

## THE ULTIMATE UNIFYING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE IN THE INTEGRAL PHILOSOPHY OF SRI AUROBINDO

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The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo is 'truly integral' as it reveals the subtle associations between all that is known and beyond, the animate and inanimate, the human and the Divine and seeks to unify them in an undiminished entirety. This philosophy describes the ultimate unifying principle of life that transcends the universe, which is the utmost or extreme reality to physical science. It is revelatory of the integral purpose of existence which humanity has perennially been in search of and is integrally transformative in its approach towards attainment of the purpose. The philosophy forms the basis of an Integral Yoga which takes all life to be yoga unlike other systems of yoga which are exclusive pursuits for uniting with the Divine. The Integral Philosophy resolves and reconciles all dualities of our existence as an Integral Knowledge becomes the basis for arriving at an essential unity in all existence.

### **A Unifying Principle that Transcends the Universe**

Sri Aurobindo's Integral Philosophy describes a unifying principle of life which transcends the world and even the universe known to us as the only reality and entails integration of the Unmanifest and the Manifest, Spirit and Matter, the Being and the Becoming, the One and the Many, the consciousness of the Individual and the Divine.

### **Integral View of Spirit and Matter as the Unmanifest and the Manifest**

Sri Aurobindo awakens us to the fact that humanity has since time immemorial aspired for "*God, Light, Freedom and Immortality*". This is possible only through manifestation of the Divine in the human. To the human mind such reconciliation between matter and spirit is inconceivable though to the mystic vision of the Upanishads and of Sri Aurobindo the two are indivisible. But until the rationalist mind comes to terms with this idea of oneness and the possibility of the reconciliation of the two, it will not be able to make a conscious progress for realizing divinity within the being and the idea of a Divine life

upon earth will remain unrealized. If we consider only pure spirit as real, the world becomes an illusion. If we are lost in *Prakriti* and become occupied in worldly activities as reality we will end up denying God. But the nature of the mind is to view and understand things separately, only after which it becomes capable of seeing them integrally. Hence the consonance of the two needs to be effectuated under experiential enlightenment. This entails testing each separately by experiencing it to the limits of its possibility. The West has experimented with matter to the extreme and experienced both the positive and negative results. The East has engrossed itself with realizing the spirit but has ended up with only personal salvation at the cost of breaking up earthly ties. It will not be inapt to say that both have come out with the conclusion that an isolated pursuit of matter or the spirit is insufficient to fulfill the eternal aspirations of humanity. It is only after this realization that the mind can rise to a state of higher consciousness from where it is able to get an integral view of spirit and matter and hence achieve a luminous reconciliation of the two. Sri Aurobindo's writings enlighten us that we are capable of grasping that Reality, that unity and integration of Spirit and Matter, the integral existence of Unmanifest and Manifest, by rising to a supramental truth consciousness. We will then be able to experience the original calm and passivity of the Unmanifest Brahman in our own life, enabling our ultimate perfection in this Manifest existence and the realization of our cherished aspirations.

### **Integral view of Being, Becoming and Being in Becoming**

According to Sri Aurobindo, there are three aspects of the Divine. There is Being, Becoming, and Being in Becoming. Being is the essential spiritual nature of the Divine who is the Supreme Truth, Consciousness, Bliss i.e., Sat-Chit-Ananda. Becoming is universal existence i.e. life and Nature. Being in Becoming is the spirit in life and Nature. In terms of time we can say that there is timelessness, time, and timelessness in time. Timelessness is of the Being, time is of the Becoming, and timelessness in time is of Being in Becoming. The consciousness present in the above three aspects is the transcendental consciousness, the cosmic consciousness and individual consciousness respectively. By ascending in consciousness we can discover the Being in Becoming i.e., the spirit within, and in every object and life surrounding us. The mental consciousness of the individual has to grow cosmic to interpret its right relation with the Universal in which it exists. We have to realize the one

universal consciousness, of which our consciousness is a manifestation for the play of a smaller act in the play of the larger work of the transcendental purpose. When one discovers the true individual self by discovering one's soul, one is also able to see and fulfill one's universal and transcendental purpose. It is in the supramental consciousness, that the three can be seen as unified. This consciousness has the knowledge of the multiplicity and the knowledge of the Oneness simultaneously, because it is the reconciling consciousness. In the cosmic consciousness, there is no disharmony, no duality and no conflicting contraries; and so it can become the basis for an absolute synthesis of all opinions, views and beliefs.

### **Integral View of the One and the Many**

The reality intelligible to the mind is life and its multi-forms of existence but our reasoning intellect fails to make out a definitive pattern and purpose for the reason of their being and the relation between them in context of the happenings and occurrences that dominate, influence and surround life. An Integral knowledge brings us to the reality that Brahman is the One; nothing else exists. It is the Absolute and the relative; the corporeal and incorporeal. This Reality exceeds all definitions of mind and is the supreme knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo gives us the basic law of the movement of existence when he writes,

“That law is that all things are one in their being and origin, one in their general law of existence, one in their interdependence and the universal pattern of their relations; but each realises this unity of purpose and being on its own lines and has its own law of variation by which it enriches the universal existence.” (*The Human Cycle, Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo [CWSA], Vol. 25, p. 63*)

The beautiful aspect is that the Oneness is not imposed on the individual but has to come with a gradual self-realization. Groups or individuals aid one another on this path by support or even through opposition. The individual grows in the highest pursuits of wisdom, strength, harmony and perfection towards a stage where there would be no impulse or need to assert one's individuality since the ideal of One for All and All for One will have been realized. Hence we get an insight into the movement of Nature which is integrative and unifying and is trying its best to harmonize and integrate the human stuff at its disposal.



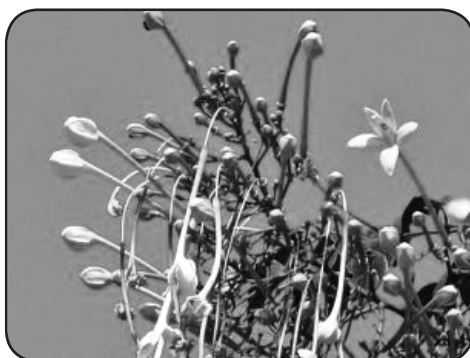
*Consciousness One with the Divine Consciousness*  
Photo credit: [www.blossomlikeaflower.com](http://www.blossomlikeaflower.com)

### **Integral View of the Individual and the Divine Consciousness**

The ordinary existence of a human being is an egoistic consciousness which associates itself with mind, life and body as the "I". Almost all of us live in a surface consciousness and so are oblivious of the integrality of our being. The role of the individual is significant as it is a focused concentration directed towards its own growth; with the development being conserved from birth to birth. The mode of development of the mass as a whole would be a comparatively slower process. According to Sri Aurobindo, "[b]y detaching himself from all identification with mind, life and body, he can get back from his ego to the consciousness of the true Individual, the Jivatman, who is the real possessor of mind, life and body." (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23-24, p. 409) Jivatman is a portion of the Divine, the real Self that upholds the soul-form for a play of the transcendent and the universal. Once the realization of the real Self comes, one can become a conscious contributor towards the development of one's own individual being, thus aiding Nature's yoga. The yoga of the individual is a seeking to merge the individual consciousness with the Divine consciousness.

In the Divine reality - the source of all creation, the essence of all being, there is an original integral consciousness, reflected as unity, wholeness, perfection, and infinity of knowledge. In the emergence of the Universe from a Divine source i.e., in the process of involution, the original integral consciousness and knowledge became oblivious of its luminosity and turned into inconscience and ignorance. Since all the higher potentialities are only latent in the inconscient, there is also a reverse process, process of evolution which basically is an evolution of consciousness at each step of the ladder. The same steps are taken backwards and we witness the subconscious rising

from the inconscient, the conscient from the subconscious with further possibilities of the superconscient rising from the conscient. The limited consciousness of an individual cannot widen and heighten itself on its own but if it so intends and deeply aspires, is lent a helping hand by a greater consciousness which is transformative and integrative. Sri Aurobindo indicates that for a recovery of our essential whole reality, "There must be a replacement of a limited and separative by an essential and integral consciousness identified with the original truth and the whole truth of self and existence." (*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21-22, p. 659) This will enable us to shed our divided nature by perceiving the unity and oneness of all things and developing a truer view of life. The things that appear to the limited consciousness as being in opposition will appear as true complements and perfectly reconcilable.



*Transformation, the goal of creation*  
 Photo credit: [www.blossomlikeflower.com](http://www.blossomlikeflower.com)

## **A Revelatory and Transformative Philosophy**

The Integral Philosophy reveals the integral purpose of existence which is not to involve oneself in exclusive pursuits of materialism and individualism but to grow in spirit and possess an equal concern for all else and all others. Sri Aurobindo does not leave us here with this wisdom but goes further to provide insight on how this may be achieved, bringing to light the need for an integral transformation of consciousness.

### **The Integral Purpose of Existence**

Man as a mental being is unable to see the integral purpose of existence. Even if one makes an effort at it, one arrives at something like 'this worldly' and 'the other worldly' and hence subscribes either to the materialist or to the ascetic view. This leads to a denial of either spirit or matter because these two

entities seem too contradictory to support any progress if simultaneously recognized by the reasoning mind. The materialist has over the past years met with tremendous success in science and technology but it is also amply clear that until and unless an individual grows in truth and goodness on the inside and realises a connection with the entire existence, all prized inventions are sure to spell disaster and bring doom to humanity. Without a proper understanding of the purpose of our being we can only foresee a future of dissatisfaction, strife, vanity, insecurity and crisis. Sri Aurobindo enlightens us about the integral purpose of our being when he writes,

“Man is there to affirm himself in the universe, that is his first business, but also to evolve and finally to exceed himself: he has to enlarge his partial being into a complete being, his partial consciousness into an integral consciousness; he has to achieve mastery of his environment but also world-union and world-harmony; he has to realise his individuality but also to enlarge it into a cosmic self and a universal and spiritual delight of existence.” (ibid., p. 711)

The thought is sublime because though its context is the development of the individual, it has no room for even a grain of low consciousness or an egoistic pursuit. Virtue and consideration for ‘the other’ is inherent in the agenda for man to surpass himself.

### **Integral Transformation of Consciousness**

The problems and evils of the world spring from a divided consciousness which results in a wrong knowledge, a wrong will and wrong doing. To come out of the inconscience and ignorance Sri Aurobindo is for a total change of consciousness and a radical change of nature. He writes,

“[T]his change must consist in an integration, a healing of the divided consciousness of our being, and since that division is complex and many-sided, no partial change on one side of the being can be passed off as a sufficient substitute for the integral transformation.” (ibid., p. 651)

For the realization to be complete, all of the being and nature must be included and transformed. A lower consciousness perceives the separateness and opposition of things. It is with a higher consciousness, that we are able to see the mutuality, necessity, and unity. We realize that we are not only an individual being, but a world being; an eternal individual capable of transcending all limitations of unconsciousness, ego, division and ignorance. Sri Aurobindo writes, “An integral consciousness will become the basis of

an entire harmonization of life through the total transformation, unification, integration of the being and the nature." (ibid., p. 753) A transformation of consciousness will enable us to rise above the vital-mental consciousness to a psychic or spiritual consciousness where one finds that the individual exists in the Transcendent which itself is concealed in the individual. The soul which comes in contact with the transcendent gets the realization that all is in each and each is in all, all is in God and God is all.

### **A Philosophy to Resolve All Dualities of Life**

A reasoning intellect fails to decipher the cause behind the happenings and occurrences that dominate, influence and surround our life. We are met with dualities at each step of our lives. The integration of dualities such as knowledge and ignorance, pleasure and pain, positive and negative, good and evil, truth and falsehood, happiness and suffering forms the basis for a greater wisdom and ascension. Sri Aurobindo brings a fresh outlook to our accustomed way of thought when he writes,

"in the duality of pleasure and pain, we have seen that pain is a contrary effect of the one delight of existence resulting from the weakness of the recipient, his inability to assimilate the force that meets him, his incapacity to bear the touch of delight that would otherwise be felt in it; it is a perverse reaction of Consciousness to Ananda, not itself a fundamental opposite of Ananda: this is shown by the significant fact that pain can pass into pleasure and pleasure into pain and both resolve into the original Ananda." (ibid., p. 515)

Such reconciliation cannot be realized with an objective view of things but by recognizing the self and all that is; as expression of a greater existence. When we perceive the true nature of the Reality we resolve the contradictions, divisions, and dualities of life; overcome our divided nature and thereby fulfill our human aspiration.

### **The Integral Yoga that Integrates all Systems of Yoga and the Entire Life**

Yoga is the pursuit of integrating the being with the Divine. Each school of yoga selects a different aspect of the being for coming in contact with the divine. Hathayoga uses the body and the vital; Rajayoga, uses the mind; *karma* yoga, *bhakti* yoga, *jnana* yoga use some part of the mental being i.e., will, heart, or intellect. Sri Aurobindo says, "*All life is Yoga*" which means that we ought to consciously take up everything around us that we come

across in life as an opportunity and a field to raise ourselves in consciousness. Yoga according to him is not an activity or pursuit divorced from the routine and petty looking activities of life. A sadhaka of integral yoga must conquer forces of ego, falsehood and disorder in the world as well as in the self and has to harmonize knowledge, will, and emotion. According to Sri Aurobindo, "It is the method of an integral God realisation, an integral self-realisation, an integral fulfillment of the being, an integral transformation and perfection of the nature". (*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 357-358) The way for the integral yoga is a surrender of the whole being to the Divine so that the whole nature is changed into the divine nature. The highest stage of surrender is to become a living instrument of the Divine. Integral yoga seeks to put the whole conscious being into contact with the Divine and call Him in to transform us with his *Shakti*. By doing this the yoga becomes the self-fulfillment of the *Purusha* through his Energy. All of our nature is used, nothing is rejected. The divine power uses all life with its experiences to divinise the physical, vital and mental aspects of the being.



*Integral Harmony*

*Photo credit: www.blossomlikeaflower.com*

### **An Integral Knowledge, the Basis for Achieving Unity in All Existence**

Sri Aurobindo views all problems of existence as arising out of the ignorance of the inherent unity in things, the forgotten Oneness which is the eternal reality. Sri Aurobindo observes, "For all problems of existence are essentially problems of harmony. They arise from the perception of an unsolved discord and the instinct of an undiscovered agreement or unity."



(*The Life Divine*, CWSA, Vol. 21-22, p. 4) Unity is indispensable to progress, be it unity within the self, unity in a family, an organization, an institution, or a community. Unity comes with a common aim and purpose. Real progress comes through focusing on the central aim and being guided by it, rather than seeking contentment in an egoistic identity. Sri Aurobindo sets before humanity the highest possible aim of a spiritual realization through a revolutionary self effort rather than going through a gradual process of evolution. As one grows in Integral Knowledge one is able to realize the integrality of one's being with the One and its multiplicity. Sri Aurobindo's writes,

"This is the characteristic of the integral knowledge that it unifies all in Sachchidananda because not only is Being one in itself, but it is one everywhere, in all its poises and in every aspect, in its utmost appearance of multiplicity as in its utmost appearance of oneness."  
(*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 23-24, p. 419)

## Conclusion

The Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo weaves out a magnificent fabric out of the smallest grains of matter and strands of life, each contributing to the beauty of the 'entire'; nothing is left out, each is carefully harmonized with the other, finally revealing the divine scheme and intent. We belong to the universe in time and space, and to the transcendent in eternity, yet have been given the freedom and opportunity to discover our unity and integrality. Sri Aurobindo's philosophy unites humanity with inanimate matter, the environment, cultures, nations, the whole world, the entire universe and even the transcendent. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy ushers forth an integral idealism that is realizable, as the fundamental spiritual principles of existence that reflect the One Being, such as peace, power, knowledge, goodness, truth, beauty, love, joy, delight, creativity etc., reflect as practical values in life experienced as influence from the psychic presence within. Sri Aurobindo dispels all doubts of the impossibility of such unity and integration when he says,

"Love is the keynote, Joy is the music, Power is the strain, Knowledge is the performer, the Infinite All is the composer and audience. We know only the preliminary discords which are as fierce as the harmony shall be great; but we shall arrive surely at the fugue of the divine Beatitudes." (*Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, p. 204)

## References

1. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry: 1997.
2. Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, CWSA, Vol. 25, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry: 1997.
3. Sri Aurobindo, *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, CWSA, Vol. 13, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry: 1998.
4. Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga* CWSA, Vol. 23-24, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry: 1999.
5. Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine* CWSA, Vol. 21-22, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry: 2005.

### **The Cosmic Spirit**

*Sri Aurobindo*

I am a single Self all Nature fills.  
Immeasurable, unmoved the Witness sits:  
He is the silence brooding on her hills,  
The circling motion of her cosmic might.

I have broken the limits of embodied mind  
And am no more the figure of a soul.  
The burning galaxies are in me outlined;  
The universe is my stupendous whole.

My life is the life of village and continent,  
I am earth's agony and her throbs of bliss;  
I share all creatures' sorrow and content  
And feel the passage of every stab and kiss.

Impassive, I bear each act and thought and mood;  
Time traverses my hushed infinitude.

element left untouched, no movement left unpurified. Every moment and every movement is offered at the altar of the Sacrificial Fire, Agni, to be transmuted into its Divine counterpart.

6. **Collective and not Individual Achievement Alone:** The aim of this Yoga is not only individual perfection and realization for the sake of the individual, "but something to be gained for the earth consciousness here." This transformation is impossible through individual solitary transformation unconcerned with the work of the earth. "Also, no individual human being can by his own power alone work out the transformation, nor is it the object of the yoga to create an individual superman here and there. The object of the yoga is to bring down the Supramental consciousness on earth, to fix it there, to create a new race with the principle of the Supramental consciousness governing the inner and outer individual and collective life. That force accepted by individual after individual according to their preparation would establish the Supramental consciousness in the physical world and so create a nucleus for its own expansion." (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, p. 14)

These are some of the central themes discussed in Sri Aurobindo's major works. It can be seen that all the tenets proposed are novel and radical and any attempt to practise them is akin to a spiritual adventure for they have never been attempted before. They have been revealed to the humankind for the first time in the spiritual history of the world. To know them and to aspire to live them is a matter of rare honour and privilege, a direct action of the Grace of the Divine!

By studying carefully what Sri Aurobindo has said on *all subjects* one can easily reach a complete knowledge of the things of this world.

THE MOTHER  
CWM, Volume 13, p. 24