Chapter XXII

Rebirth and Other Worlds;

Karma, the Soul and Immortality

 He passes in his departure from this world to the physical Self; he passes to the Self of life; he passes to the Self of mind; he passes to the Self of knowledge; he passes to the Self of bliss; he moves through these worlds at will.

 Taittiriya Upanishad.[[1]](#footnote-2)

They say indeed that the conscious being is made of desire. But of whatsoever desire he comes to be, he comes to be of that will, and of whatever will he comes to be, he does that action, and whatever his action, to (the result of) that he reaches. . . . Adhered to by his Karma,[[2]](#footnote-3) he goes in his subtle body to wherever his mind cleaves, then, coming to the end of his Karma, even of whatsoever action he does here, he returns from that world to this world for Karma.

 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.[[3]](#footnote-4)

 Equipped with qualities, a doer of works and creator of their consequences, he reaps the result of his actions; he is the ruler of the life and he moves in his journey according to his own acts; he has idea and ego and is to be known by the qualities of his intelligence and his quality of self. Smaller than the hundredth part of the tip of a hair, the soul of the living being is capable of infinity.Male is he not nor female nor neuter, but is joined to whatever body he takes as his own.

Swetaswatara Upanishad.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Mortals, they achieved immortality.

Rig Veda.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Our first conclusion on the subject of reincarnation has been that the rebirth of the soul in successive terrestrial bodies is an inevitable consequence of the original significance and process of the manifestation in earth-nature; but this conclusion leads to farther problems and farther results which it is necessary to elucidate. There arises first the question of the process of rebirth; if that process is not quickly successive, birth immediately following death of the body so as to maintain an uninterrupted series of lives of the same person, if there are intervals, that in its turn raises the question of the principle and process of the passage to other worlds, which must be the scene of these intervals, and the return to earth-life. A third question is the process of the spiritual evolution itself and the mutations which the soul undergoes in its passage from birth to birth through the stages of its adventure.

If the physical universe were the sole manifested world, or if it were a quite separate world, rebirth as a part of the evolutionary process would be confined to a constant succession of direct transmigrations from one body to another; death would be immediately followed by a new birth without any possibility of an interval,—the passage of the soul would be a spiritual circumstance in the uninterrupted series of a compulsory, mechanical, material procedure. The soul would have no freedom from Matter; it would be perpetually bound to its instrument, the body, and dependent on it for the continuity of its manifested existence. But we have found that there is a life on other planes after death and before the subsequent rebirth, a life consequent on the old and preparatory of the new stage of terrestrial existence. Other planes coexist with ours, are part of one complex system and act constantly upon the physical which is their own final and lowest term, receive its reactions, admit a secret communication and commerce. Man can become conscious of these planes, can even in certain states project his conscious being into them, partly in life, presumably therefore with a full completeness after the dissolution of the body. Such a possibility of projection into other worlds or planes of being becomes then sufficiently actual to necessitate practically its own realisation, immediately and perhaps invariably following on human earth-life if man is from the beginning endowed with such a power of self-transference, eventual if he only arrives at it by a gradual progression. For it is possible that at the beginning he would not be sufficiently developed to carry on his life or his mind into larger life-worlds or mind-worlds and would be compelled to accept an immediate transmigration from one earthly body to another as his only present possibility of persistence.

The necessity for an interregnum between birth and birth and a passage to other worlds arises from a double cause: there is an attraction of the other planes for the mental and the vital being in man’s composite nature due to their affinity with these levels, and there is the utility or even the need of an interval for assimilation of the completed life-experience, a working out of what has to be discarded, a preparation for the new embodiment and the new terrestrial experience. But this need of a period of assimilation and this attraction of other worlds for kindred parts of our being may become effective only when the mental and vital individuality has been sufficiently developed in the half-animal physical man; until then they might not exist or might not be active: the life experiences would be too simple and elementary to need assimilation and the natural being too crude to be capable of a complex assimilative process; the higher parts would not be sufficiently developed to lift themselves to higher planes of existence.

There can be, then, in the absence of such connections with other worlds, a theory of rebirth which admits only of a constant transmigration; here the existence of other worlds and the sojourn of the soul in other planes are not an actual or at any stage a necessary part of the system. There can be another theory in which this passage is the obligatory rule for all and there is no immediate rebirth; the soul needs an interval of preparation for the new incarnation and new experience. A compromise between the two theories is also possible; the transmigration may be the first rule prevailing while the soul is yet unripe for a higher world-existence; the passage to other planes would be the subsequent law. There may even be a third stage, as is sometimes suggested, in which the soul is so powerfully developed, its natural parts so spiritually alive that it needs no interval, but can immediately resume birth for a more rapid evolution without the retardation of a period of intermittence.

In the popular ideas which derive from the religions that admit reincarnation, there is an inconsistency which, after the manner of popular beliefs, they have been at no pains to reconcile. On the one hand, there is the belief, vague enough but fairly general, that death is followed immediately or with something like immediateness by the assumption of another body. On the other hand, there is the old religious dogma of a life after death in hells and heavens or, it may be, in other worlds or degrees of being, which the soul has acquired or incurred by its merits or demerits in this physical existence; the return to earth intervenes only when that merit and demerit are exhausted and the being is ready for another terrestrial life. This inconsistency would disappear if we admit a variable movement dependent on the stage of evolution which the soul has reached in its manifestation in Nature; all would then turn on the degree of its capacity for entering a higher status than the earthly life. But in the ordinary notion of reincarnation the idea of a spiritual evolution is not explicit, it is only implied in the fact that the soul has to reach the point at which it becomes capable of transcending the necessity of rebirth and returning to its eternal source; but if there is no gradual and graded evolution, this point can be as well reached by a chaotic zigzag movement of which the law is not easily determinable. The definitive solution of the question depends on psychic inquiry and experience; here we can only consider whether there is in the nature of things or in the logic of the evolutionary process any apparent or inherent necessity for either movement, for the immediate transition from body to body or for the retardation or interval before a new reincarnation of the self-embodying psychic principle.

A sort of half necessity for the life in other worlds, a dynamic and practical rather than an essential necessity, arises from the very fact that the different world-principles are interwoven with each other and in a way interdependent and the effect that this fact must have upon the process of our spiritual evolution. But this might be counteracted for a time by the greater pull or attraction of the earth or the preponderant physicality of the evolving nature. Our belief in the birth of an ascending soul into the human form and its repeated rebirth in that form, without which it cannot complete its human evolution, rests, from the point of view of the reasoning intelligence, on the basis that the progressive transit of the soul into higher and higher grades of the earthly existence and, once it has reached the human level, its repeated human birth compose a sequence necessary for the growth of the nature; one brief human life upon earth is evidently insufficient for the evolutionary purpose. In the early stages of a series of human reincarnations, during a period of rudimentary humanity, there is a certain possibility at first sight of an often repeated immediate transmigration,—the repeated assumption of a new human form in a fresh birth immediately the previous body has been dissolved by a cessation or expulsion of the organised life-energy and the consequent physical disintegration which we call death. But what necessity of the evolutionary process would compel such a series of immediate rebirths? Evidently, it could only be imperative so long as the psychic individuality —not the secret soul-entity itself but the soul-formation in the natural being—is little evolved, insufficiently developed, so insufficiently formed that it could not abide except by dependence upon the uninterrupted continuance of this life’s mental, vital and physical individuality: unable as yet to persist in itself, discard its past Mind-formation and Life-formation and build after a useful interval new formations, it would be obliged to transfer at once its rudimentary crude personality for preservation to a new body. It is doubtful whether we should be justified in attributing any such entirely insufficient development to a being so strongly individualised that it has got as far as the human consciousness. Even at his lowest normality the human individual is still a soul acting through a distinct mental being, however ill-formed his mind may be, however limited and dwarfed, however engrossed and encased in the physical and vital consciousness and unable or unwilling to detach itself from its lower formations. Yet we may suppose that there is a downward attachment so strong as to compel the being to hasten at once to a resumption of the physical life because his natural formation is not really fit for anything else or at home on any higher plane. Or, again, the life-experience might be so brief and incomplete as to compel the soul to an immediate rebirth for its continuance. Other needs, influences or causes there may be in the complexity of Nature-process, such as a strong will of earthly desire pressing for fulfilment, which would enforce an immediate transmigration of the same persistent form of personality into a new body. But still the alternative process of a reincarnation, a rebirth of the Person not only into a new body but into a new formation of the personality, would be the normal line taken by the psychic entity once it had reached the human stage of its evolutionary cycle.

For the soul personality, as it develops, must get sufficient power over its own nature-formation and a sufficient self-expressive mental and vital individuality to persist without the support of the material body, as well as to overcome any excessive detaining attachment to the physical plane and the physical life: it would be sufficiently evolved to subsist in the subtle body which we know to be the characteristic case or sheath and the proper subtle-physical support of the inner being. It is the soul-person, the psychic being, that survives and carries mind and life with it on its journey, and it is in the subtle body that it passes out of its material lodging; both then must be sufficiently developed for the transit. But a transference to planes of Mind-existence or Life-existence implies also a mind and life sufficiently formed and developed to pass without disintegration and exist for a time on these higher levels. If these conditions were satisfied, a sufficiently developed psychic personality and subtle body and a sufficiently developed mental and vital personality, survival of the soul-person without an immediate new-birth would be secured and the pull of the other worlds would become operative. But this by itself would mean a return to earth with the same mental and vital personality and there would be no free evolution in the new birth. There must be an individuation of the psychic person itself sufficient for it not to depend on its past mind and life formations any more than on its past body, but to shed them too in time and proceed to a new formation for new experience. For this discarding of the old and preparation of new forms the soul must dwell for some time between two births somewhere else than on the entirely material plane in which we now move; for here there would be no abiding place for a disembodied spirit. A brief stay might indeed be possible if there are subtle envelopes of the earth-existence which belong to earth but are of a vital or mental character: but even then there would be no reason for the soul to linger there for a long period, unless it is still burdened with an overpowering attachment to the earth-life. A survival of the material body by the personality implies a supraphysical existence, and this can only be in some plane of being proper to the evolutionary stage of the consciousness or, if there is no evolution, in a temporary second home of the spirit which would be its natural place of sojourn between life and life,—unless indeed it is its original world from which it does not return into material Nature.

 Where then would the temporary dwelling in the supra-physical take place? what would be the soul’s other habitat? It might seem that it ought to be on a mental plane, in mental worlds, both because on man the mental being the attraction of that plane, already active in life, must prevail when there is not the obstacle of the attachment to the body, and because the mental plane should be, evidently, the native and proper habitat of a mental being. But this does not automatically follow, because of the complexity of man’s being; he has a vital as well as a mental existence,—his vital part often more powerful and prominent than the mental,—and behind the mental being is a soul of which it is the representative. There are, besides, many planes or levels of world-existence and the soul has to pass through them to reach its natural home. In the physical plane itself or close to it there are believed to be layers of greater and greater subtlety which may be regarded as sub-planes of the physical with a vital and a mental character; these are at once surrounding and penetrating strata through which the interchange between the higher worlds and the physical world takes place. It might then be possible for the mental being, so long as its mentality is not sufficiently developed, so long as it is restricted mainly to the more physical forms of mind and life activity, to be caught and delayed in these media. It might even be obliged to rest there entirely between birth and birth; but this is not probable and could only happen if and in so far as its attachment to the earth-forms of its activity was so great as to preclude or hamper the completion of the natural upward movement. For the post-mortal state of the soul must correspond in some way to the development of the being on earth, since this after-life is not a free upward return from a temporary downward deviation into mortality, but a normal recurrent circumstance which intervenes to help out the process of a difficult spiritual evolution in the physical existence. There is a relation which the human being in his evolution on earth develops with higher planes of existence, and that must have a predominant effect on his internatal dwelling in these planes; it must determine his direction after death and determine too the place, period and character of his self-experience there.

It may be also that he may linger for a time in one of those annexes of the other worlds created by his habitual beliefs or by the type of his aspirations in the mortal body. We know that he creates images of these superior planes, which are often mental translations of certain elements in them, and erects his images into a system, a form of actual worlds; he builds up also desire worlds of many kinds to which he attaches a strong sense of inner reality: it is possible that these constructions may be so strong as to create for him an artificial post-mortal environment in which he may linger. For the image-making power of the human mind, its imagination, which is in his physical life only an indispensable aid to his acquisition of knowledge and his life-creation, may in a higher scale become a creative force which would enable the mental being to live for a while amid its own images until they were dissolved by the soul’s pressure. All these buildings are of the nature of larger life constructions; in them his mind translates some of the real conditions of the greater mental and vital worlds into terms of his physical experience magnified, prolonged, extended to a condition beyond physicality: he carries by this translation the vital joy and vital suffering of the physical being into supraphysical conditions in which they have a greater scope, fullness and endurance. These constructive environments must therefore be considered, so far as they have any supraphysical habitat, as annexes of the vital or of the lower mental planes of existence.

But there are also the true vital worlds,—original constructions, organised developments, native habitats of the universal life-principle, the cosmic vital Anima, acting in its own field and in its own nature. On his internatal journey he may be held there for a period by force of the predominantly vital character of the influences which have shaped his earthly existence,—for these influences are native to the vital world and their hold on him would detain him for a while in their proper province: he may be kept in the grasp of that which held him in its grasp even in the physical being. Any residence of the soul in annexes or in its own constructions could be only a transitional stage of the consciousness in its passage from the physical to the supraphysical state; it must pass from these structures into the true worlds of supraphysical Nature. It may enter at once into the worlds of other-life, or it may remain first, as a transitional stage, in some region of subtle-physical experience whose surroundings may seem to it a prolongation of the circumstances of physical life, but in freer conditions proper to a subtler medium and in some kind of happy perfection of mind or life or a finer bodily existence. Beyond these subtle-physical planes of experience and the life-worlds there are also mental or spiritual-mental planes to which the soul seems to have an internatal access and into which it may pursue its internatal journey; but it is not likely to live consciously there if there has not been a sufficient mental or soul development in this life. For these levels must normally be the highest the evolving being can internatally inhabit, since one who has not gone beyond the mental rung in the ladder of being would not be able to ascend to any supramental or overmental state; or if he had so developed as to overleap the mental level and could attain so far, it might not be possible for him to return so long as the physical evolution has not developed here an organisation of an overmental or supramental life in Matter.

But, even so, the mental worlds are not likely to be the last normal stage of the after-death passage; for man is not entirely mental: it is the soul, the psychic being, and not the mind, that is the traveller between death and birth, and the mental being is only a predominant element in the figure of its self-expression. There must then be a final resort to a plane of pure psychic existence in which the soul would await rebirth; there it could assimilate the energies of its past experience and life and prepare its future. Ordinarily, the normally developed human being, who has risen to a sufficient power of mentality, might be expected to pass successively through all these planes, subtle-physical, vital and mental, on his way to his psychic habitation. At each stage he would exhaust and get rid of the fractions of formed personality structure, temporary and superficial, that belonged to the past life; he would cast off his mind-sheath and life-sheath as he had already cast off his body-sheath: but the essence of the personality and its mental, vital and physical experiences would remain in latent memory or as a dynamic potency for the future. But if the development of mind were insufficient, it is possible that it would not be able to go consciously beyond the vital level and the being would either fall back from there, returning from its vital heavens or purgatories to earth, or, more consistently, would pass at once into a kind of psychic assimilative sleep coextensive with the internatal period; to be awake in the highest planes a certain development would be indispensable.

All this, however, is a matter of dynamic probability, and that, though amounting in practice to a necessity, though justified by certain facts of subliminal experience, is still for the reasoning mind not in itself quite conclusive. We have to ask whether there is any more essential necessity for these internatal intervals, or at least any of so great a dynamic power as to lead to an irresistible conclusion. We shall find one such necessity in the decisive part played by the higher planes in the earth-evolution and the relation that it has created between them and the evolving soul-consciousness. Our development takes place very largely by their superior but hidden action upon the earth-plane. All is contained in the inconscient or the subconscient, but in potentiality; it is the action from above that helps to compel an emergence. A continuance of that action is necessary to shape and determine the progression of the mental and vital forms which our evolution takes in material nature; for these progressive movements cannot find their full momentum or sufficiently develop their implications against the resistance of an inconscient or inert and ignorant material Nature except by a constant though occult resort to higher supraphysical forces of their own character. This resort, the action of this veiled alliance, takes place principally in our subliminal being and not on the surface: it is from there that the active power of our consciousness emerges, and all that it realises it sends back constantly into the subliminal being to be stored up, developed and re-emerge in stronger forms hereafter. This interaction of our larger hidden being and our surface personality is the main secret of the rapid development that operates in man once he has passed beyond the lower stages of mind immersed in Matter.

This resort must continue in the internatal stage; for a new birth, a new life is not a taking up of the development exactly where it stopped in the last, it does not merely repeat and continue our past surface personality and formation of nature. There is an assimilation, a discarding and strengthening and rearrangement of the old characters and motives, a new ordering of the developments of the past and a selection for the purposes of the future without which the new start cannot be fruitful or carry forward the evolution. For each birth is a new start; it develops indeed from the past, but is not its mechanical continuation: rebirth is not a constant reiteration but a progression, it is the machinery of an evolutionary process. Part of this rearrangement, the discarding especially of past strong vibrations of the personality, can only be effected by an exhaustion of the push of previous mental, vital, physical motives after death, and this internatal liberation or lightening of impedimenta must be put through on the planes proper to the motives that are to be discarded or otherwise manipulated, those planes which are themselves of that nature; for it is only there that the soul can still continue the activities which have to be exhausted and rejected from the consciousness so that it can pass on to a new formation. It is probable also that the integrating positive preparation would be carried out and the character of the new life would be decided by the soul itself in a resort to its native habitat, a plane of psychic repose, where it would draw all back into itself and await its new stage in the evolution. This would mean a passage of the soul progressively through subtle-physical, vital and mental worlds to the psychic dwelling-place from which it would return to its terrestrial pilgrimage. The terrestrial gathering up and development of the materials thus prepared, their working out in the earth life would be the consequence of this internatal resort, and the new birth would be a field of the resultant activity, a new stadium or spiral curve in the individual evolution of the embodied spirit.

For when we say that the soul on earth evolves successively the physical, the vital, the mental, the spiritual being, we do not mean that it creates them and that they had no previous existence. On the contrary, what it does is to manifest these principles of its spiritual entity under the conditions imposed by a world of physical Nature; this manifestation takes the form of a structure of frontal personality which is a translation of the inner self into the terms and possibilities of the physical existence. In fact we must accept the ancient idea that man has within him not only the physical soul or Purusha with its appropriate nature, but a vital, a mental, a psychic, a supramental, a supreme spiritual being;[[6]](#footnote-7) and either the whole or the greater presence or force of them is concealed in his subliminal or latent and unformulated in his superconscient parts. He has to bring forward their powers in his active consciousness and to awake to them in its knowledge. But each of these powers of his being is in relation with its own proper plane of existence and all have their roots there. It is through them that there takes place the subliminal resort of the being to the shaping influences from above, a resort which may become more and more conscious as we develop. It is logical then that according to the development of their powers in our conscious evolution should be the internatal resort which this nature of our birth here and its evolutionary object and process necessitate. The circumstances and the stages of that resort must be complex and not of the crudely and trenchantly simple character which the popular religions imagine: but in itself it can be accepted as an inevitable consequence of the very origin and nature of the soul-life in the body. All is a closely woven web, an evolution and an interaction whose links have been forged by a Conscious- Force following out the truth of its own motives according to a dynamic logic of these finite workings of the Infinite.

If this view of rebirth and the soul’s temporary passage into other planes of existence is correct, both rebirth and the after-life assume a different significance from the colour put on them by the long-current belief about reincarnation and the after-death sojourn in worlds beyond us. Reincarnation is commonly supposed to have two aspects, metaphysical and moral, an aspect of spiritual necessity, an aspect of cosmic justice and ethical discipline. The soul—in this view or for this purpose supposed to have a real individual existence—is on earth as a result of desire and ignorance; it has to remain on earth or return to it always so long as it has not wearied of desire and awakened to the fact of its ignorance and to the true knowledge. This desire compels it to return always to a new body; it must follow always the revolving wheel of birth till it is enlightened and liberated. It does not, however, remain always on earth, but alternates between earth and other worlds, celestial and infernal, where it exhausts its accumulated store of merit or demerit due to the enactment of sin or virtue and then returns to the earth and to some kind of terrestrial body, sometimes human, sometimes animal, sometimes even vegetable. The nature of this new incarnation and its fortunes are determined automatically by the soul’s past actions, Karma; if the sum of past action was good, the birth is in the higher form, the life happy or successful or unaccountably fortunate; if bad, a lower form of Nature may house us or the life, if human, will be unhappy, unsuccessful, full of suffering and misfortune. If our past actions and character were mixed, then Nature, like a good accountant, gives us, according to the pitch and values of our former conduct, a well-assorted payment of mixed happiness and suffering, success and failure, the rarest good luck and the severest ill-fortune. At the same time a strong personal will or desire in the past life may also determine our new avatar. A mathematical aspect is often given to these payments of Nature, for we are supposed to incur a precise penalty for our misdeeds, undergo or return the replica or equivalent of what we have inflicted or enacted; the inexorable rule of a tooth for a tooth is a frequent principle of the Karmic Law: for this Law is an arithmetician with his abacus as well as a judge with his code of penalties for long-past crimes and mis-demeanours. It is also to be noted that in this system there is a double punishment and a double reward for sin and virtue; for the sinner is first tortured in hell and afterwards afflicted for the same sins in another life here and the righteous or the puritan is rewarded with celestial joys and afterwards again pampered for the same virtues and good deeds in a new terrestrial existence.

These are very summary popular notions and offer no foothold to the philosophic reason and no answer to a search for the true significance of life. A vast world-system which exists only as a convenience for turning endlessly on a wheel of Ignorance with no issue except a final chance of stepping out of it, is not a world with any real reason for existence. A world which serves only as a school of sin and virtue and consists of a system of rewards and whippings, does not make any better appeal to our intelligence. The soul or spirit within us, if it is divine, immortal or celestial, cannot be sent here solely to be put to school for this kind of crude and primitive moral education; if it enters into the Ignorance, it must be because there is some larger principle or possibility of its being that has to be worked out through the Ignorance. If, on the other hand, it is a being from the Infinite plunged for some cosmic purpose into the obscurity of Matter and growing to self-knowledge within it, its life here and the significance of that life must be something more than that of an infant coddled and whipped into virtuous ways; it must be a growth out of an assumed ignorance towards its own full spiritual stature with a final passage into an immortal consciousness, knowledge, strength, beauty, divine purity and power, and for such a spiritual growth this law of Karma is all too puerile. Even if the soul is something created, an infant being that has to learn from Nature and grow into immortality, it must be by a larger law of growth and not by some divine code of primitive and barbaric justice. This idea of Karma is a construction of the smaller part of the human vital mind concerned with its petty rules of life and its desires and joys and sorrows and erecting their puny standards into the law and aim of the cosmos. These notions cannot be acceptable to the thinking mind; they have too evidently the stamp of a construction fashioned by our human ignorance.

But the same solution can be elevated to a higher level of reason and given a greater plausibility and the colour of a cosmic principle. For, first, it may be based on the unassailable ground that all energies in Nature must have their natural consequence; if any are without visible result in the present life, it may well be that the outcome is only delayed, not withheld for ever. Each being reaps the harvest of his works and deeds, the returns of the action put forth by the energies of his nature, and those which are not apparent in his present birth must be held over for a subsequent existence. It is true that the result of the energies and actions of the individual may accrue not to himself but to others when he is gone; for that we see constantly happening, —it happens indeed even during a man’s lifetime that the fruits of his energies are reaped by others; but this is because there is a solidarity and a continuity of life in Nature and the individual cannot altogether, even if he so wills, live for himself alone. But, 838 The Life Divine if there is a continuity of his own life by rebirth for the individual and not only a continuity of the mass life and the cosmic life, if he has an ever-developing self, nature and experience, then it is inevitable that for him too the working of his energies should not be cut off abruptly but must bear their consequence at some time in his continuous and developing existence. Man’s being, nature, circumstances of life are the result of his own inner and outer activities, not something fortuitous and inexplicable: he is what he has made himself; the past man was the father of the man that now is, the present man is the father of the man that will be. Each being reaps what he sows; from what he does he profits, for what he does he suffers. This is the law and chain of Karma, of Action, of the work of Nature-Energy, and it gives a meaning to the total course of our existence, nature, character, action which is absent from other theories of life. It is evident on this principle that a man’s past and present Karma must determine his future birth and its happenings and circumstances; for these too must be the fruit of his energies: all that he was and did in the past must be the creator of all that he now is and experiences in his present, and all that he is and is doing in the present must be the creator of what he will be and experience in the future. Man is the creator of himself; he is the creator also of his fate. All this is perfectly rational and unexceptionable so far as it goes and the law of Karma may be accepted as a fact, as part of the cosmic machinery; for it is so evident—rebirth once admitted—as to be practically indisputable.

There are, however, two riders to this first proposition which are less general and authentic and bring in a doubtful note; for though they may be true in part, they are overstated and create a wrong perspective, because they are put forward as the whole sense of Karma. The first is that as is the nature of the energies so must be the nature of the results,—the good must bring good results, the evil must bring evil results: the second is that the master word of Karma is justice and therefore good deeds must bear the fruit of happiness and good fortune and evil deeds must bear the fruit of sorrow, misery and ill-fortune. Since there must be a cosmic justice which is looking on and controlling in some way the immediate and visible operations of Nature in life, but is not apparent to us in the facts of life as seen by us, it must be present and evident in the totality of her unseen dealings; it must be the subtle and hardly visible, but strong and firm secret thread that holds together the otherwise incoherent details of her dealings with her creatures. If it be asked why actions alone, good or bad deeds alone, should have a result, it might be conceded that good or evil thoughts, feelings, actions have all their corresponding results, but since action is the greater part of life and the test and formulated power of a man’s values of being, since also he is not always responsible for his thoughts and feelings, as they are often involuntary, but is or must be held responsible for what he does, as that is subject to his choice, it is mainly his actions that construct his fate; they are the chief or the most forceful determinants of his being and his future. This is the whole law of Karma.

But we have first to observe that a law or chain of Karma is only an outward machinery and cannot be elevated to a greater position as the sole and absolute determinant of the life-workings of the cosmos, unless the cosmos is itself entirely mechanical in its character. It is indeed held by many that all is Law and Process and there is no conscious Being or Will in or behind the cosmos; if so, here is a Law and Process that satisfies our human reason and our mental standards of right and justice and it has the beauty and truth of a perfect symmetry and a mathematical accuracy of working. But all is not Law and Process, there is also Being and Consciousness; there is not only a machinery but a Spirit in things, not only Nature and law of cosmos but a cosmic Spirit, not only a process of mind and life and body but a soul in the natural creature. If it were not so, there could be no rebirth of a soul and no field for a law of Karma. But if the fundamental truth of our being is spiritual and not mechanical, it must be ourself, our soul that fundamentally determines its own evolution, and the law of Karma can only be one of the processes it uses for that purpose: our Spirit, our Self must be greater than its Karma. There is Law, but there is also spiritual freedom. Law and Process are one side of our existence and their reign is over our outer mind, life and body, for these are mostly subject to the mechanism of Nature. But even here their mechanical power is absolute only over body and matter; for Law becomes more complex and less rigid, Process more plastic and less mechanical when there comes in the phenomenon of life, and yet more is this so when mind intervenes with its subtlety; an inner freedom already begins to intervene and, the more we go within, the soul’s power of choice is increasingly felt: for Prakriti is the field of law and process, but the soul, the Purusha, is the giver of the sanction, *anumantā*, and even if ordinarily it chooses to remain a witness and concede an automatic sanction, it can be, if it wills, the master of its nature, Ishwara.

It is not conceivable that the spirit within is an automaton in the hands of Karma, a slave in this life of its past actions; the truth must be less rigid and more plastic. If a certain amount of results of past Karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic being which presides over the new formation of its earth-experience and assents not merely to an outward compulsory process, but to a secret Will and Guidance. That secret Will is not mechanical, but spiritual; the guidance comes from an Intelligence which may use mechanical processes but is not their subject. Self-expression and experience are what the soul seeks by its birth into the body; whatever is necessary for the self-expression and experience of this life, whether it intervenes as an automatic outcome of past lives or as a free selection of results and a continuity or as a new development, whatever is a means of creation of the future, that will be formulated: for the principle is not the working out of a mechanism of Law, but the development of the nature through cosmic experience so that eventually it may grow out of the Ignorance. There must therefore be two elements, Karma as an instrument, but also the secret Consciousness and Will within working through the mind, life and body as the user. Fate, whether purely mechanical or created by ourselves, a chain of our own manufacture, is only one factor of existence; Being and its consciousness and its will are a still more important factor. In Indian astrology which considers all life circumstances to be Karma, mostly predetermined or indicated in the graph of the stars, there is still provision made for the energy and force of the being which can change or cancel part or much of what is so written or even all but the most imperative and powerful bindings of Karma. This is a reasonable account of the balance: but there is also to be added to the computation the fact that destiny is not simple but complex; the destiny which binds our physical being, binds it so long or in so far as a greater law does not intervene. Action belongs to the physical part of us, it is the physical outcome of our being; but behind our surface is a freer life power, a freer mind power which has another energy and can create another destiny and bring it in to modify the primary plan, and when the soul and self emerges, when we become consciously spiritual beings, that change can cancel or wholly remodel the graph of our physical fate. Karma, then,—or at least any mechanical law of Karma,—cannot be accepted as the sole determinant of circumstances and the whole machinery of rebirth and of our future evolution.

 But this is not all; for the statement of the Law errs by an over-simplification and the arbitrary selection of a limited principle. Action is a resultant of the energy of the being, but this energy is not of one sole kind; the consciousness-force of the spirit manifests itself in many kinds of energies: there are inner activities of mind, activities of life, of desire, passion, impulse, character, activities of the senses and the body, a pursuit of truth and knowledge, a pursuit of beauty, a pursuit of ethical good or evil, a pursuit of power, love, joy, happiness, fortune, success, pleasure, life satisfactions of all kinds, life enlargement, a pursuit of individual or collective objects, a pursuit of the health, strength, capacity, satisfaction of the body. All this makes an exceedingly complex sum of the manifold experience and many-sided action of the spirit in life, and its variety cannot be set aside in favour of a single principle, neither can it be hammered into so many sections of the single duality of ethical good and evil; ethics, the maintenance of human standards of morality, cannot, therefore, be the sole preoccupation of the cosmic Law or the sole principle of determination of the working of Karma. If it is true that the nature of the energy put forth must determine the nature of the result or outcome, all these differences in the nature of the energy have to be taken into account and each must have its appropriate consequence. An energy of seeking for truth and knowledge must have as its natural outcome,—its reward or recompense, if you will,—a growth into truth, an increase in knowledge; an energy used for falsehood should result in an increase of falsehood in the nature and a deeper immersion in the Ignorance. An energy of pursuit of beauty should have as its outcome an increase in the sense of beauty, the enjoyment of beauty or, if so directed, in the beauty and harmony of the life and the nature. A pursuit of physical health, strength and capacity should create the strong man or the successful athlete. An energy put out in the pursuit of ethical good must have as its outcome or reward or recompense an increase in virtue, the happiness of ethical growth or the sunny felicity and poise and purity of a simple and natural goodness, while the punishment of opposite energies would be a deeper plunge into evil, a greater disharmony and perversion of the nature and, in case of excess, a great spiritual perdition, *mahati vinastih*. An energy put forward for power or other vital ends must lead to an increase of the capacity for commanding these results or to the development of a vital strength and plenitude. This is the ordinary disposition of things in Nature and, if justice be demanded of her, this surely is justice that the energy and capacity put forward should have in its own kind its fitting response from her. The prize of the race is assigned by her to the swift, the victory in battle to the brave and strong and skilful, the rewards of knowledge to the capable intellect and the earnest seeker: these things she will not give to the good man who is sluggish or weak or skilless or stupid merely because he is righteous or respectable; if he covets these other powers of life, he must qualify for them and put forward the right kind of energy. If Nature did otherwise, she could well be accused of injustice; there is no reason to accuse her of injustice for this perfectly right and normal arrangement or to demand from her a rectification of the balance in a future life so that the good man may be given as a natural reward for his virtue a high post or a large bank balance or a happy, easy and well-appointed life. That cannot be the significance of rebirth or a sufficient basis for a cosmic law of Karma.

There is indeed in our life a very large element of what we call luck or fortune, which baulks our effort of result or gives the prize without effort or to an inferior energy: the secret cause of these caprices of Destiny—or causes, for the roots of Fortune may be manifold,—must be no doubt partly sought for in our hidden past; but it is difficult to accept the simple solution that good luck is a return for a forgotten virtuous action in a past life and bad luck a return for a sin or crime. If we see the righteous man suffering here, it is difficult to believe that this paragon of virtue was in the last life a scoundrel and is paying, even after his exemplary conversion by a new birth, for sins he then committed; nor if the wicked triumphs, can we easily suppose that he was in his last life a saint who has suddenly taken a wrong turn but continues to receive a cash return for his previous virtue. A total change of this kind between life and life is possible though not likely to be frequent, but to saddle the new opposite personality with the rewards or punishments of the old looks like a purposeless and purely mechanical procedure. This and many other difficulties arise, and the too simple logic of the correlation is not so strong as it claims to be; the idea of retribution of Karma as a compensation for the injustice of life and Nature is a feeble basis for the theory, for it puts forward a shallow and superficial human feeling and standard as the sense of the cosmic Law and is based on an unsound reasoning; there must be some other and stronger foundation for the law of Karma.

Here, as so often, the error comes by our forcing a standard which is the creation of our human mind into the larger, freer and more comprehensive ways of the cosmic Intelligence. In the action attributed to the law of Karma two values are selected out of the many created by Nature, moral good and evil, sin and virtue, and vital-physical good and evil, outward happiness and suffering, outward good fortune and ill-fortune, and it is supposed that there must be an equation between them, the one must be the reward or punishment of the other, the final sanction which it receives in the secret justice of Nature. This collocation is evidently made from the view-point of a common vital-physical desire in our members: because happiness and good fortune are what the lower part of our vital being most desires, misfortune and suffering what it most hates and dreads, it proceeds, when it accepts the moral demand upon it for the curbing of its propensities, for self-restraint from doing evil and self-exertion towards doing what is good, to strike a bargain, to erect a cosmic Law which will compensate it for this strenuous self-compulsion and help it by the dread of punishment to adhere to its difficult path of self-denial. But the truly ethical being does not need a system of rewards and punishments to follow the path of good and shun the path of evil; virtue to him is its own reward, sin brings with it its own punishment in the suffering of a fall from his own law of nature: this is the true ethical standard. On the contrary, a system of rewards and punishments debases at once the ethical values of good, turns virtue into selfishness, a commercial bargain of self-interest, and replaces the right motive of abstinence from evil by a baser motive. Human beings have erected the rule of reward and punishment as a social necessity in order to restrain the doing of things harmful to the community and encourage what is helpful to it; but to erect this human device into a general law of cosmic Nature or a law of the supreme Being or the supreme law of existence is a procedure of doubtful value. It is human, but also puerile, to impose the insufficient and narrow standards of our own Ignorance on the larger and more intricate operations of cosmic Nature or on the action of the supreme Wisdom and supreme Good which draws or raises us towards itself by a spiritual power working slowly in ourselves through our inner being and not by a law of temptation and compulsion upon our outer vital nature. If the soul is passing through an evolution by a many-sided and complex experience, any law of Karma or return to action and output of Energy, if it is to fit itself into that experience, must also be complex and cannot be of a simple and exiguous texture or rigid and one-sided.

 At the same time, a partial truth of fact, not of fundamental or general principle, may be admitted for this doctrine; for although the lines of the action of energy are distinct and independent, they can act together and upon each other, though not by any rigidly fixed law of correspondence. It is possible that in the total method of the returns of Nature there intervenes a strand of connection or rather of interaction between vital-physical good and ill and ethical good and ill, a limited correspondence and meeting-point between divergent dualities not amounting to an inseparable coherence. Our own varying energies, desires, movements are mixed together in their working and can bring about a mixed result: our vital part does demand substantial and external rewards for virtue, for knowledge, for every intellectual, aesthetic, moral or physical effort; it believes firmly in punishment for sin and even for ignorance. This may well either create or else reply to a corresponding cosmic action; for Nature takes us as we are and to some extent suits her movements to our need or our demands on her. If we accept the action of invisible Forces upon us, there may be also invisible Forces in Life-Nature that belong to the same plane of Consciousness- Force as this part of our being, Forces that move according to the same plan or the same power-motive as our lower vital nature. It can be often observed that when a self-assertive vital egoism goes on trampling on its way without restraint or scruple all that opposes its will or desire, it raises a mass of reactions against itself, reactions of hatred, antagonism, unease in men which may have their result now or hereafter, and still more formidable adverse reactions in universal Nature. It is as if the patience of Nature, her willingness to be used were exhausted; the very forces that the ego of the strong vital man seized and bent to its purpose rebel and turn against him, those he had trampled on rise up and receive power for his downfall: the insolent vital force of Man strikes against the throne of Necessity and is dashed to pieces or the lame foot of Punishment reaches at last the successful offender. This reaction to his energies may come upon him in another life and not at once, it may be a burden of consequence he takes up in his return to the field of these Forces; it may happen on a small as well as a large scale, to the small vital being and his small errors as well as in these larger instances. For the principle will be the same; the mental being in us seeking for success by a misuse of force which Nature admits but reacts in the end against it, receives the adverse return in the guise of defeat and suffering and failure. But the promotion of this minor line of causes and results to the status of an invariable absolute Law or the whole cosmic rule of action of a supreme Being is not valid; they belong to a middle region between the inmost or supreme Truth of things and the impartiality of material Nature.

 In any case the reactions of Nature are not in essence meant as reward or punishment; that is not their fundamental value, which is rather an inherent value of natural relations and, in so far as it affects the spiritual evolution, a value of the lessons of experience in the soul’s cosmic training. If we touch fire, it burns, but there is no principle of punishment in this relation of cause and effect, it is a lesson of relation and a lesson of experience; so in all Nature’s dealings with us there is a relation of things and there is a corresponding lesson of experience. The action of the cosmic Energy is complex and the same Forces may act in different ways according to circumstances, to the need of the being, to the intention of the Cosmic Power in its action; our life is affected not only by its own energies but by the energies of others and by universal Forces, and all this vast interplay cannot be determined in its results solely by the one factor of an all-governing moral law and its exclusive attention to the merits and demerits, the sins and virtues of individual human beings. Nor can good fortune and evil fortune, pleasure and pain, happiness and misery and suffering be taken as if they existed merely as incentives and deterrents to the natural being in its choice of good and evil. It is for experience, for growth of the individual being that the soul enters into rebirth; joy and grief, pain and suffering, fortune and misfortune are parts of that experience, means of that growth: even, the soul may of itself accept or choose poverty, misfortune and suffering as helpful to its growth, stimulants of a rapid development, and reject riches and prosperity and success as dangerous and conducive to a relaxation of its spiritual effort. Happiness and success bringing happiness are, no doubt, a legitimate demand of humanity; it is an attempt of life and matter to catch a pale reflection or a gross image of felicity: but a superficial happiness and material success, however desirable to our vital nature, are not the main object of our existence; if that had been the intention, life would have been otherwise arranged in the cosmic ordinance of things. All the secret of the circumstances of rebirth centres around the one capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience; that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory. Cosmic existence is not a vast administrative system of universal justice with a cosmic Law of recompense and retribution as its machinery or a divine Legislator and Judge at its centre. It is seen by us first as a great automatic movement of energy of Nature, and in it emerges a self-developing movement of consciousness, a movement therefore of Spirit working out its own being in the motion of energy of Nature. In this motion takes place the cycle of rebirth, and in that cycle the soul, the psychic being, prepares for itself,—or the Divine Wisdom or the cosmic Consciousness-Force prepares for it and through its action,—whatever is needed for the next step in its evolution, the next formation of personality, the coming nexus of necessary experiences constantly provided and organised out of the continuous flux of past, present and future energies for each new birth, for each new step of the spirit backward or forward or else still in a circle, but always a step in the growth of the being towards its destined self-unfolding in Nature.

This brings us to another element of the ordinary conception of rebirth which is not acceptable, since it is an obvious error of the physical mind,—the idea of the soul itself as a limited personality which survives unchanged from one birth to another. This too simple and superficial idea of the soul and personality is born of the physical mind’s inability to look beyond its own apparent self-formation in this single existence. In its conception, what returns in the reincarnation must be not only the same spiritual being, the same psychic entity, but the same formation of nature that inhabited the body of the last birth; the body changes, the circumstances are different, but the form of the being, the mind, the character, the disposition, temperament, tendencies are the same: John Smith in his new life is the same John Smith that he was in his last avatar. But if that were so, there would be no spiritual utility or meaning at all in rebirth; for there would be the repetition of the same little personality, the same small mental and vital formation to the end of Time. For the growth of the embodied being towards the full stature of its reality, not only a new experience, but a new personality is indispensable; to repeat the same personality would only be helpful if something had been incomplete in its formation of its experience which needed to be worked out in the same cadre of self, in the same building of mind and with the same formed capacity of energy. But normally this would be quite otiose: the soul that has been John Smith cannot gain anything or fulfil itself by remaining John Smith for ever; it cannot achieve growth or perfection by repeating the same character, interests, occupations, types of inner and outer movements for ever. Our life and rebirth would be always the same recurring decimal; it would be not an evolution but the meaningless continuity of an eternal repetition. Our attachment to our present personality demands such a continuity, such a repetition; John Smith wants to be John Smith for ever: but the demand is obviously ignorant and, if it were satisfied, that would be a frustration, not a fulfilment. It is only by a change of outer self, a constant progression of the nature, a growth in the spirit that we can justify our existence.

Personality is only a temporary mental, vital, physical formation which the being, the real Person, the psychic entity, puts forward on the surface,—it is not the self in its abiding reality. In each return to earth the Person, the Purusha, makes a new formation, builds a new personal quantum suitable for a new experience, for a new growth of its being. When it passes from its body, it keeps still the same vital and mental form for a time, but the forms or sheaths dissolve and what is kept is only the essential elements of the past quantum, of which some will but some may not be used in the next incarnation. The essential form of the past personality may remain as one element among many, one personality among many personalities of the same Person, but in the background, in the subliminal behind the veil of the surface mind and life and body, contributing from there whatever is needed of itself to the new formation; but it will not itself be the whole formation or build anew the old unchanged type of nature. It may even be that the new quantum or structure of being will exhibit a quite contrary character and temperament, quite other capacities, other very different tendencies; for latent potentials may be ready to emerge, or something already in action but inchoate may have been held back in the last life which needed to be worked out but was kept over for a later and more suitable combination of the possibilities of the nature. All the past is indeed there, with its accelerated impetus and potentialities for the formation of the future, but all of it is not ostensibly present and active. The greater the variety of formations that have existed in the past and can be utilised, the more rich and multitudinous the accumulated buildings of experience, the more their essential result of capacity for knowledge, power, action, character, manifold response to the universe can be brought forward and harmonised in the new birth, the more numerous the veiled personalities mental, vital, subtle-physical that combine to enrich the new personality on the surface, the greater and more opulent will be that personality and the nearer to the possible transition out of the completed mental stage of evolution to something beyond it. Such a complexity and gathering up of many personalities in one person can be a sign of a very advanced stage of the individual’s evolution when there is a strong central being that holds all together and works towards harmonisation and integration of the whole many-sided movement of the nature. But this opulent taking up of the past would not be a repetition of personality; it would be a new formation and large consummation. It is not as a machinery for the persistent renewal or prolongation of an unchanging personality that rebirth exists, but as a means for the evolution of the spiritual being in Nature.

It becomes at once evident that in this plan of rebirth the false importance which our mind attaches to the memory of past 850 The Life Divine lives disappears altogether. If indeed rebirth were governed by a system of rewards and punishments, if life’s whole intention were to teach the embodied spirit to be good and moral,—supposing that that is the intention in the dispensation of Karma and it is not what it looks like in this presentation of it, a mechanical law of recompense and retribution without any reformatory meaning or purpose,—then there is evidently a great stupidity and injustice in denying to the mind in its new incarnation all memory of its past births and actions. For it deprives the reborn being of all chance to realise why he is rewarded or punished or to get any advantage from the lesson of the profitableness of virtue and the unprofitableness of sin vouchsafed to him or inflicted on him. Even, since life seems often to teach the opposite lesson,—for he sees the good suffer for their goodness and the wicked prosper by their wickedness,—he is rather likely to conclude in this perverse sense, because he has not the memory of an assured and constant result of experience which would show him that the suffering of the good man was due to his past wickedness and the prosperity of the sinner due to the splendour of his past virtues, so that virtue is the best policy in the long run for any reasonable and prudent soul entering into this dispensation of Nature. It might be said that the psychic being within remembers; but such a secret memory would seem to have little effect or value on the surface. Or it may be said that it realises what has happened and learns its lesson when it reviews and assimilates its experiences after issuing from the body: but this intermittent memory does not very apparently help in the next birth; for most of us persist in sin and error and show no tangible signs of having profited by the teaching of our past experience.

But if a constant development of being by a developing cosmic experience is the meaning and the building of a new personality in a new birth is the method, then any persistent or complete memory of the past life or lives might be a chain and a serious obstacle: it would be a force for prolonging the old temperament, character, preoccupations, and a tremendous burden hampering the free development of the new personality and its formulation of new experience. A clear and detailed memory of past loves, hatreds, rancours, attachments, connections would be equally a stupendous inconvenience; for it would bind the reborn being to a useless repetition or a compulsory continuation of his surface past and stand heavily in the way of his bringing out new possibilities from the depths of the spirit. If, indeed, a mental learning of things were the heart of the matter, if that were the process of our development, memory would have a great importance: but what happens is a growth of the soul personality and a growth of the nature by an assimilation into our substance of being, a creative and effective absorption of the essential results of past energies; in this process conscious memory is of no importance. As the tree grows by a subconscient or inconscient assimilation of action of sun and rain and wind and absorption of earth-elements, so the being grows by a subliminal or intraconscient assimilation and absorption of its results of past becoming and an output of potentialities of future becoming. The law that deprives us of the memory of past lives is a law of the cosmic Wisdom and serves, not disserves its evolutionary purpose.

The absence of any memory of past existences is wrongly and very ignorantly taken as a disproof of the actuality of rebirth; for if even in this life it is difficult to keep all the memories of our past, if they often fade into the background or fade out altogether, if no recollection remains of our infancy, and yet with all this hiatus of memory we can grow and be, if the mind is even capable of total loss of memory of past events and its own identity and yet it is the same being who is there and the lost memory can one day be recovered, it is evident that so radical a change as a transition to other worlds followed by new birth in a new body ought normally to obliterate altogether the surface or mental memory, and yet that would not annul the identity of the soul or the growth of the nature. This obliteration of the surface mental memory is all the more certain and quite inevitable if there is a new personality of the same being and a new instrumentation which takes the place of the old, a new mind, a new life, a new body: the new brain cannot be expected to carry in itself the images held by the old brain; the new life or mind cannot be summoned to keep the deleted impressions of the old mind and life that have been dissolved and exist no more. There is, no doubt, the subliminal being which may remember, since it does not suffer from the disabilities of the surface; but the surface mind is cut off from the subliminal memory which alone might retain some clear recollection or distinct impression of past lives. This separation is necessary because the new personality has to be built up on the surface without conscious reference to what is within; as with all the rest of the superficial being, so our surface personality too is indeed formed by an action from within, but of that action it is not conscious, it seems to itself to be selfformed or ready-made or formed by some ill-understood action of universal Nature. And yet fragmentary recollections of past births do sometimes remain in spite of these almost insuperable obstacles; there are even a very few cases of astonishingly exact and full memory in the child mind. Finally, at a certain stage of development of the being when the inner begins to predominate over the outer and come to the front, past-life memory does sometimes begin to emerge as if from some submerged layer, but more readily in the shape of a perception of the stuff and power of past personalities that are effective in the composition of the being in the present life than in any precise and accurate detail of event and circumstance, although this too can recur in parts or be recovered by concentration from the subliminal vision, from some secret memory or from our inner conscious-substance. But this detailed memory is of minor importance to Nature in her normal work and she makes small or no provision for it: it is the shaping of the future evolution of the being with which she is concerned; the past is put back, kept behind the veil and used only as an occult source of materials for the present and the future.

This conception of the Person and Personality, if accepted, must modify at the same time our current ideas about the immortality of the soul; for, normally, when we insist on the soul’s undying existence, what is meant is the survival after death of a definite unchanging personality which was and will always remain the same throughout eternity. It is the very imperfect superficial “I” of the moment, evidently regarded by Nature as a temporary form and not worth preservation, for which we demand this stupendous right to survival and immortality. But the demand is extravagant and cannot be conceded; the “I” of the moment can only merit survival if it consents to change, to be no longer itself but something else, greater, better, more luminous in knowledge, more moulded in the image of the eternal inner beauty, more and more progressive towards the divinity of the secret Spirit. It is that secret spirit or divinity of Self in us which is imperishable, because it is unborn and eternal. The psychic entity within, its representative, the spiritual individual in us, is the Person that we are; but the “I” of this moment, the “I” of this life is only a formation, a temporary personality of this inner Person: it is one step of the many steps of our evolutionary change, and it serves its true purpose only when we pass beyond it to a farther step leading nearer to a higher degree of consciousness and being. It is the inner Person that survives death, even as it pre-exists before birth; for this constant survival is a rendering of the eternity of our timeless spirit into the terms of Time.

What our normal demand of survival asks for is a similar survival for our mind, our life, even our body; the dogma of the resurrection of the body attests to this last demand,—even as it has been the root of the age-long effort of man to discover the elixir of immortality or any means magical, alchemic or scientific to conquer physically the death of the body. But this aspiration could only succeed if the mind, life or body could put on something of the immortality and divinity of the indwelling spirit. There are certain circumstances in which the survival of the outer mental personality representative of the inner mental Purusha could be possible. It could happen if our mental being came to be so powerfully individualised on the surface and so much one with the inner mind and inner mental Purusha and at the same time so open plastically to the progressive action of the Infinite that the soul no longer needed to dissolve the old form of mind and create a new one in order to progress. A similar individualisation, integration and openness of the vital being on the surface would alone make possible a similar survival of the life-part in us, the outer vital personality representative of the inner life-being, the vital Purusha. What would really happen then is that the wall between the inner self and the outer man would have broken down and the permanent mental and vital being from within, the mental and vital representatives of the immortal psychic entity, would govern the life. Our mind nature and our life nature could then be a continuous progressive expression of the soul and not a nexus of successive formations preserved only in their essence. Our mental personality and life personality would then subsist without dissolution from birth to birth; they would be in this sense immortal, persistently surviving, continuous in their sense of identity. This would be evidently an immense victory of soul and mind and life over the Inconscience and the limitations of material Nature.

But such a survival could only persist in the subtle body; the being would still have to discard its physical form, pass to other worlds and in its return put on a new body. The awakened mental Purusha and vital Purusha, preserving the mind sheath and the life sheath of the subtle body which are usually discarded, would return with them into a new birth and keep a vivid and sustained sense of a permanent being of mind and life constituted by the past and continuing into the present and future; but the basis of physical existence, the material body, could not be preserved even by this change. The physical being could only endure, if by some means its physical causes of decay and disruption could be overcome7 and at the same time it could be made so plastic and progressive in its structure and its functioning that it would answer to each change demanded of it by the progress of the inner Person;[[7]](#footnote-8) it must be able to keep pace with the soul in its formation of self-expressive personality, its long unfolding of a secret spiritual divinity and the slow transformation of the mental into the divine mental or spiritual existence. This consummation of a triple immortality,—immortality of the nature completing the essential immortality of the spirit and the psychic survival of death,—might be the crown of rebirth and a momentous indication of the conquest of the material Inconscience and Ignorance even in the very foundation of the reign of Matter. But the true immortality would still be the eternity of the spirit; the physical survival could only be relative, terminable at will, a temporal sign of the spirit’s victory here over Death and Matter.

1. III. 10. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Action, *karma.* In the view expressed in this verse of the Upanishad the Karma or the action of this life is exhausted by the life in the world beyond in which its results are fulfilled and the soul returns to earth for fresh Karma. The cause of birth in this world, of Karma, of the soul’s passage to other-world existence and its return here is, throughout, the soul’s own consciousness, will and desire. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. IV. 4. 5, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. V. 7-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. I. 110. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Taittiriya Upanishad [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Even if Science—physical Science or occult Science,—were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)