The meaning associated with the word ‘spiritual’ often suggests and stimulates within oneself a sense of an unknown satisfaction, an indescribable feeling of satiation on the one hand, and a faint feeling of the presence of an extramundane ideal on the other. We do not generally think deeply over the mental processes that go on automatically at the time when we are in an atmosphere which we call spiritual. A holy man, a saint or a sage, a sacred place of pilgrimage, a temple of worship or a church – something of this kind which is automatically related to the definition we hold in our own minds of religion and spirituality – stirs feelings of a novel type of emotion in our own selves, and we are compelled, as it were, to acquiesce in the necessity to be spiritual in order that we may be really happy.

The term ‘spirituality’ gets so associated with feelings of this kind that it has remained a veiled, indescribable summoning from some unknown source which seems to be promising the fulfilment of what we lack in this world of material existence and social relations, so that the inner personality seems to be a little bit shaken up in a peculiar way even when listening to the word ‘spiritual’ or contemplating its suggestiveness, its meaning or connotation.

“It is good to catch the spirit of a particular situation,” “The spirit is different from the letter,” and such other statements appear to point to the presence of an operating influence we term ‘spirit’, without which life becomes a literary outer form without what we generally call a soul in it. We say, “Everything is well, but there is no soul in it.” It may be any kind of performance, occasion, situation or circumstance which can assume the form of a perfection for all outer perception, but we generally go by the complaint, “It was quite all right, but there was no soul in it.”

What do we actually mean when we wish that something should have a soul in it, or that the spirit of a particular situation has to be taken into consideration rather than a literal form of it? We speak of the letter of the law and the spirit of the law, for instance, between which we make a necessary distinction. Though the letter of the law is an acceptable form of legality and jurisprudence, that the spirit of it is more important is something well known to everyone. But what is the spirit of it?
actually in our mind when we say the spirit has to be brought into the arena of any kind of performance, inwardly or outwardly? What is spirituality?

The condition of the spirit is spirituality. The atmosphere of the spirit is spirituality. The environment that is supposed to be around, what we call the spirit of a thing, is called spirituality. Now, the satisfaction that somehow arises in our own minds on contemplation of even the necessity to have a spirit behind things is, at the same time, connected to a particular idealisation in our minds of what I call extramundane existence.

The spirit is different from the letter. The soul is not what appears on the surface. This is the reason why we are not going to be satisfied with even an artistic performance if it has no soul in it. Whatever be the meaning that we attach to the word 'soul', mostly we do not even know what the soul means, and yet we expect the soul to be there. How is it that even without properly thinking over the matter, we expect a soul to be present in things, and a spirit to pervade atmospheres? And how is it that we feel a sense of an unrecognised satisfaction within ourselves when the spirit inundates the form, and the soul invades the form that is outside?

This peculiar surge of a liberation of our own internal constitution is actually what is taking place when we are happy. I repeat these words: a liberation of the otherwise inwardly tied up components of our personality. The freedom that they enjoy is actually at the back of any kind of joy or happiness that we feel. We are mostly shackled persons. We are limited in every blessed way. There is finitude hovering everywhere, over our heads and around us. Physically we are finite, socially we are conditioned, politically we are restrained. The very Earth controls our movements by the pull of gravitation, what to talk of other things which keep us in a mood of subjection to the laws that operate in the world. This inward revelation sometimes taking place within ourselves is the appearance of the spirit of things, the soul of anything whatsoever. Often it is said that all joy comes from the soul, and satisfaction can be there only in the spirit and nowhere else.

This is well said, and we have heard it often repeated in scriptures and told to us everywhere from pulpits, rostrums, through lectures and the like, but how is it that we seem to be not able to possess it? How is it that the spirit, or the soul of a thing, eludes our grasp? We are in a drudgery of involvement in the atmosphere of day-to-day performance. We do work, we are office-goers, and we have what we call our duties. These do not satisfy us.

It is not that the work that we do is satisfying. We somehow get on with it, and we have to do it for reasons which are ulterior, obvious, and are mostly external – the letter, not the spirit. We do not seem to be present in the atmosphere of our life. We seem to be elsewhere, and this elsewhereness that is one of the aspects of the search for
the spirit is the reason why we often feel that the spirit of a thing is not in this world. It is an extramundane, otherworldly, non-material, super-physical something.

Do we not look up to the skies when we offer prayer to God? We do not generally bend our heads down and look at the ground. There is an inward tendency to gaze at the sky, look up to visualise the presence of something which we consider the spirit of the world, the soul of the cosmos.

The transcendent element, the extra-physical character of the spirit, is injected into us, as it were, by the very conception of it; therefore, we cannot be happy with any occurrence in this world, with any object or thing that is made available to us, because occurrences, events, circumstances, objects, things, persons, are not extramundane, they are wholly mundane. They are visible things which are connected to and tied down to the very Earth.

Inasmuch as we have a tendency to look for the spirit of a thing in non-mundane circumstances, we cannot be satisfied with anything that is mundane in its nature. Even the best of friends cannot satisfy us, the largest requisition of material wealth cannot make us happy, and the very Earth is unsatisfying in the end. The reason is that it is the letter or the formation, the outer presentation of the life we call our existence here, that is visible to us. The spirit is missing.

We do not see the spirit anywhere in the world, and the absence of the spirit in things in the world makes us conclude that this spirit which is absent here below has to be present somewhere else, not in this world. It is super-terrestrial. This is the psychological reason why we automatically look up to the skies for a spirit of the meaning of life, though we are not wholly correct in the assumption that the spirit of a thing should be above, because a thing that is above is not within, and so if our conception of the spirit or soul of a thing as extra-terrestrial is to be justified, we have also to justify the other consequence that follows from it, namely, that there is no soul in this world. The world will be dead. It is a corpse. Sometimes it looks like that. People complain, “After all, I have lived a long life of service and now I am superannuated, I have commuted my pension, and I have become old and found nothing in the world. I have lived a life of wastefulness, as it were. I am feeling now that there was nothing that I could gather. Nothing that I can call a pearl could be gathered in this world. I go. My time has come. I go, not knowing what I have been searching for but feeling I have obtained nothing.”

Our feeling that this world can give us nothing, and whatever is to be our boon or our satisfaction has to be from somewhere other than the world, is a corollary that necessarily follows from the perception of the sorrow in life, the transiency of things, the brittleness of objects, death pervading everything, and nothing permanently existing anywhere. We see with our own eyes and we infer from experience that everything dies in this world. Nothing can be exempted from the law of the fluxation
of things. Death seems to be the final ruler of all things. This is frightening. If everything is to be swallowed by death one day or the other, this very Earth is an unreliable abode for us. We seek satisfaction and a reliable source of security in some abode which cannot be in this world.

Firstly, the security that we expect permanently should be existing somewhere. If it is totally non-existent, the very expectation of it is futile. It is seen physically that the world cannot give us any security. Neither our relations, kith, kin, and friends, nor material wealth, nor house, nor land can give us security, because we know we can be divested of these associations any moment by circumstances of history. By a little consideration on the fragments of life through history we will realise that we have no real friend in this world. History has taught us that anything can desert us at any moment. Yet, we have a feeling that there is security somewhere. We cannot be totally cut off from every kind of blessedness, and we cannot be entirely in a land of death and transiency. Though it is true that transiency and death alone are visible in this world – anything can be destroyed at any time, anyone can die at any moment – considering these aspects, we can say that there is nothing that we can expect here of any permanent value. Yet, we expect it.

It is not possible for me to go with the feeling that, after all, this is wretchedness and there is nothing that I can expect. Well, it may be. It is perhaps true that I cannot expect anything to my satisfaction in this world, but I do expect satisfaction. Where shall I find it? It has to be somewhere which is not in this world, because I do not find it in this world. The fact, the idea, the conviction, the supposition that my security should be somewhere other than in this world follows from the non-perception of it in this world.

Here comes a little bit of an answer as to why we consider God as an otherworldly, supra-cosmic existence. God is not in this world; God is above the world. Even a child knows this: God is above the world, God created the world, He is not in this world, He is outside the world. The outsideness, the extra-cosmic nature, the otherworldly nature of God, whom we call the source of satisfaction, arises because of the impossibility of recognising that kind of perfection in anything in this world.

This is one side of the matter. If there is nothing that can satisfy us in this world, there can be no soul in anything in this world. The world is a dead corpse. There is no soul in this world. There is no life. It is only death everywhere. Anityam asukhāṁ lokam imaṁ prāpya bhajasva māṁ (Gita 9.33), duḥkhālayam aśāśvatam (Gita 8.15) are words in the Bhagavadgita itself corroborating our day-to-day feeling that this world is the abode of sorrow, and this transiency is totally unreliable. We are also living in this world. We are not living outside the world. We complain that there is nothing worthwhile in this world while living in the world itself.
Here is a pointer to a new light that we can visualise in this very world of death itself. In this transiency, in this abode of darkness and death and sorrow and veil of tears, there seems to be something scintillating and beckoning. Even here, in this pit of sorrow which is this world, there is some sort of little light glimmering through an aperture, as it were, telling us that all is not so bad as it appears on the surface because if everything is dead, a hell of Satan’s creation and unadulterated evil, which we feel the world to be, then we, being part and parcel of this world, will have nothing to expect. We shall go empty-handed in the manner we came into this world.

We do not wish to go in that way. I do not want to go empty-handed, as if there is nothing that I can expect even after death. There is a feeling: “I have some hope to achieve what I feel as my supreme ideal. This world does not give it to me. It has not given it to anybody. Even emperors have gone from this Earth, finally not achieving their expectations of suzerainty, lordship and permanency of possession.”

We have a peculiar dual feeling in our minds acting like a double-edged sword, on the one hand telling us that we can expect nothing in this world, and yet telling us we have to expect something somewhere. Now, a thing that is totally soulless and unspiritual, which we think this world to be, cannot even hint that there is such a thing called the spirit of the soul. There cannot be life in what is called death. They are contraries. There cannot be anything permanent which is wholly moving, as a flowing river. Transiency and permanency cannot go together. If, as some people tell us, this world is entirely transiency, it is continuously moving, there is nothing permanent in this world, nobody can tell us what a permanent thing can be.

If no expectation of final satisfaction of a permanent nature can be had in this world of death and difficulty, an idea that such a thing has to be expected somewhere cannot arise in this world. We people living in this world cannot have the opportunity, the blessing or the fortune of even entertaining an idea of some hopefulness of the future, if such a thing cannot be at all.

Now, this little analysis will tell us that there is some sort of a soul living in this world. There is life in death, there is light in darkness, there is joy in sorrow, there is possession in loss, and there is eternity in temporality. The total transcendence or the otherworldly character of our spiritual expectation seems to also have a tentacle operating in this very Earth in which we are enmeshed. The very fibre of this physical body seems to be animated by a spirit.

The body is not the soul; this is what is told us. But the body cannot be felt to even be existing unless the soul pervades it. The charge of the spirit over the cells of the body should be so intense and complete that it has to practically become the body itself in order that we may feel that we have a body or that we are the body, as we feel mostly.
This physical body, which is not supposed to be spiritual and other than the soul, cannot be known to be there unless the soul pervades it completely, thoroughly, as water pervades fibre of a cloth which is sunk into it, saturating it through and through. Therefore, matter – this Earth, this impermanency, this object, this body, this veil of tears – also has a capacity to point to the presence of that which we are permanently expecting. The soul is not outside the world though it appears, and always it has been appearing, that it is not in this world. As sorrow cannot be equated with joy, and there cannot be joy where there is sorrow, and also inasmuch as it is all sorrow only in this world from beginning to end, day in and day out, from birth to death, there would be no joy.

But joy has to be there in a subtle, permeating manner, without which even the expectation of joy would not be possible. This would point out that we have a hope. It is not all pessimism and expectation of destruction of things, and an end of all things. Together with this possibility of an end of everything in this world, including our own selves, there is also a simultaneous possibility and a hope of achieving a non-temporal objective even while we are in this objective, temporal world.

The Bhagavadgita, in a very important way, highlights this peculiar juxtaposition in this world of creation of two aspects of life, what we generally call the spiritual and the unspiritual, conscious and unconscious, spirit and matter, and the like. The juxtaposition of these two aspects is the same difficulty that the great hero Arjuna in the Mahabharata and the Bhagavadgita felt, which is the difficulty we also feel in our own lives. We cannot, as I pointed out already, be satisfied finally with anything in this world. Not the whole Earth can satisfy any person. Yet, we want to be satisfied entirely. Do we not feel that this is a contradiction in our aspiration, to be expecting something that we cannot have in this world and finding it nowhere?

The reason is that in this world of total externality, physicality, materiality, transiency, sorrow and death – in this world of this nature – there is the presence of a totally opposite pervasiveness, which is what is called the soul of a thing, the spirit of any condition, the value that we attach to things, the meaning of life itself. Do we not love our own selves, though we condemn everything in the world, including our own selves? Do we not say many a time, “What is there in life? Wretched is existence. Let me end this body.” Sometimes we make statements of this kind, as if we hate our own selves. The hatred sometimes wrongly felt towards one’s own self even under what we may call psychopathological conditions is also, if we carefully note, a consequence of the love of life. He who loves death really loves life because the love of death is not actually the love of extinction. This has to be carefully noticed. It is not that which we are expecting when we think of ending our life. What we expect is the end of the sorrow associated with this kind of life, and not life itself; inasmuch as we associate sorrow with this bodily existence, we seem to feel, wrongly, that the end of the body is
perhaps also the end of the sorrow of life. This is not actually the case because sorrow
is not located in any particular thing, not even in this body of ours. Sorrow is the
consequence of a peculiar inability to see or visualise a coordination that exists
between the here and the hereafter, the body and the soul, the visible and the invisible,
time and eternity, the world and God Himself.

If all this had been so simple, there would have been no necessity for Bhagavan Sri
Krishna to go on haranguing the gospel in so many chapters. The matter is very
difficult indeed. Even a shrewd intellectual like Arjuna was not in a mood to
understand what all this means. On the one hand, in the Gita there is the affirmation
of eternity, utter godliness and pervasive universality. Together with this there is an
injunction to work hard, to follow one’s duty and never shirk work, never sit idle but
be very busy with one’s ordained duty, which instruction in the Gita simultaneously
goes together with a peculiar apparent contradiction, as it were, that there is a
universal pervasiveness, God operating in all things as immanence, who does
everything and nobody else can do anything.

On the one hand, it is said in the Gita that God does everything and nobody else
does anything, and nobody else can do anything. At the same time, the Gita says to do
the work. *Karman eva 'dhikāras te mā phaśeṣu kadācana* (Gita 2.47): Your duty is
to work. This injunction, twofold in nature, ordering us to be physically, personally,
socially, in every way active, performing our duty in life, has to go together with the
acceptance of a supreme Universal power which alone does everything. How would
you collate these two features? This duty is associated with you and made an
imperative of your personality. You must do, and yet you are not doing anything.

Spirituality is this great art of actually doing everything that is expected of us as our
duty under the circumstances of our placement in society, simultaneously with the
acceptance of the universality of the spiritual ideal, which is not located in this person
or that person. The particular individual expected to perform his or her duty is to be
set in tune with that which is non-particular, the highest idealisation, the
Viratwarupa which Bhagavan Sri Krishna bestowed upon Arjuna, which is the
insistence of the Universal in the particular. That is to say, work goes with meditation.
Duty is simultaneous with God-consciousness. The world is the body of God. Our life
is commensurate with an eternal life. Even the process of dying is a preparation for a
better life. The birth and death series of metempsychosis, as they call it, is an
educational process of all that is finite, individual, for the purpose of enthroning all
that is particularised and individualised on a permanent footing in total Universality.

The reason why we are not ultimately satisfied with anything in this world is that
everything in this world is a particular located something. We cannot see anything
existing everywhere. The universality which alone can bestow upon us the blessing of
permanency cannot be found in any particularity in the world because universality is a
feature of pervasiveness, presence everywhere, which cannot be connected with anything in this world.

Inasmuch as nothing in the world can be universal, nothing can satisfy us. It is that pervasiveness which is universally operative which is the soul of things. The soul, the spirit, so-called, is the universal background of every particular created element, living or non-living. There is a connection with every individual with that which is not individual. It is the non-individual character of our existence that presses us forward for expecting something that is not in this body or in the world. It is the individuality in us which compels us to be active. Every person has to be active, working hard, doing duty, because the very nature of finitude, which is the individuality of a person, is the consciousness of limitation.

Every duty, every work is an external gesture, a ritual, as it were, that we perform exhibiting our connectedness with things, our participation with nature; and work, therefore, is not merely a mechanical doing. It is yourself moving, flowing as it were, outwardly in space and time. This is karma yoga. It becomes a yoga only when the work is nothing but us moving. It is not somebody else making our limbs act.

Work that is done by a person cannot be spiritual; it cannot be regarded as even a duty when the soul is absent in it. “Oh, this person is doing this work without having his soul in it.” We sometimes make this complaint. The presence of the soul in work is necessary in order that it may become service. Otherwise, it is like a bulldozer moving on the road. We cannot call it karma yoga.

The idea is, we have to be present in the work that we do. That is to say we, as an expectation of a super-individual principle, have to be operating in that individual movement that we call action or duty in this world. Work becomes divinised immediately when the non-individual spirit in us, the element of universality in us, charges itself forward and enlivens that particular operation of ours we call work, duty, or any kind of relationship in this world.

The Bhagavadgita is a very difficult subject. Its meaning is hard to comprehend because what it is teaching us seems to be an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, we are totally bound to this difficulty of living in this physical body and this physical world which has an end one day or the other, and we can expect nothing of permanent value, yet we have to expect all that is permanent, eternal, in this world only. We have to see God here, and not somewhere else.

This ‘hereness’, ‘nowness’ of God, as we sometimes put it, is the Vishwarupatva of God. The universality of Vishwarupa is the permeation of the transcendence of God in the very particle of dust in this world. Otherwise, aspiration for God cannot arise in our mind. He who is totally controlled by death – that which is totally perishable, entirely bereft of any soul element – cannot aspire for the soul. That which is ungodly cannot aspire for God.
Hence, the world is not an evil, as sometimes we may feel it is. It is not so wretched, as we are likely to complain. It is good. There is an element of goodness; perhaps it is all goodness. It is not that the world is only sometimes good and a little bit good. It is all goodness. The Vishwarupa-darshana is the presentation of the all-good character of the creation of God, and there is nothing evil in it. “Look at me,” said the Lord, and the whole Earth was present there, revolving. The solar system, the good and bad, the beautiful and the ugly, the necessary and the unnecessary, the friend and the foe, all were arrayed there in perfect pattern of placement in regular contexts. They were all placed in proper positions, and they looked beautiful. All the ugliness, all the materiality, all the destructive element in this visible world was seen there, transmuted completely into its eternal nature. As philosophers say, it assumed its archetypal nature. Originality was assumed. The attainment of immortality is the assumption of the originality of things, the shadow returning to the light from where it came, death itself awakening into the immortality that it enshrines within itself. Deathlessness is present inside death, as soul is present in all things. It is possible, therefore, for us to be happy in this world.

Though I began by saying that it is impossible for us to be happy in this world, now I conclude by saying it is possible for us to be happy in this world. Not only it is possible, it is our duty to be happy in this world, because there is no world. It is a peculiar manifestation of the otherworldly existence we call God. Again I come to the point of the Vishwarupa, which included the very Earth itself, and even Patalaloka was included in that high heaven of utter divinity which was manifest there. All the fourteen *lokas*, seven above and seven below, are supposed to be organically present as living essentials in the body of God, says the Srimad Bhagavatam Mahapurana. In the very beginning of the Second Skanda, Suka Maharshi tells us how the embodied form of this Supreme Being, which is this creation, has all the fourteen worlds within it, which includes even the nether regions of Patala. Not only the highest Brahmaloka, even the lowest region of the creation of God – we may call it hell if we like – is vitally connected to the highest heaven, which is Brahmaloka.

This is the reason why it is necessary for us to be spiritually oriented even in this so-called unspiritual world, and somehow try to take advantage of this blessing of being born into this world in the condition we are, and live a happy life not by merely imagining that happiness is there as a theoretical ideal but by practically transmuting our daily life into a coordination with that which is super-physical, divine, universal. We, the particular finite, are directly, permanently connected to that which is infinite and universal. The finite that we are is connected to the infinite, because we know very well that even the idea that we are finite cannot arise unless we are connected to something which is not finite. If it is entirely finitude and death, we will not know that there is something other than the finite. We will expect nothing more than that.
The finitude of a particular thing, the limitation imposed upon a particular object, is nothing but the presence of another finitude like it. So the existence of finitude is not finally valid. Its validity is there only so long as another finite is there, conditioning it and compelling it to be finite. So there is a mutual interrelatedness of all finite objects, which is again appointed to the super-finite existence pervading all finite things. The infinite is present in every finite thing.

Thus, we need not seek God in high heaven, above the seventh region of creation. It is not necessary to physically look up. We can also look within. We can find that which is within is also without. The Upanishad says that which is there in the sun, high above in the sky, is also within.

It is the presence of that high heaven within our own selves that is responsible for our unending longing for a satisfaction not in this world. We often hear it said, “The kingdom of heaven is within you,” but we know very well that no kingdom can be inside a person. Yet, in a very important sense, it is present. The whole macrocosm, the entire creation, the whole world, is inside every particle of sand. The brahmanda is in the pindanda. All that we expect can be realised just here, at the very spot that we are seated. Desires are futile adventures in this world. The sense organs deceive us at every moment. The mind is a deceptive friend. It always connives with the sense organs, telling us that our sources of satisfaction are outside. There is no outside in this world. It is an inclusiveness that is pervasiveness that is this world. Therefore, wherever you are, in whatever condition you are placed, whatever be the work that you are performing, whatever be the duty with which you are entrusted under the circumstances you are placed in life, be happy. Never make a complaint. Never curse. Never say something is bad, evil, ugly: “I don’t like it.” Such a statement should not be made by a really worthwhile spiritual aspirant who sincerely seeks God, because that seeking of God is the seeking of the real value of things, and a real value cannot be something totally outside us, because a thing that is entirely outside cannot be reached by us.

Where is the ladder that will connect us from this low Earth to the high heaven? What are the rungs of the ladder through which we have to climb to that God, who is so high above us? There must be something to connect us with that high heaven. What is that link? That link is nothing but our own selves. In the various gradations of our ascent we will find that we ourselves, in the various levels of expressions of our personality, become ladders for the higher ascent to the Supreme Being. The God who is far, far away in the highest heaven is very, very near, inside, in the very root of the recesses of our thought.

God Himself climbs from His own lower pedestal of manifestation, which is this world and body, to Himself in the highest heaven that we speak of. A big drama is played. A great enactment is taking place in the form of this creation. God plays with
Himself. *Reme rameśo vraja-sundarībhīr yathārbhakaḥ sva-pratibimba vibhramaḥ* (Bhagavata 10.33.16) is a little passage in the Srimad Bhagavata: God plays with this world as a child plays with its own faces seen in the mirrors that are placed before itself. God is dancing in the form of this world; therefore, we, as gopis participating in the eternal Krishna, are to participate in this eternal dance, which is our cooperation with this central soul of the cosmos, which is within us, outside us, and is what we call the soul of a thing, the spirit of a thing, the value of a thing, the meaning of a thing, or life itself. Minus that, there is no life.

The desire to live, to plant life in a thing, is the desire to plant God in that particular thing. The fear of death and the love of life is actually the love of God that we are entertaining within our own selves and the abhorrence of the absence of God. That we permanently fear death and always seek deathlessness is an indication that death is not our essential nature. Deathless is our essential nature, and therefore, in this very world of utter destruction and death there is that supreme deathlessness, not merely pervading as an extraneous force but existing as our very soul. The highest above is also the deepest below. The God of heaven is the soul of the human being, and so there is hope. Good days are coming. Be happy.