



Integral Yoga Psychology

In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, and in his voluminous correspondence with his disciples collected under the title *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo laid out the psychological principles and practices of the Integral Yoga. The aim of the yoga is to enable the individual who undertakes it to attain conscious identity with the One Reality, the Self, and to transform the mind, life, and body so they would become fit instruments for a divine life on earth. This spiritual discipline is long and difficult and is not meant for everyone; to achieve its ultimate aims requires an entire devotion of one's life to it.

The Integral Yoga utilizes various yogic practices of India's cultural heritage and synthesizes them with its own unique methods, however, there is no one set method or practice that its practitioners follow. Certain broad guidelines have been provided, several basic approaches have been described, and many specific practices and techniques have been suggested. But for each individual who undertakes this discipline, the specific path will differ. The reasons for this are twofold. The first is that the goals of this yoga can be achieved only through the guidance and power and action of the Divine Mother, the Consciousness and Force of the Supreme. The Divine Mother uses many methods and the circumstances of life flexibly with a wisdom and subtle precision impossible in a rigid programme. The second reason is that each individual presents unique characteristics, possibilities, and obstacles that can only be taken into account by the Divine Consciousness that sees and holds all things in its total regard.

The central guiding principle of this yoga is a complete surrender to the Divine Mother. It is the Mother alone who can transform and divinise our ignorant, stumbling human consciousness and life. Elaborating on this central principle, Sri Aurobindo has characterized the discipline to be followed as a “triple labor of aspiration, rejection, and surrender.” Aspiration means the sustained call of the individual to the Supreme to take possession of the ego-centered and limited surface being. Rejection involves separating oneself and withdrawing from all wrong movements that contradict or conflict with the aims of the yoga. Together, the force of aspiration and the rejection of the obstacles in the nature work to effect a sincere and true surrender of all the parts of the being to the Divine Power. In proportion to the completeness of this surrender, the individual will feel the Divine taking up the being and working in it, substituting and pouring into it its own higher powers of peace, wisdom, harmony, force, beauty, and delight.

There are several basic approaches within which these three practices may be embedded or with which they may be harmonized. The first of these approaches is the yoga of works, and here



works has a broad significance that includes all one's actions external and internal. Its central character is that all one's actions are to be done as an offering to the Divine and no longer for the personal satisfaction of the ego or even for the benefit of a greater social purpose. Through this offering—which progressively must expand to the extent that this remembrance of the Divine and inner self-offering become the constant state of the being—the inner contact with the Divine grows increasingly close and entire. As this inner communion develops, one's actions begin to be felt as being originated, guided, inspired, and even executed by the Divine, eventually one feels oneself simply to be a pure channel for the outflow of a divine action.

The second approach is the yoga of knowledge. Here the central process is a drawing back of the true divine Self from its false identification with the limited personal ego, as well as a drawing back from identification with the superficial movements of mind, and life, and body. Here Sri Aurobindo capitalizes on a fundamental distinction in our conscious existence, that between the conscious, witnessing being or spirit, the Purusha, and the workings of the nature, Prakriti. In this approach, the Purusha disengages itself first from the body, observing its workings silently as a witness but not identifying with them. Subsequently, the Purusha separates itself in a similar manner from the action of the life-energy and the mind. After this separation of the Purusha from the Prakriti has been achieved, there remains a vague, elusive sense of “I,” an essential ego-sense. This sense of “I” also must be eliminated through a constant denial of its fundamental reality, and through a “constant fixing of the thought on the idea of the One and Infinite in itself or the One and Infinite everywhere.” These processes change first the mental outlook on oneself, which in turn deepens into a spiritual realisation in the substance of the being.

A third approach to the Divine is through the yoga of love and devotion. Here it is the emotional nature that is to be turned entirely towards the Divine Being in a movement of devotion, love, and self-giving. The Supreme is not only an impersonal abstraction or state of existence, but is capable of varied relations with its conscious individualities manifested in the infinity of its being. The Supreme can be viewed and approached as the Master of our existence, as our Father, Mother, Friend, Guide, Lover. The heart of this approach is the progressive development of a personal relation or relations with the Divine, in which the Divine is brought into close and frequent relation, gradually developing into a constant and increasingly intense and intimate relation. The crown of this movement is the delight of conscious union with the Supreme Beloved.

A fourth approach is through what Sri Aurobindo has called the yoga of self-perfection. This approach has elements in common with the others, because to perfect the nature it is necessary to disengage the Self from the ego and the outer nature, and to become receptive to the action of the Divine Mother who alone can effect this change. The first need is to purify the various parts of the mental, vital, and physical nature. Each part has a particular function in the overall expression of the spirit in the outer nature. Ordinarily, however, the various parts of the nature



do not keep to their proper role, but become intermixed and confused with the others. Purification is to become aware of the complex elements of the nature, and to put this confused action into order. In addition, the various elements of the being must be developed and uplifted beyond their ordinary action and abilities and raised to their highest possibilities. As part of this elevation, the yoga of self-perfection includes in its scope the development of the higher reaches of the mind beyond the intellect—the higher mind, illumined mind, intuition, and Overmind. As the consciousness successively ascends to each higher level, their greater lights and powers are brought down to enlighten and change the lower nature. Ascending beyond even the Overmind, one enters the supramental consciousness, an entirely divine consciousness and omnipotent force, which alone can entirely transform and perfect the outer nature.

These four basic approaches constitute the main lines of spiritual discipline of the Integral Yoga. Each of the four feeds into the others and assists in their development and perfection. Depending on the individual, one or another approach may be emphasized in the beginning, but eventually all are developed so as to include all the parts of the nature in the inner realisation and the outer transformation of the being. For the principle of the Integral Yoga is that all the parts of the nature participate in the Divine Consciousness and Delight and express this divinity in a transformed outer life.