Part I

Before We Begin

For each person the circumstances will be different. The question beneath them may be the same.

What am I here on earth for?

No one can answer that question on another's behalf. It cannot finally be settled by borrowing another person's conviction, however noble, nor by accepting an idea because it has survived the centuries, gathered authority, or acquired intellectual persuasion. At some point the question ceases to be philosophical and becomes personal. It asks not what we believe about life, but what kind of life we are willing to live.

This book begins there.

It begins with the possibility that human beings may be capable of more than the gradual refinement of knowledge, skill and personality; that consciousness itself may possess depths and possibilities that have scarcely begun to be explored; and that what we ordinarily call the human being may be less a finished achievement than a being still in the midst of becoming.

For thousands of years, in different civilisations and through very different languages of experience, human beings have turned inward in search of that possibility. They have explored silence, meditation, prayer, contemplation, self-knowledge, devotion, discipline and the mysterious regions of consciousness that lie beyond the ordinary movements of thought, desire and sensation. Their discoveries form one of humanity's great inheritances. Yet much of that inheritance remains scattered, separated by culture, language and history, while the modern world has developed another extraordinary stream of knowledge through science, technology and the exploration of the external universe.

Perhaps the time has come for these two great movements of human discovery to begin speaking to one another.

For if consciousness can deepen, then everything through which human life expresses itself acquires another possibility. Learning may become more than the accumulation of information. Work may become more than livelihood. Leadership may become more than the exercise of authority. Relationship may become more than exchange between separate selves. Even civilisation itself may be understood not simply as the structures humanity builds around life, but as one of the ways in which consciousness discovers what it is capable of becoming.

The extraordinary powers developed through science, reason, creativity and collective endeavour are part of the great human adventure. The question is whether these powers can be joined by an equally deliberate development of the consciousness that uses them.

For perhaps the deepest unfinished work of our species is not outside us. Perhaps it is within. And if that is so, then conscious evolution is more than an interesting possibility. It may become one of the central responsibilities of being human. The journey that follows is an exploration of that possibility.

The journey asks for something more demanding and more intimate: the willingness to look again at what we have assumed ourselves to be, to examine the consciousness from which we live, and to entertain the possibility that evolution has not finished with us.

The purpose, then, is recognition. Perhaps somewhere within these pages a question will meet a question that has been waiting within you. An idea may illuminate something you have experienced but never quite understood. Perhaps something will resist you, and that resistance itself will prove worth listening to. For the deepest journeys do not always begin when we discover an answer. Sometimes they begin when we become unable to ignore a question.

Purna

Purna is a Sanskrit word signifying fullness, wholeness and completeness. Here it names a School for Conscious Evolution dedicated to the disciplined exploration of Reality, the transformation of consciousness, and the creative renewal of human life and civilisation.

Purna begins from a simple conviction: humanity is not a finished species. The evolution of consciousness can become a conscious participation, and that participation need not end with the transformation of the individual. It can enter work, relationship, leadership, institutions and civilisation.

Purna is a **cosmology of participation**. It does not ask us to withdraw from the unfinished world, but to discover how consciousness can participate in its transformation.

Inspired by the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Purna holds inner transformation and outer transformation as movements of one evolutionary adventure. Its concern is therefore neither personal fulfilment alone nor social change alone, but the emergence of human beings capable of contributing consciously to what humanity may yet become.

What follows is an exploration of that possibility. **Let us begin.**