the Becoming, not really, but only in appearance and by following the current; in the Akshara Nature falls to silence and rest in the Soul, therefore it becomes aware of its immutable Being.” (CWSA 19: 229)

2.

“There is a constant movement (Prakriti) and a constant silence (Purusha).” (CWSA 28: 42)

3.

“One effective way often used to facilitate this entry into the inner self is the separation of the Purusha, the conscious being, from the Prakriti, the formulated nature. If one stands back from the mind and its activities so that they fall silent at will or go on as a surface movement of which one is the detached and disinterested witness, it

becomes possible eventually to realize oneself as the inner Self of mind, the true and pure mental being, the Purusha; by similarly standing back from the life activities, it is possible to realise oneself as the inner Self of life, the true and pure vital being, the Purusha; there is even a Self of body of which, by standing back from the body and its demands and activities and entering into a silence of the physical consciousness watching the action of its energy, it is possible to become aware, a true and pure physical being, the Purusha. So too, by standing back from all these activities of nature successively or together, it becomes possible to realise one's inner being as the silent impersonal self, the witness Purusha. This will lead to a spiritual realisation and liberation, but will not necessarily bring about a transformation; for the Purusha, satisfied to be free and himself, may leave the Nature, the Prakriti, to exhaust its accumulated impetus by an unsupported action, a mechanical continuance not renewed and reinforced or vivified and prolonged by his consent, and use this rejection as a means of withdrawing from all nature." (CWSA 22: 939–940)

4.

"So too at first soul in man does not appear as something quite distinct from mind and from mentalised life; its movements are involved in the mind movements, its operations seem to be mental and emotional activities; the

mental human being is not aware of a soul in him standing back from the mind and life and body, detaching itself, seeing and controlling and moulding their action and formation: but, as the inner evolution proceeds, this is precisely what can, must and does happen,—it is the long-delayed but inevitable next step in our evolutionary destiny. There can be a decisive emergence in which the being separates itself from thought and sees itself in an inner silence as the spirit in mind, or separates itself from the life movements, desires, sensations, kinetic impulses and is aware of itself as the spirit supporting life, or separates itself from the body sense and knows itself as a spirit ensouling Matter: this is the discovery of ourselves as the Purusha, a mental being or a life-soul or a subtle self supporting the body. This is taken by many as a sufficient discovery of the true self and in a certain sense they are right; for it is the self or spirit that so represents itself in regard to the activities of Nature, and this revelation of its presence is enough to disengage the spiritual element: but self-discovery can go farther, it can even put aside all relation to form or action of Nature. For it is seen that these selves are representations of a divine Entity to which mind, life and body are only forms and instruments: we are then the Soul looking at Nature, knowing all her dynamisms in us, not by mental perception and observation, but by an intrinsic consciousness and its direct sense of things and its intimate exact vision, able therefore by its emergence

to put a close control on our nature and change it. When there is a complete silence in the being, either a stillness of the whole being or a stillness behind unaffected by surface movements, then we can become aware of a Self, a spiritual substance of our being, an existence exceeding even the soul individuality, spreading itself into universality, surpassing all dependence on any natural form or action, extending itself upward into a transcendence of which the limits are not visible. It is these liberations of the spiritual part in us which are the decisive steps of the spiritual evolution in Nature.” (CWSA 22: 886–887)

VI—Nirvana Is Absolute Silence in Nameless Infinite

1.

"It is not possible to situate Nirvana as a world or plane, for the Nirvana push is to a withdrawal from world and world values; it is therefore a state of consciousness or rather of superconsciousness without habitation or level. There is more than one kind of Nirvana (extinction or dissolution) possible. Man being a mental being in a body, *manomaya puruṣa*, makes this attempt at retreat from the cosmos through the spiritualised mind, he cannot do otherwise and it is this that gives it the appearance of an extinction or dissolution, *laya, nirvāṇa*; for extinction of the mind and all that depends on it including the separative ego in something Beyond is the natural way, almost the indispensable way for such a withdrawal. ... But it is possible also to pass to that through a certain experience of Nirvana, an absolute silence of mind and cessation of its activities, constructions, representations which can be so complete that not only to the silent mind but also to the passive senses the whole world is emptied of its solidity and reality and things appear only as unsubstantial forms without any real habitations or else floating in something that is a nameless Infinite: this Infinite or else something still beyond is That which alone is real; an absolute calm, peace, liberation would be the resulting state. Action would

continue, but no initiation or participation in it by the silent liberated consciousness; a nameless Power would do all until there began the descent from above which would transform the consciousness, making its silence and freedom a basis for a luminous knowledge, action, Ananda. But such a passage would be rare; ordinarily a silence of the mind, a liberation of the consciousness, a renunciation of its belief in the final value or truth of the mind's imperfect representations or constructions would be enough for the higher working to be possible." (CWSA 28: 140–141)

2.

"There is another basic realisation, the most extreme of all, that yet comes sometimes as the first decisive opening or an early turn of the Yoga. It is the awakening to an ineffable high transcendent Unknowable above myself and above this world ... To remain in this consciousness, to carry out this initiation or follow out this first suggestion of the character of things would be to proceed towards the goal of dissolution of self and world in the Unknowable,—Moksha, Nirvana." (CWSA 23: 117–118)

3.

"Once the being or its different parts begin to ascend to the planes above, any part of the being may do it, frontal or other. The sanskara that one cannot come back must

be got rid of. One can have the experience of Nirvana at the summit of the mind or anywhere in those planes that are now superconscient to the mind; the mind spiritualised by the ascent into Self has the sense of *laya*, dissolution of itself, its thoughts, movements, sanskaras into a superconscient Silence and Infinity which it is unable to grasp,—the Unknowable. But this would bring or lead to some form of Nirvana only if one makes Nirvana the goal, if one is tied to the mind and accepts its dissolution into the Infinite as one's own dissolution or if one has not the capacity to reorganise experience on a higher than the mental plane. But otherwise what was superconscient becomes conscient, one begins to possess or else be the instrument of the dynamis of the higher planes and there is a movement, not of liberation into Nirvana, but of liberation + transformation. However high one goes, one can always return, unless one has the will not to do so." (CWSA 30: 432–433)

4.

"This peace of Nirvana is reached when all the mental consciousness is perfectly controlled and liberated from desire and remains still in the Self, when, motionless like the light of a lamp in a windless place, it ceases from its restless action, shut in from its outward motion, and by the silence and stillness of the mind the Self is seen within, not disfigured as in the mind, but in the Self, seen, not as it is mistranslated falsely or partially by the mind and

represented to us through the ego, but self-perceived by the Self, *svaparakāśa*.” (CWSA 19: 242)

5.

“The Kshara spirit visible to us as all natural existence and the totality of all existences moves and acts pervadingly in the immobile and eternal Akshara. ... These two then are the two spirits we see in the world; one emerges in front in its action, the other remains behind it steadfast in that perpetual silence from which the action comes and in which all actions cease and disappear into timeless being, Nirvana. *Dvāv imau puruṣau loke kṣaraś cākṣara eva ca*.” (CWSA 19: 437)

6.

“In what may be called the first silence, it is like that—silence alone with no emotion or other inner activity. When it deepens one can feel the Nirvana of the Buddhists or the Atmabodha of the Vedantins. Both force and bliss or either can descend into the silence, filling it with calm Tapas or silent Ananda.” (CWSA 30: 454)

7.

“The main stress here [bliss of Nirvana] has fallen on the stilling of the emotive mind, the mind of desire and the senses which are the recipients of outward touches and reply to them with our customary emotional reactions; but

even the mental thought has to be stilled in the silence of the self-existent being.” (CWSA 19: 242)

8.

“If earth circumstances begin to seem unreal to a soul passing into a different world or another plane of consciousness, that would not prove their unreality; similarly, the fact that world-existence seems unreal to us when we pass into the spiritual silence or into some Nirvana, does not of itself prove that the cosmos was all the time an illusion. The world is real to the consciousness dwelling in it, an unconditioned existence is real to the consciousness absorbed in Nirvana; that is all that is established.” (CWSA 22: 436)

9.

“The Unmanifested Supreme is beyond all definition and description by mind or speech; no definition the mind can make, affirmative or negative, can be at all expressive of it or adequate.

To the Mind this Unmanifest can present itself as a Self, a supreme Nihil (Tao or Sunya), a featureless Absolute, an Indeterminate, a blissful Nirvana of manifested existence, a Non-Being out of which Being came or a Being of Silence out of which a world-illusion came. But all these are mental formulas expressing the mind's approach to it, not That itself; impressions which

fall from That upon the receiving consciousness, not the true essence or nature (swarupa) of the Eternal and Infinite. Even the words Eternal and Infinite are only symbolic expressions ...” (CWSA 12: 189)

10.

“It must be noted however that the opening upward does not necessarily lead to peace, silence and Nirvana only. The sadhak becomes aware not only of a great, eventually an infinite peace, silence, wideness above us, above the head as it were and extending into all physical and supraphysical space, but also he can become aware of other things—a vast Force in which is all power, a vast Light in which is all knowledge, a vast Ananda in which is all bliss and rapture. At first they appear as something essential, indeterminate, absolute, simple, *kevala*; a Nirvana into any of these things seems possible.” (CWSA 30: 325–326)

11.

“At the stage when from the mental it has to move towards its supramental status, one most liberatingly helpful, if not indispensable experience that may intervene is the entry into a total Nirvana of mentality and mental ego, a passage into the silence of the Spirit. ... But the Supermind keeps always and in every status or condition the spiritual realisation of the Unity of all; the intimate presence of that

VI—Nirvana Is Absolute Silence in Nameless Infinite

unity is there even within the completest grasp of each thing, each state given its whole delight of itself, power and value: there is thus no losing sight of the affirmative aspects even when there is the full acceptance of the truth of the negative.” (CWSA 21: 332–333)

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into Inactive Silence of the Supreme

1.

“For at the gates of the Transcendent stands that mere and perfect Spirit described in the Upanishads, luminous, pure, sustaining the world but inactive in it, without sinews of energy, without flaw of duality, without scar of division, unique, identical, free from all appearance of relation and of multiplicity,—the pure Self of the Adwaitins, the inactive Brahman, the transcendent Silence. And the mind when it passes those gates suddenly, without intermediate transitions, receives a sense of the unreality of the world and the sole reality of the Silence which is one of the most powerful and convincing experiences of which the human mind is capable. Here, in the perception of this pure Self or of the Non-Being behind it, we have the starting point for a second negation,—parallel at the other pole to the materialistic, but more complete, more final, more perilous in its effects on the individuals or collectivities that hear its potent call to the wilderness,—the refusal of the ascetic.”
(CWSA 21: 26)

2.

“In the ancient Indian system there is only one triune supernal, Sachchidananda. Or if you speak of the upper hemisphere as the supernal, there are three, Sat plane, Chit plane and Ananda plane. The Supermind could be

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

added as a fourth, as it draws upon the other three and belongs to the upper hemisphere. The [ancient] Indian systems did not distinguish between two quite different powers and levels of consciousness, one which we can call Overmind and the other the true Supermind or Divine Gnosis. That is the reason why they got confused about Maya (Overmind-Force or Vidya-Avidya) and took it for the supreme creative power. In so stopping short at what was still a half-light they lost the secret of transformation—even though the Vaishnava and Tantra Yogas groped to find it again and were sometimes on the verge of success. For the rest, this, I think, has been the stumbling-block of all attempts at the discovery of the dynamic divine Truth; I know of none that has not imagined, as soon as it felt the Overmind lustres descending, that this was the true illumination, the gnosis,—with the result that they either stopped short there and could get no farther, or else concluded that this too was only Maya or Lila and that the one thing to do was to get beyond it into some immovable and inactive Silence of the Supreme.” (CWSA 28: 83)

3.

“What is the power of this silence? When one rises above, one enters into a kind of great silence, that is frozen, that is everywhere; but what is the power of this silence? Does it do anything?”

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

This is what people used to seek in the past when they wanted to escape from life. They would go into a trance, they would leave their body quite still and they would go within and they were perfectly happy. And with the Sannyasis who had themselves buried alive it was like that. They said, 'Now, I have finished my work'—their language was very impressive—'I have finished, I am entering into Samadhi' and they had themselves buried alive. They went into a room or something, and then it was closed and that was the end of it. And that is what happened: they went into a trance, and after some time, naturally, their body was dissolved and they were in peace.

But Sri Aurobindo says that this silence is powerful.

Powerful, yes.

Well, I would like to know exactly how it is powerful? Because one has the feeling that one could stay there for an eternity...

Not an eternity—Eternity.

... without anything changing.

No, because it is not manifested, it is outside the manifestation. But Sri Aurobindo wants us to bring it down here. That is the difficulty. And one must accept infirmity

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

and even the appearance of imbecility, everything, and not one out of fifty million has the courage for that.

There are millions of ways of fleeing. There is only one way to remain: it is truly to have courage and endurance, to accept every appearance of infirmity, helplessness, incomprehension, even an apparent denial of the Truth. But if one does not accept that, it will never change. Those who want to remain great, luminous, strong, powerful and so on and so forth, well, let them stay up there, they cannot do anything for the earth.” (CWM 10: 211–212)

4.

“It is always possible to have realisations of a kind on the mental spiritual plane even if the vital is still impure. There is a sort of separation of the mental Purusha and Prakriti which results in a knowledge that has no transforming effect on the life. But the theory of these Yogis is that one has to know the Self; life and what one does in life do not matter. Have you not read of the Yogi who came with his concubine and Ramakrishna asked him, ‘Why do you live like that?’ He answered, ‘All is Maya, so it does not matter what I do so long as I know the Brahman.’ It is true Ramakrishna replied, ‘I spit on your Vedanta’, but logically the Yogi had a case. For if all life and action are Maya and only the silent Brahman is real—well!” (CWSA 30: 398)

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

5.

"The soul shut up in this circle of action has no freedom, no leisure or light of self-knowledge to make the discovery of its self and the true value of life and meaning of existence. It has indeed such hints of its being as it can get from its active personality and dynamic nature, but the standards of perfection it can erect there are much too temporal, restricted and relative to be a satisfactory key to its own riddle. How, while absorbed and continually forced outward by the engrossing call of its active nature, is it to get back to its real self and spiritual existence? The ascetic renunciation and the way of the Gita are both agreed that it must first of all renounce this absorption, must cast from it the external solicitation of outward things and separate silent self from active nature; it must identify itself with the immobile Spirit and live in the silence. It must arrive at an inner inactivity, *naïṣkarmya*. It is therefore this saving inner passivity that the Gita puts here as the first object of its Yoga, the first necessary perfection in it or Siddhi. 'An understanding without attachment in all things, a soul self conquered and empty of desire, man attains by renunciation a supreme perfection of *naïṣkarmya*.'" (CWSA 19: 528–529)

6.

"There is one answer with which we are very familiar in India; no work at all remains, for the rest is quiescence.

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

When the soul can live in the eternal presence of the Supreme or when it is unified with the Absolute, the object of our existence in the world, if it can be said to have an object, at once ceases. Man, released from the curse of self-division and the curse of Ignorance, is released too from that other affliction, the curse of works. All action would then be a derogation from the supreme state and a return into the Ignorance. This attitude towards life is supported by an idea founded on the error of the vital nature to which action is dictated only by one or all of three inferior motives, necessity, restless instinct and impulse or desire. The instinct or impulse quiescent, desire extinguished, what place is there for works? Some mechanical necessity might remain but no other, and even that would cease for ever with the fall of the body. But after all, even so, while life remains, action is unavoidable. Mere thinking or, in the absence of thought, mere living is itself an act and a cause of many effects. All existence in the world is work, force, potency, and has a dynamic effect in the whole by its mere presence, even the inertia of the clod, even the silence of the immobile Buddha on the verge of Nirvana." (CWSA 23: 264–265)

7.

"Intimately connected with the aim of the Yoga of Knowledge which must always be the growth, the ascent or the withdrawal into a higher or a divine consciousness

VII—Why the Ancient Indian System Concluded to Enter into
Inactive Silence of the Supreme

not now normal to us, is the importance attached to the phenomenon of Yogic trance, to Samadhi. It is supposed that there are states of being which can only be gained in trance; that especially is to be desired in which all action of awareness is abolished and there is no consciousness at all except the pure supramental immersion in immobile, timeless and infinite being. By passing away in this trance the soul departs into the silence of the highest Nirvana without possibility of return into any illusory or inferior state of existence. Samadhi is not so all-important in the Yoga of devotion, but it still has its place there as the swoon of being into which the ecstasy of divine love casts the soul. To enter into it is the supreme step of the ladder of Yogic practice in Rajayoga and Hathayoga. What then is the nature of Samadhi or the utility of its trance in an integral Yoga? It is evident that where our objective includes the possession of the Divine in life, a state of cessation of life cannot be the last consummating step or the highest desirable condition: Yogic trance cannot be an aim, as in so many Yogic systems, but only a means, and a means not of escape from the waking existence, but to enlarge and raise the whole seeing, living and active consciousness." (CWSA 24: 519)

VIII—The Negative Ideal of Losing Oneself in the Silence Is Not the True Essence of Indian Culture

1.

“The Indian mind believed and still believes that soul power is a greater thing, works from a mightier centre of will and has greater results than a more outwardly and materially active will-force. But it will be said that India has valued most the impersonal and that must obviously discourage personality. But this too,—except for the negative ideal of losing oneself in the trance or the silence of the Eternal, which is not the true essence of the matter,—involves a misconception. However paradoxical it may sound, one finds actually that the acceptance of the eternal and impersonal behind one’s being and action and the attempt at unity with it is precisely the thing that carries the person to his largest greatness and power. For this impersonality is not a nullity, but an oceanic totality of the being. The perfect man, the Siddha or the Buddha, becomes universal, embraces all being in sympathy and oneness, finds himself in others as in himself and by so doing draws into himself at the same time something of the infinite power of a universal energy. That is the positive ideal of Indian culture.” (CWSA 20: 254)

IX—Nirvana Is Not the Single and All-Excluding Truth

1.

"We recognise, then, that it is possible for the consciousness in the individual to enter into a state in which relative existence appears to be dissolved and even Self seems to be an inadequate conception. It is possible to pass into a Silence beyond the Silence. But this is not the whole of our ultimate experience, nor the single and all-excluding truth. For we find that this Nirvana, this self-extinction, while it gives an absolute peace and freedom to the soul within is yet consistent in practice with a desireless but effective action without. This possibility of an entire motionless impersonality and void Calm within doing outwardly the works of the eternal verities, Love, Truth and Righteousness, was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha's teaching,—this superiority to ego and to the chain of personal workings and to the identification with mutable form and idea, not the petty ideal of an escape from the trouble and suffering of the physical birth. In any case, as the perfect man would combine in himself the silence and the activity, so also would the completely conscious soul reach back to the absolute freedom of the Non-Being without therefore losing its hold on Existence and the universe." (CWSA 21: 34)

2.

“But this [Moksha, Nirvana] is not the only line of issue; it is possible, on the contrary, for me to wait till through the silence of this timeless unfilled liberation I begin to enter into relations with that yet ungrasped Source of myself and my actions; then the void begins to fill, there emerges out of it or there rushes into it all the manifold Truth of the Divine, all the aspects and manifestations and many levels of a dynamic Infinite. At first this experience imposes on the mind and then on all our being an absolute, a fathomless, almost an abysmal peace and silence. Overpowered and subjugated, stilled, liberated from itself, the mind accepts the Silence itself as the Supreme. But afterwards the seeker discovers that all is there for him contained or new-made in that silence or through it descends upon him from a greater concealed transcendent Existence. For this Transcendent, this Absolute is not a mere peace of signless emptiness; it has its own infinite contents and riches of which ours are debased and diminished values. If there were not that Source of all things, there could be no universe; all powers, all works and activities would be an illusion, all creation and manifestation would be impossible.” (CWSA 23: 117–118)

X—Entire Retirement Not the Remedy

1.

“To remain in silence as much as possible is good for a time. But entire retirement is seldom found to be helpful—the lower movements may remain quiescent owing to want of stimulus from outside, but do not disappear. For that you must be able to get an inner quietude and a mastery over the outer movements which will resist any atmosphere.” (CWSA 31: 93)

2.

“The difficulty is that the things in the atmosphere come in even if one does not speak with people. There are always mind waves moving about. It is a mastery that has to be developed, beginning with a power of silence, exclusion, non-response.” (CWSA 31: 93)

3.

“To live in the self is of course the proper object of withdrawal and to live in the self brings the higher experiences which must obviously be helpful and not harmful. What I wrote was only to explain what I meant by the danger of too complete retirement and why it turned out to be harmful to X, Y and others. There are some like Z who derived unmixed profit from it. It altogether depends

X—Entire Retirement Not the Remedy

on one's temperament and on one's attitude and aim and inner poise during the silence." (CWSA 31: 341)

XI—To Cease in the Pure Silence Is Not the Best Way for Man

1.

"The Gita's message to those, absolutist seekers of the Infinite, who carry impersonality to an exclusive extreme, entertain an intolerant passion for the extinction of life and action and would have as the one ultimate aim and ideal an endeavour to cease from all individual being in the pure silence of the ineffable Spirit, is that this is indeed one path of journey and entry into the Infinite, but the most difficult, the ideal of inaction a dangerous thing to hold up by precept or example before the world, this way, though great, yet not the best way for man and this knowledge, though true, yet not the integral knowledge. The Supreme, the all-conscious Self, the Godhead, the Infinite is not solely a spiritual existence remote and ineffable; he is here in the universe at once hidden and expressed through man and the gods and through all beings and in all that is. And it is by finding him not only in some immutable silence but in the world and its beings and in all self and in all Nature, it is by raising to an integral as well as to a highest union with him all the activities of the intelligence, the heart, the will, the life that man can solve at once his inner riddle of self and God and the outer problem of his active human existence." (CWSA 19: 570)

2.

"If the sole intention were the revelation of the essential spiritual Reality and a cessation of our being into its pure existence, this insistence on the mental evolution would have no purpose: for at every point of the nature there can be a breaking out of the spirit and an absorption of our being into it; an intensity of the heart, a total silence of the mind, a single absorbing passion of the will would be enough to bring about that culminating movement." (CWSA 22: 890)

3.

"If a departure from the world and its activities, a supreme release and quietude were the sole aim of the seeker, the three great fundamental realisations [eternal Presence in me, Divinity in the world outside me and transcendent Unknowable above myself] would be sufficient for the fulfilment of his spiritual life: concentrated in them alone he could suffer all other divine or mundane knowledge to fall away from him and himself unencumbered, depart into the eternal Silence. But he has to take account of the world and its activities, learn what divine truth there may be behind them and reconcile that apparent opposition between the Divine Truth and the manifest creation which is the starting-point of most spiritual experience." (CWSA 23: 118–119)

4.

"The divinised man entering into his divine nature will act even as he acts; he will not give himself up to inaction. The Divine is at work in man in the ignorance and at work in man in the knowledge. To know Him is our soul's highest welfare and the condition of its perfection, but to know and realise Him as a transcendent peace and silence is not all; the secret that has to be learned is at once the secret of the eternal and unborn Divine and the secret of the divine birth and works, *janma karma came divyam*. The action which proceeds from that knowledge, will be free from all bondage; 'he who so knoweth me,' says the Teacher, 'is not bound by works'." (CWSA 19: 144)

5.

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"Even he who might have attained a perfect contemplation in silence and solitude would have arrived at it only by withdrawing from his body, by disregarding it; and so the substance of which the body is constituted would remain as impure, as imperfect as before, since he would have left it to itself; and by a misguided mysticism, through the lure of supraphysical splendours, the egoistic desire to unite with Thee for his own personal satisfaction, he would have turned his back upon the very reason of his earthly existence, he would have refused like a coward to

XI—To Cease in the Pure Silence Is Not the Best Way for Man
accomplish his mission—the redemption and purification of
Matter.” [Prayers and Meditation] (CWM 1: 20)

XII—Sri Aurobindo's Experience of Nirvana

1.

"Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my [Sri Aurobindo's] own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world—only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above,—no abstraction—it was positive, the only positive reality—although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me,—the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards,—but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous [stunning] silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of

experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But mean while realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale." (CWSA 29: 452–453) (CWSA 35: 249–250)

2.

"I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the

overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities—the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more.” (CWSA 28: 71) (CWSA 35: 257)

XIII—Affirmative Yoga Seeks Transcendence but Not Withdrawal

1.

“In a more affirmative Yoga seeking transcendence but not withdrawal [from world and world values] there would not be this indispensability [of Nirvana], for there would be the way already alluded to of self-exceeding or transformation of the mental being.” (CWSA 28: 140)

2.

“But the crowning realisation of this yoga is when you become aware of the whole world as the expression, play or Lila of an infinite divine personality, when you see in all, not the impersonal Sad Atman which is the basis of manifest existence,—although you do not lose that knowledge,—but Sri Krishna who at once is, bases and transcends all manifest and unmanifest existence, *‘vyaktāt paraḥ* [unmanifest Supreme beyond the manifest]. For behind the Sad Atman [the Self as pure Existence] is the silence of the Asat [Non-Being, beyond manifestation] which the Buddhist Nihilists realised as the *sūnyam* and beyond that silence is the Paratpara Purusha [the purusa higher than the highest] (*puruṣo vareṇya ādityavarṇas tamasaḥ parastāt [the excellent purusa, of the colour of the sun, beyond darkness]*). It is he who has made this world out of his being and is immanent in and sustains it

XIII—Affirmative Yoga Seeks Transcendence but Not Withdrawal as the infinite-finite Ishwara, *ananta* and *sānta*, Shiva and Narayana, Sri Krishna the Lilamaya who draws all of us to him by his love, compels all of us by his masteries and plays his eternal play of joy and strength and beauty in the manifold world.” (CWSA 13: 76–77)

3.

“In this development there are stages—the whole truth cannot be known till all are passed and the final stage is there. The stage in which you are is one in which the Self is beginning to be realised, the Self free from all embodiment and not depending on embodiment for its perpetual existence. It is therefore natural that you should feel the embodiment to be something quite subordinate and like the earth-life of Jeans almost accidental. It is because of this stage that the Mayavadins, taking it for final, thought the world to be an illusion. But this is only a stage of the journey. Beyond this Self which is static, separate, formless, there is a greater consciousness in which the Silence and the Cosmic Activity are united but in another knowledge than the walled-in ignorance of the embodied human being. This Self is only one aspect of the Divine Reality. It is when one gets to that greater Consciousness that cosmic existence and form and life and mind no longer appear to be an accident but find their significance. Even there there are two stages, the overmental and the supramental, and it is not till one gets

XIII—Affirmative Yoga Seeks Transcendence but Not Withdrawal to the last that the full truth of existence can become entirely real to the consciousness. Observe what you experience and know that it has its value and is indispensable as a stage, but do not take the experience as the final knowledge.” (CWSA 28: 395)

4.

“Undoubtedly a release from the limitations of the mind and body into an eternal peace, rest, silence of the Spirit, makes a higher appeal than the offer of a heaven of mental joys or eternized physical pleasures, but this too after all is a lure; its insistence on the mind’s world-weariness, the life-being’s shrinking from the adventure of birth, strikes a chord of weakness and cannot be the supreme motive. The desire of personal salvation, however high its form, is an outcome of ego; it rests on the idea of our own individuality and its desire for its personal good or welfare, its longing for a release from suffering or its cry for the extinction of the trouble of becoming and makes that the supreme aim of our existence. To rise beyond the desire of personal salvation is necessary for the complete rejection of this basis of ego. If we seek the Divine, it should be for the sake of the Divine and for nothing else, because that is the supreme call of our being, the deepest truth of the spirit. The pursuit of liberation, of the soul’s freedom, of the realisation of our true and highest self, of union with the Divine, is justified only because it is the highest law of our

XIII—Affirmative Yoga Seeks Transcendence but Not Withdrawal nature, because it is the attraction of that which is lower in us to that which is highest, because it is the Divine Will in us.” (CWSA 23: 269)

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action

1.

“By an entire passivity the mind falls asleep or enters into trance or else is liberated into a spiritual silence; but though it is a liberation from the ignorance of the partial being in its flux of action, it is earned by putting on a luminous nescience of the dynamic Reality or a luminous separation from it: the spiritual-mental being remains self-absorbed in a silent essential status of existence and becomes either incapable of active consciousness or repugnant to all activity; this release of silence is a status through which the soul passes in its journey towards the Absolute. But there is a greater fulfilment of our true and integral being in which both the static and the dynamic sides of the self are liberated and fulfilled in That which upholds both and is limited neither by action nor by silence.

For Brahman does not pass alternately from passivity to activity and back to passivity by cessation of Its dynamic force of being. ... Integral Brahman possesses both the passivity and the activity simultaneously and does not pass alternately from one to the other as from a sleep to a waking: it is only some partial activity in us which seems to do that, and we by identifying ourselves with that partial activity have the appearance of this alternation from one nescience to another nescience; but our true, our integral

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action being is not subject to these opposites and it does not need to become unaware of its dynamic self in order to possess its self of silence. When we get the integral knowledge and the integral liberation of both soul and nature free from the disabilities of the restricted partial and ignorant being, we too can possess the passivity and the activity with a simultaneous possession, exceeding both these poles of the universality, limited by neither of these powers of the Self in its relation or non-relation to Nature. ...

... It must be equally untrue that Brahman in his activity is unaware of or separated from his passivity; omnipresent, he is there supporting the action, possesses it always in the heart of the movement and is eternally calm and still and free and blissful in all the whirl of its energies. Nor in either silence or action can he be at all unaware of his absolute being, but knows that all he expresses through them draws its value and power from the power of that absolute existence. If it seems otherwise to our experience, it is because we identify with one aspect and by that exclusiveness fail to open ourselves to the integral Reality." (CWSA 22: 596–598)

2.

"This infinite containing, not excluding all finite appearances, this impersonal admitting, not rejecting all individualities and personalities, this immobile sustaining, pervading, containing, not standing apart from all the

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action
movement of Nature, is the clear mirror in which the Divine will reveal His being. Therefore it is to the Impersonal that we have first to attain; through the cosmic deities, through the aspects of the finite alone the perfect knowledge of God cannot be totally obtained. But neither is the silent immobility of the impersonal Self, conceived as shut into itself and divorced from all that it sustains, contains and pervades, the whole all revealing all-satisfying truth of the Divine. To see that we have to look through its silence to the Purushottama, and he in his divine greatness possesses both the Akshara and the Kshara; he is seated in the immobility, but he manifests himself in the movement and in all the action of cosmic Nature; to him even after liberation the sacrifice of works in Nature continues to be offered.” (CWSA 19: 132)

3.

“The first door of escape we see out of this limitation of our possibilities, out of this confused mixture of dharmas is in a certain high trend towards impersonality, a movement inwards towards something large and universal and calm and free and right and pure hidden now by the limiting mind of ego. The difficulty is that while we can feel a positive release into this impersonality in moments of the quiet and silence of our being, an impersonal activity is by no means so easy to realise. The pursuit of an impersonal truth or an impersonal will in our conduct is vitiated so long

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action as we live at all in our normal mind by that which is natural and inevitable to that mind, the law of our personality, the subtle urge of our vital nature, the colour of ego. ... This impersonal silence however is not the last word of wisdom in the matter, because it is not the only way and crown or not all the way and the last crown of self-realisation open to our endeavour. There is a mightier fuller more positive spiritual experience in which the circle of our egoistic personality and the round of the mind's limitations vanish in the unvalled infinity of a greatest self and spirit and yet life and its works not only remain still acceptable and possible but reach up and out to their widest spiritual completeness and assume a grand ascending significance." (CWSA 19: 545–546)

4.

"We get back to the great idea of the Gita, the idea of the Purushottama,—though that name is not given till close upon the end, it is always that which Krishna means by his 'I' and 'Me', the Divine who is there as the one self in our timeless immutable being, who is present too in the world, in all existences, in all activities, the master of the silence and the peace, the master of the power and the action, who is here incarnate as the divine charioteer of the stupendous conflict, the Transcendent, the Self, the All, the master of every individual being." (CWSA 19: 239)

5.

"These objections, so formidable at first sight to the reason, seem to have been present to the mind of the Teacher in the Gita when he says that although the Divine is unborn, imperishable in his self-existence, the Lord of all beings, yet he assumes birth by a supreme resort to the action of his Nature and by force of his self-Maya; that he whom the deluded despise because lodged in a human body, is verily in his supreme being the Lord of all; that he is in the action of the divine consciousness the creator of the fourfold Law and the doer of the works of the world and at the same time in the silence of the divine consciousness the impartial witness of the works of his own Nature,—for he is always, beyond both the silence and the action, the supreme Purushottama. And the Gita is able to meet all these oppositions and to reconcile all these contraries because it starts from the Vedantic view of existence, of God and the universe." (CWSA 19: 150–151)

6.

"A strong one-sided truth, when set forth as the whole truth, creates a strong light but also a strong confusion; for the very strength of its element of truth increases the strength of its element of error. ...

God is there not only in the silence, but in the action; the quietism of the impassive soul unaffected by Nature and the kinetism of the soul giving itself to Nature so that

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action
the great world-sacrifice, the Purusha-Yajna, may be effected, are not a reality and a falsehood in perpetual struggle nor yet two hostile realities, one superior, the other inferior, each fatal to the other; they are the double term of the divine manifestation.” (CWSA 19: 143–144)

7.

“Man, too, becomes perfect only when he has found within himself that absolute calm and passivity of the Brahman and supports by it with the same divine tolerance and the same divine bliss a free and inexhaustible activity. Those who have thus possessed the Calm within can perceive always welling out from its silence the perennial supply of the energies that work in the universe. It is not, therefore, the truth of the Silence to say that it is in its nature a rejection of the cosmic activity. The apparent incompatibility of the two states is an error of the limited Mind which, accustomed to trenchant oppositions of affirmation and denial and passing suddenly from one pole to the other, is unable to conceive of a comprehensive consciousness vast and strong enough to include both in a simultaneous embrace. The Silence does not reject the world; it sustains it. Or rather it supports with an equal impartiality the activity and the withdrawal from the activity and approves also the reconciliation by which the soul remains free and still even while it lends itself to all action.” (CWSA 21: 31)

8.

"It is possible, as in a certain high exaggeration of the path of knowledge, to cut here [in the path of love] also the knot of the problem, escape the difficulty of uniting the spirit of love with the crudities of the world-action by avoiding it; it is open to us, withdrawing from outward life and action altogether, to live alone with our adoration of the Divine in the heart's silence. It is possible too to admit only those acts that are either in themselves an expression of love for the Divine, prayer, praise, symbolic acts of worship or subordinate activities that may be attached to these things and partake of their spirit, and to leave aside all else; the soul turns away to satisfy its inner longing in the absorbed or the God-centred life of the saint and devotee. ... But the integral Yoga pushed towards a complete union of the Divine with the earth-life cannot stop short in this narrow province or limit this union within the lesser dimensions of an ethical rule of philanthropy and beneficence. All action must be made in it part of the God-life, our acts of knowledge, our acts of power and production and creation, our acts of joy and beauty and the soul's pleasure, our acts of will and endeavour and struggle and not our acts only of love and beneficent service. Its way to do these things will be not outward and mental, but inward and spiritual, and to that end it will bring into all activities, whatever they are, the spirit of divine love, the spirit of adoration and worship, the spirit

XIV—A Greater Fulfilment Is Limited by Neither Silence nor Action of happiness in the Divine and in the beauty of the Divine so as to make all life a sacrifice of the works of the soul's love to the Divine, its cult of the Master of its existence.” (CWSA 23: 161–162)

9.

“Not only liberation but perfection must be the aim of the Karmayoga. The Divine works through our nature and according to our nature; if our nature is imperfect, the work also will be imperfect, mixed, inadequate. Even it may be marred by gross errors, falsehoods, moral weaknesses, diverting influences. The work of the Divine will be done in us even then, but according to our weakness, not according to the strength and purity of its source. If ours were not an integral Yoga, if we sought only the liberation of the self within us or the motionless existence of Purusha separated from Prakriti, this dynamic imperfection might not matter. Calm, untroubled, not depressed, not elated, refusing to accept the perfection or imperfection, fault or merit, sin or virtue as ours, perceiving that it is the modes of Nature working in the field of her modes that make this mixture, we could withdraw into the silence of the spirit and, pure, untouched, witness only the workings of Prakriti. But in an integral realisation this can only be a step on the way, not our last resting-place. For we aim at the divine realisation not only in the immobility of the Spirit, but also in the movement of Nature.” (CWSA 23: 251–252)

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