

Chapter-X

Illuminated Consciousness

In Illumination the state of consciousness is popularly supposed to be peculiar to the mystic. It is a form of mental life, a kind of perception radically different from that of "normal" men. His preceding adventures and experiences cannot be allowed by this quality. His awakening to consciousness of the Absolute is often accompanied by circumstances of splendour and intensity which seem to mark it off from other psychic upheavals. But it reproduces upon higher levels those characteristic processes of conversion and falling in love which give depth and actuality to the religious and passional life. The purification possesses certain features which are confined to the phenomena of mystical development. It is again closely related to the mortifications of ascetic, but necessarily mystical, piety.

It is the most exalted form with which we are acquainted of training of the human plant. It is the essence of all education and a necessary stage in every kind of transcendence. The mystic adopts in a more drastic shape the principles which all who would live with an intense life, all seekers after freedom and all true lovers must accept.

“It is an experience to the self. It is to the psychologist a normal incident of that organic process of development which was initiated by the first awakening of the transcendental sense. Responding to the intimations received in that awakening, ordering itself in their interest and concentrating its scattered energies on one thing, the self emerges from long and varied acts of purification to find another order of reality. It has risen to acute consciousness of a world that was always there and wherein its, substantial being-God, has always stood. Such a consciousness is ‘transcendental feeling’ or a deep knowledge of the secret plan.”¹

In *Cosmic Consciousness*, one of the sonnets, Sri Aurobindo’s voice of transcendental sense can be heard.

“I pass beyond Time and life on measureless wings
Yet still am one with born and unborn things.”²

In all pleasurable and exalted states of mystic consciousness the sense of I—hood persists. It is a loving and joyous relation between the Absolute as object and the self as subject. It falls under the head of illumination. It is really an enormous development of the intuitional life at high levels. All

veritable and first-hand apprehensions of the divine are obtained by the use of symbols, as in the religious life. All phases of poetic inspiration and 'glimpses of truth,' are the activities of the illuminated mind.

These descriptions of the joy of illumination and the outpourings of love and rapture belong to this state. We shall find here the most lyrical passages of mystical literature. Here poet, mystic and musician are on common ground. Only by the oblique methods of the artist, the use of aesthetic suggestion musical rhythm and the wonder of vision can be expressed. Essential goodness, truth and beauty are apprehended by the heart, whether the heart is that of lover, painter, and saint. This apprehension can only be adequately communicated in a living form.

There are two forms of perception representing dual intuition of a transcendent-immanent Reality. It is a stretching of consciousness in two directions until it includes in its span both the world of pure being and the world of becoming which we find to be one of the distinguishing marks of the mystic type.

Along with this two-fold extension of consciousness, the energy of the intuitional or transcendental self is enormously increased. The psychic upheavals of the purgative way have

tended to make it central for life: to eliminate from the character all those elements which checked its activity. It seizes upon the ordinary channels of expression and frequently shows itself in such forms as (a) auditions, (b) dialogues between the surface consciousness and another intelligence which purports to be divine, (c) visions, and sometimes (d) in automatic writings. "The automatic activity of growing subconscious powers constitutes the 'new man'. He increases steadily during the whole of the mystic life."³

Illumination appears mainly under one or all of these three forms, often all are present, though, as a rule, one seems to dominate the rest. The character of each case will be conditioned by the self's psychic make-up, its temperamental leaning towards pure contemplation or automatic expression, the metaphysical, artistic, or intimate aspects of truth. The possible combinations between these various factors are as innumerable as the possible creations of life itself.

Very clearly connected with the sense of the presence of God or power of perceiving the Absolute, is the complementary mark of the illuminated consciousness. It is the vision of a new heaven and a new earth or an added significance and reality in the phenomenal world. Julius said, "God is all thing that is good

as to my sight, and the goodness that all thing that, it is He.” Here again we have to distinguish carefully between vaguely poetic language—“the light that never was, “every common bush afire with God”—and descriptions relate to a concrete and definite psychological experience.

This experience balances and completes the experience of the presence of God at its best. Its note is sacramental, not ascetic. It entails the expansion rather than the concentration of consciousness, the discovery of the perfect one ablaze and not the forsaking of the many in order to find the One. Its characteristic expression is:

“The World is charged with the grandeur of God;
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil,
Turn thy thoughts into thy own soul, where He is
hid.”

“It takes, as a rule, the form of an enormously enhanced mental lucidity. It is an ineffable radiance, a beauty and a reality never before suspected perceived by a sort of clairvoyance shining in the meanest things.”⁴

Blake’s “ To see a world in a grain of sand,” Tennyson’s “Flower in the crannied wall,” Vaughan’s “Each bush and oak doth know I AM,” are quoted reports of ‘ things

seen' in the state of consciousness of pure love. The value is summed up in Eckhart's profound saying, "The meanest thing that one knows in God, if one could understand a flower as it has its being in God this would be a higher thing than the whole world!"⁵ Many mystical poets of the type of Wordsworth and Walt Whitman possessed to a considerable extent this form of illumination.

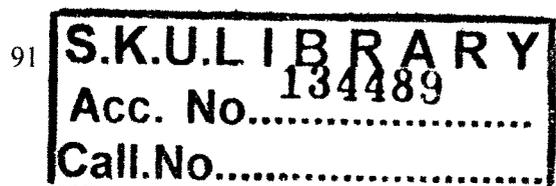
The poem *Light* by Sri Aurobindo reveals a state of illumination.

"Light, endless Light! Darkness has room no more,
Life's ignorant gulfs give up their secrecy:
The huge unconscious depths unplumbed before
Lie glimmering in vast expectancy."⁶

The poem *The Divine Hearing* reveals Sri Aurobindo's mystical voices and visions.

"All sounds, all voices have become Thy voice,
Music and thunder and the cry of birds,
Life babbling of her sorrows and her joys,
Cadence of human speech and murmured words."⁷

Visions and voices stand in the same relation to the mystic as pictures, poems, and musical compositions stand to the great painter, poet musician. They are the artistic



expressions and creative results (a) of thought, (b) of intuition, (c) of direct perception. All would be ready to acknowledge how conventional and imperfect of necessity are those transcripts of perceived goodness, truth, and beauty which we owe to artistic genius, how unequal is their relation to reality. But this is not to say that they are valueless or absurd. So too with the mystic whose proceedings in this respect are closer to those of the artist than is generally acknowledged. In both types there is a constant and involuntary work of translation going on, by which Reality is interpreted in the terms of appearance. In both, a peculiar mental make-up conduces to this result.

Automatism shows itself in voices or auditions. The mystic becomes aware of something which speaks to him either clearly or implicitly, giving him abrupt and unexpected orders and encouragements. The reality of his contact with the divine life is brought home to him by a device. His subliminal mind is in transcendental perceptions. It is with the absolute, irradiated by the uncreated light, but still dissociated from the 'surface-intelligence. It seems to that surface-self like another being. Hence its messages are often heard as voices either the immediate or inarticulate voice, which the auditive mystic knows well but finds it so difficult to define. But it is

recognized as speaking only within the mind. By hallucination we have all experienced in dream the exterior voice. It appears to be speaking externally to the subject and to be heard by the outward ear. This, the traditional classification of auditions, answers exactly to the three main types of vision. They are intellectual, imaginary and corporeal.

True auditions are usually heard when the mind is in a state of deep absorption without conscious thought. They translate into articulate language. There is some aspect of that ineffable apprehension of Reality which the contemplative enjoys. The clairvoyant intuitions are prophetic hints which surge in on him so soon as he lays himself open to the influence of the supra-sensible. Sometimes mystical intuition takes the form of a sudden and ungovernable uprush of knowledge from the depth of personality. Then, auditions break in upon the normal activities of the self with startling abruptness. It is in such cases that their objective and uncontrollable character is most sharply felt. Sometimes audition assumes a musical rather than a verbal character.

It is the effort of man's deeper mind to speak truth to his surface-intelligence, to the effort of the same mysterious power to show truth. 'Vision,' that vaguest of words, has been

used by mystics to describe a wide range of experience, from formless intuition, through crude optical hallucination, to the voluntary visualizations common to the artistic mind. There are two classes of vision. The first kind are to be concealed, the second declared. The first are more truly mystic, the second are more prophetic in type. The first thing we notice when we come to enquire is that the mystics are all but unanimous in their refusal to attribute importance to any kind of visionary experience.

In a poem *The Word of Silence* Sri Aurobindo says that he listens to a greater Word born from the mute which is invisible omniscient ray. This voice can be heard only by silence` ear.

“But now I listen to a greater Word
Born from the mute unseen Omniscient Ray:
The Voice that only Silence` ear has heard
Leaps missioned from an eternal glory of Day.”

The poem *Divine Sight* reveals Sri Aurobindo visionary experience of the divine world.

“Each sight is now immortal with Thy bliss
My soul through the rapt eyes has come to see
A veil is rent and they no more can miss

The miracle of Thy world- epiphany.”⁸

Three main groups have been distinguished by the mystics, and illustrated over and over again from their experiences. These are (1) intellectual, (2) imaginary, and (3) corporeal vision. With the first two we must now concern ourselves. As to corporeal vision it has few peculiarities of interest to the student of pure mysticism.

The intellectual vision like the substantial word as described by the mystic is of so elusive, spiritual and formless. It is very hard to distinguish it from that act of pure contemplation in which it generally takes its rise. These moods and apprehensions of the soul are so closely linked together. The intellectual vision seems to be something not sort but put before the mind and perceived the whole self by means of a sense which is neither sight nor feeling, but part takes of the character of both.

Intellectual vision is closely connected with that consciousness of the presence of God. Here the mystic's general awareness of the divine focuses upon one point- a point to which some theological or symbolic character is at once attached. The result is a sense of presence so concrete, defined and sharply personal. “In the prayer of union and of

quiet,” says St. Teresa, certain inflowings of the God head are present; but in the vision the sacred humanity also, together with them, is pleased to be our companion and to do us good.

In imaginary vision there is again no sensorial hallucination. The self sees sharply and clearly, it is true. But it is perfectly aware of its most precious organ- ‘that inward eye which is the bliss of solitude.’ Imaginary Vision is the spontaneous and automatic activity of a power which all artists, all imaginative people possess. There is little real difference except in degree between Wordsworth’s imaginary vision of the dancing daffodils and Suso’s of the dancing angels. Both are admirable examples of passive imaginary vision. It is of two types (a) purely symbolic (b) personal.

In the symbolic form there is no mental deception. The self is aware that it is being to shown truth under an image. In this type we see the mystic passion for the Absolute, his intuition of its Presence in his soul combine with the constituents of poetic imagination and expressing them self in an allegorical form. It is really visualized poem, inspired by direct contact with the truth. There is another form of imaginary vision which must be touched on with a gentler hand. In this the subliminal powers are placed before the mind

by somewhat other of which the mystic is always conscious. Closely related concrete beliefs and spiritual passions of the self express their apprehensions of God.

Imaginary vision is sometimes active. Active vision is the expression of a change in the self, and generally accompanies some psychological crisis. In this vision, which always has dramatic character, the self seems to itself to act, not merely to look on. Such visions possess many of the characters of dream: they are purely symbolic and they are theologically realistic.

They are automatic expressions of profound subliminal activity: not merely the media by which the self's awareness of the Absolute is strengthened and enriched but the outward and visible signs of its movement towards new levels of consciousness. Hence we are not surprised to find that dynamic vision of this sort often initiates the Unitive life.⁹

The mystic has to learn so to concentrate all his faculties, his very self, upon the invisible and intangible, that all visible things are forgotten. He must call in his scattered faculties by a deliberate exercise of the will, its swarm of images and its riot of thought. In mystical language he must sink into his nothingness: into that blank abiding place where

busy, clever reason cannot come. "The whole of this process, gathering up and turning inwards of the powers of the self and gazing into the ground of the soul, is called *introversion*." ¹⁰

Plato long ago defined the necessity of such perception, and the nature of that art of contemplation by which the soul can feed upon the Real. When he said in one of his most purely mystical passages, when the soul returns into it self and reflects, it passes into the region which is pure and everlasting, immortal and unchangeable.

Contemplation is the mystic's medium. It is to him that which harmony is to the musician, form and colour to the artist, measure to the poet. The vehicle, by which he can best apprehend the good and beautiful, enters into communion with the Real. As "voice" or "vision" is the way in which his transcendental consciousness presents its discoveries to the surface-mind, contemplation is the way in which it makes those discoveries and perceives the supra-sensible. The growth of his effective genius, therefore, is connected with his growth in this art. The growth is largely conditioned by education.

Contemplation is a power which we may and often must apply to perception not only of divine but of anything. It is the condition in which all things give up to us the secret of

their life. Introversion is an art which can be acquired as gradually and as certainly, by the born mystic, as the art of piano-playing can be acquired by the born musician.

In its early stages the practice of introversion is voluntary, difficult and delicate. These are the early stages of learning to read or write. But as reading or writing finally becomes automatic, so as the mystic's training in introversion proceeds, habits are formed. Contemplative powers establish themselves amongst his normal faculties.

Contemplation, taking the term in its widest sense, embraces the whole mystic art. It establishes communion between the soul and the absolute by way of these two complementary modes of apprehending. The first one is usually uncontrollable definitely outgoing ecstatic experience, the attainment of pure being. The second one is more controllable ingoing experience, the breaking down of the barrier between the surface – self and those deeper levels of personality where God is met and known in 'our nothingness,' and mysterious fusion of divine human takes place. In this stage all the scattered interests of the self have to be collected. There must be deliberate and unnatural act of attention. Here is a deliberate expelling of all discordant images from the

consciousness. Since at this point, the transcendental faculties are still young and weak. The senses are not wholly mortified. It needs a stern determination.

The device is a rule of meditation, in which the state of recollection usually begins. It is to say, that the deliberate consideration of and dwelling upon some aspect of Reality. It is an aspect chosen from amongst the religions of the self. Thus Hindu mystics brood upon the sacred word, while Christian contemplatives set before their minds one of the names or attributes of God, a fragment of Scripture or an incident of the life of the Christ. The consideration and the ideas and feelings flow from it to occupy the whole mental field. This powerful suggestion is kept before the consciousness by an act of will. It overpowers the stream of small suggestions which the outer world pours incessantly upon the mind. "The self, concentrated upon this image or idea, dwelling on it more than thinking about it, as one may gaze upon a picture that one loves, falls gradually and insensibly into the condition reverie; and protected by this holy day-dream from the more distracting dream of life, sinks into itself and becomes in the language of asceticism "recollected."¹¹

Notes.

1. Evelyn Under Hill *Mysticism A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness*, chap-Illumination of the Self, (pub-1911),pp,279, 280.
2. Sri Aurobindo *Collected poems*,(pub-1972),p.144.
3. Evelyn Under Hill *Ibid*, chap-Illumination of the Self, p. 289.
4. Evelyn UnderHill *Ibid*, chap-Illumination of the Self, p.289.
5. Evelyn Under Hill *Ibid*, chap-Illumination of the Self, p. 305.
6. Sri Aurobindo *Ibid*, p.160.
7. Sri Aurobindo *Ibid*, p.164.
8. Sri Aurobindo *Ibid*, p.165.
9. Evelyn Under Hill *Ibid*, chap- Voices and Visions, pp. 328,331,335,343,345,348.
10. Evelyn Under Hill *Ibid*, chap- Introversion, p.362.
11. Evelyn UnderHill *Ibid*, chap-Introversion, p.376.