

from The Life Divine by Sri Aurobindo, pgs. 1060-1062

The answer might, indeed, be only individual; it might result in a multiplication of spiritualised individuals or even, conceivably though not probably, a gnostic individual or individuals isolated in the unspiritualised mass of humanity. Such isolated realised beings must either withdraw into their secret divine kingdom and guard themselves in a spiritual solitude or act from their inner light on mankind for what little can be prepared in such conditions for a happier future. The inner change can begin to take shape in a collective form only if the gnostic individual finds others who have the same kind of inner life as himself and can form with them a group with its own autonomous existence or else a separate community or order of being with its own inner law of life. It is this need of a separate life with its own rule of living adapted to the inner power or motive force of the spiritual existence and creating for it its native atmosphere that has expressed itself in the past in the formation of the monastic life or in attempts of various kinds at a new separate collective living self-governed and other in its spiritual principle than the ordinary human life. The monastic life is in its nature an association of other-worldly seekers, men whose whole attempt is to find and realise in themselves the spiritual reality and who form their common existence by rules of living which help them in that endeavor. It is not usually an effort to create a new life-formation which will exceed the ordinary human society and create a new world-order. A religion may hold that eventual prospect before it or attempt some first approach to it, or a mental idealism may make the same endeavor. But these attempts have always been overcome by the persistent inconscience and ignorance of our human vital nature; for that nature is an obstacle which no mere idealism or incomplete spiritual aspiration can change in its recalcitrant mass or permanently dominate. Either the endeavour fails by its own imperfection or it is invaded by the imperfection of the outside world and sinks from the shining height of its aspiration to something mixed and inferior on the ordinary human level. A common spiritual life meant to express the spiritual and not the mental, vital and physical being must found and maintain itself on greater values than the mental, vital, physical values of the ordinary human society; if it is not so founded, it will be merely the normal human society with a difference. An entirely new consciousness in many individuals transforming their whole being, transforming their mental, vital, and physical nature-self, is needed for the new life to appear; only such a transformation of the general mind, life, body nature can bring into being a new worthwhile collective existence. The evolutionary nisus must tend not merely to create a new type of mental beings but another order of beings who have raised their whole existence from our present mentalised animality to a greater spiritual level of the earth-nature.

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Any such complete transformation of the earth-life in a number of human beings could not establish itself altogether at once; even when the turning-point has been reached, the decisive line crossed, the new life in its beginnings would have to pass through a period of ordeal and arduous development. A general change from the old consciousness taking up the whole life into the spiritual principle would be the necessary first step; the preparation for this might be long and the transformation itself once begun proceed by stages. In the individual it might after a certain point be rapid and even effect itself by a bound, an evolutionary saltus; but an individual transformation would not be the creation of a new type of beings or a new collective life. One might conceive of a number of individuals thus evolving separately in the midst of the old life and then joining together to establish the nucleus of the new existence. But it is not likely that Nature would operate in this fashion, and it would be difficult for the individual to arrive at a complete change while still enclosed in the life of the lower nature. At a certain stage it might be necessary to follow the age-long device of the separate community, but with a double purpose, first to provide a secure atmosphere, a place and life apart, in which the consciousness of the individual might concentrate on its evolution in surroundings where all was turned and centred towards the one endeavour and, next, when things were ready, to formulate and develop the new life in those surroundings and in this prepared spiritual atmosphere. It might be that, in such a concentration of effort, all the difficulties of the change would present themselves with a concentrate force; for each seeker, carrying in himself the possibilities but also the imperfections of a world that has to be transformed, would bring in not only his capacities but his difficulties and the oppositions of the old nature and, mixed together in the restricted circle of a small and close common life, these might assume a considerably enhanced force of obstruction which would tend to counterbalance the enhanced power and concentration of the forces making for the evolution. This is a difficulty that has broken in the past all the efforts of mental man to evolve something better and more true and harmonious than the ordinary mental and vital life. But if nature is ready and has taken her evolutionary decision or if the power of the spirit descending from the higher planes is sufficiently strong, the difficulty would be overcome and a first evolutionary formation or formations would be possible.