
UNIT 4 INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

Contents

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 The Term: Integral
- 4.3 Integrality Of Life
- 4.4 Integral Psychology
- 4.5 Aspects Of Being According To Integral World-View
- 4.6 Types Of Being
- 4.7 Relevance Of Integral World-View
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Further Readings and References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

- To appreciate the integral nature of reality according to Aurobindo.
- To realize the differences at the levels of beings and to know that these beings with their individual differences are evolving towards the Supermind.
- To know the basic insight of Aurobindo that we are all related to each other and still one.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to understand the integral world-view developed by Aurobindo, we first try to clarify the terms. Then we approach integral psychology and aspect of being. Finally, we speak of the relevance of an integral world-view for our contemporary times.

4.2 THE TERM: INTEGRAL

The term “Integral” is applied to a wide-ranging set of developments in philosophy, psychology, religious thought, and other areas that seek interdisciplinary and comprehensive frameworks. The term is often combined with others such as approach, consciousness, culture, paradigm, philosophy, society, theory, and worldview. Major themes of this range of philosophies and teachings include a synthesis of science and religion, evolutionary spirituality, and holistic programs of development for the body, mind, soul, and spirit. In some versions of integral spirituality, integration is seen to necessarily include the three domains of self, culture, and nature (IP 2011).

Integral thinkers draw inspiration from the work of Sri Aurobindo, Teilhard De Chardin and others (Pandikattu 2006). Some individuals affiliated with integral spirituality have claimed that there exists a loosely-defined "Integral movement". The adjective integral was first used in a spiritual context by Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) from 1914 onwards to describe his own spiritual teachings, which he referred to as Purna ("Full") Yoga. It appeared in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, a book that was first published in serial form in the journal *Arya* and was revised several times since. Sri Aurobindo's work has been described as Integral Vedanta, Integral Psychology (a term coined by Indra Sen) and Psychotherapy that emerges from it. His writings influenced others who used the term "integral" in more philosophical or psychological contexts (IP 2011).

As described by Sri Aurobindo and his co-worker The Mother (1878–1973), this spiritual teaching involves an integral divine transformation of the entire being, rather than the liberation of only a single faculty such as the intellect or the emotions or the body. According to Sri Aurobindo, “the Divine is in his essence infinite and his manifestation too is multitudinously infinite. If that is so, it is not likely that our true integral perfection in being and in nature can come by one kind of realisation alone; it must combine many different strands of divine experience. It cannot be reached by the exclusive pursuit of a single line of identity till that is raised to its absolute; it must harmonise many aspects of the Infinite. An integral consciousness with a multiform dynamic experience is essential for the complete transformation of our nature.” (Ghose 1992)

4.3 INTEGRALITY OF LIFE

To understand the “integrality” of wholeness of life, let us start with knowledge. Knowledge gathers by observation and experience. It becomes practically useful knowledge when a process of a thing is known, e.g. climbing a tree, drawing water from a well, speaking the first few words, art of writing, etc. At this stage, we see our practically useful knowledge is in proportion to our experience as the topography of a locality. A time comes when this partial knowledge becomes perfect knowledge or complete knowledge when the field of observation can be organised into a subject or a branch of science. At this time, the field reveals the laws governing it, not before and we become integral (Karmayogi 2001).

Random knowledge, however great the volume, will not allow itself to be reduced to laws. For the laws of a field to be extracted as the essence of the field, the observation must be complete or exhaustive. When a field exists in more than one plane, the laws cannot be perfectly known until the observation is exhausted in all the planes of existence. Life exists in the mental, vital, physical fields and their respective subtle planes. The spiritual plane cannot be fully excluded if one desires mastery, but as far as physical work is concerned, the direct involvement of the spiritual plane may be excluded, if it is represented by the work values that are spiritual. The Laws of Life Response cannot be seen unless and until life is seen functioning at those points. The greatness of life and its integrality lies in the fact that those great touches are there in ALL acts, small or great, however crudely they reveal themselves. The crudeness is in our perception, not in their revelation. From this point of view, a few conclusions are drawn.

General observation of life, however wide, can only give a random knowledge of Life Response. It can be interesting, cannot be final, cannot conclusively reveal the laws and confirm them. An observation of life, an analysis of events in all planes of its existence is a sine qua non for one who endeavours to lay his hands on these laws. The clue, the key, lies in those subtle points where energy spills over from one field to another, often appearing to be an unconnected vagary, occasionally contradicting the laws. To see such points of contradiction as confirmation is the index for complete understanding. A further point, maybe the most important one, is to render this knowledge useful for evoking life response or to make Life Respond as we intend. Should we do so, he who does it gains mastery over life.

As Sri Aurobindo has detailed in The Life Divine the theory of creation and its process, all these laws are pronounced there abundantly. Over thirty years they have been ‘documented’ after a fashion enough to confirm the understanding. As this is a minor version of the Master’s philosophy, it may not evoke a great response from His disciples. For the layman, it has a

twofold advantage of mastering one's own life and being introduced to His philosophy. A painstaking analysis of events of life, coupled with a study of historical events and events in literature that reveal these laws will be of great interest to the general reader. Obviously there is no use for detailing the laws which may offer a good theoretical knowledge which may not go beyond the first reading (Karmayogi 2001).

The integral view

According to the integral view, there is the Divine Reality which manifests itself as the universe. The universe is a system of planes or worlds, supra-terrestrial and terrestrial. The earth-life is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the Divine Reality. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through contradictions and perplexities. To discover the Divine Reality and to work for its full manifestation in physical life is the integral aim of life. All life must be accepted, but all life must be transformed by the highest divine light and power.

4.4 INTEGRAL PSYCHOLOGY

Sri Aurobindo never used the term "Integral Psychology"; the term was coined in the 1940s by Indra Sen, a devotee of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who established the field of Integral Psychology, based on Sri Aurobindo's teachings, as referred earlier (IP 2011). A further interpretation of Integral Psychology was developed, although not in detail, in the 1970s by Haridas Chaudhuri, a student of Sri Aurobindo, who postulated a triadic principle of uniqueness, relatedness and transcendence, corresponding to the personal, interpersonal and transpersonal domains of human existence. According to Brant Cortright, of the California Institute of Integral Studies, Integral Psychology is born through the synthesis of Sri Aurobindo's teachings with the findings of depth psychology. He presents Integral Psychology as a synthesis of the two major streams of depth psychology – the humanistic-existential and contemporary-psychoanalytic – within an integrating east-west framework.

4.5 ASPECTS OF BEING ACCORDING TO INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

Sri Aurobindo conceives of human psychology, indeed, of the entire cosmos, as having two major types of distinctions or dimensions. The faculties ascend in a "vertical" fashion, from the subconscious to the higher, transpersonal realms. At the same time, he distinguishes between the Outer being, the Inner being, and the other similarly "concentric" dimensions. The terms vertical and concentric are metaphors for the purpose of visualization and are not meant to be taken literally (IP 2011).

Subconscious

On Aurobindo's psychology, the subconscious is part of our inner consciousness. We are not conscious of its workings. It is influenced by the matter of which our bodies are composed. It is the support of our fear, pessimism, fixed habits, illness, decay and death.

Physical

The Physical faculty or part of the being, refers not just to the physical body, but the body's consciousness as well. The body is just as conscious as the vital and mental parts of the being,

only it is a different type of consciousness. As with the other faculties or principles of the being, in Sri Aurobindo's psychology, the Physical can be subdivided into finer sub-grades, such as the mental physical, the vital physical, and so on. One does not find the distinction of non-conscious body and conscious mind that characterises Western thought.

In Sri Aurobindo's reading of the Taittiriya Upanishad, the physical being (or perhaps just the Physical Purusha) is the *anna-maya-atma* - the self made of food.

- The Inner physical - the physical component of the inner being, which is wider and more plastic than the outer physical body. This is also called the subtle physical
- The True physical being is the Purusha of the physical level, which is like the Inner Physical larger than the surface body consciousness and in touch with the a larger spiritual consciousness.
- The Mental Physical (similar to the Physical Mind - see "Mental")
- The Vital Physical or Nervous Being (which seems to be equivalent to the Etheric body of western esotericism, and hence pertains to one of the subtle bodies)
- The Physical Proper or pure body consciousness, which represents the consciousness of the external physical body itself.

Like the other principles of man, the Physical not only shades upwards to higher ontological levels, but also downwards into the Subconscious, which equates to the Subconscious or Lower Unconscious, although Sri Aurobindo asserts that the Subconscious includes much more than the unconscious of (Freudian) psychology. And like all the faculties of the being, the Physical in all its aspects has to be transformed and spiritualised through the practice of Integral Yoga.

Subtle physical

The Subtle physical is Sri Aurobindo's term for a subtler aspect of the physical nature. This has many qualities not found in the gross physical nature. In *The Agenda*, Mother often refers to it. It might be compared to the etheric body and plane, or even the astral body and plane. The term "subtle physical" to distinguish from gross (*sthula*) or outer material physical (IP 2011). So Aurobindo says: "By the gross physical is meant the earthly and bodily physical - as experienced by the outward sense-mind and senses. But that is not the whole of Matter. There is a subtle physical also with a subtler consciousness in it which can, for instance, go to a distance from the body and yet feel and be aware of things in a not merely mental or vital way." He adds: "...the subtle physical has a freedom, plasticity, intensity, power, colour, wide and manifold play (there are thousands of things there that are not here) of which, as yet, we have no possibility on earth" (Ghose 1969).

Vital

The Vital or Life faculty or part of the being, refers not simply to the life force as to the various passions, desires, feelings, emotions, affects, compulsions, and likes and dislikes that strongly determine human motivation and action through desire and enthusiasm. Unlike Western psychology, in which mind, emotions, instincts, and consciousness are all lumped together, Sri

Aurobindo strongly distinguishes between the "Vital" and the "Mental" faculties (IP 2011). In addition to the individual Vital faculty, Sri Aurobindo refers to a Vital Plane or Vital world.

Mental

The Mental faculty or part of the being, is the conceptual and cognitive mind. Unlike Western psychology, in which mind and consciousness are considered the same, Sri Aurobindo strongly distinguishes between the "Mental" and the "Vital" (emotional) faculties, as well as between Mind and pure Consciousness. Sri Aurobindo in part bases his concept of the Mental on his reading of the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, the mental being (or perhaps just the Mental *Purusha*) is the *mano-maya-atma* - the self made of mind or *manas*. For Sri Aurobindo, Mind or the Mental being is not simple and uniform, but consists itself of various strata and subdivisions, the whole contributing to an elaborate integral theory of psychology. These various faculties are described or variously referred to, usually in obliquely or in passing, in some of his books, including *Savitri*, which has poetic references to many types of Mind. In his letters answering questions from disciples, Sri Aurobindo summarises the characteristics of the various levels of Mind (Ghose 1969). These various Minds and Mental principles of being include:

- Higher Mind - the first and lowest of the spiritual mental grades, lying above the normal mental level.
- Spiritual Mind - either the spiritualised mind, or a general term for levels of mind above the normal mental level (the "Mind Proper").
- Inner mind - the mental component of the Inner Being, which lies behind the surface mind or ordinary consciousness and can only be directly experienced by *sadhana*.
- True mental being - is the *Purusha* of the mental level freed from the error and ignorance of the lower *Prakriti* and open to the knowledge and guidance above.
- Psychic Mind - a movement of the mind in which the Psychic Being predominates; the mind turned towards the Divine.
- Mind Proper - is threefold, consisting of Thinking Mind, dynamic Mind and externalising Mind. It constitutes the sum of one's thoughts, opinions, ideas, and values, which guide conscious thinking, conceptualizing and decision-making processes, and is transformed, widened, and spiritualised through the practice of Integral Yoga.
- Thinking Mind - the highest aspect of the mind proper, concerned with ideas and knowledge in their own right. It is equated with the *Ajna Chakra*.
- Dynamic Mind - that aspect of the ordinary mind that puts out of mental forces for realisation, acting by the idea and by reason. It is also equated with the *Ajna* or Brow center.
- Externalising Mind - the most "external" part of the mind proper, concerned with the expression of ideas in speech, in life, or in any form it can give.

- Vital Mind - a mediator between the vital emotions, desires, and so on the mental proper. It is limited by the vital view and feeling of things, and expresses the desires, feelings, ambitions, and other active tendencies of the vital in mental forms, such as daydreams and imaginations of greatness, happiness, and so on. As with the Externalising Mind, Sri Aurobindo associates it with the *Vishuddha* or Throat *Chakra*.
- Physical Mind - refers to either or both the Externalising Mind and the Mental in the Physical; it is limited to a physical or materialistic perspective, and cannot go beyond that, unless enlightened from above.
- Mind in the physical or mental physicalmentalises the experiences of outward life and things, sometimes very cleverly, but it does not go beyond that, unlike the externalising mind which deals with these things from the perspective of reason and its own higher intelligence.
- The Mechanical Mind is a much lower action of the mental physical which when left to itself can only repeat the same ideas and record the reflexes of the physical consciousness in its contact with outward life and things.
- Mind of Light, according to The Mother, is the Physical Mind receiving the supramental light and thus being able to act directly in the Physical. (IP 2011)

Higher levels of Mind

There are still higher levels of Mind, which includes Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, and Intuitive Mind. But we can refer to Overmind and Supermind here.

Overmind

Overmind is the plane of God. Overmental plane is the highest consciousness one can achieve without transcending the mental system. Beyond overmind are the planes of Supermind or unity-consciousness. A detailed description of the Overmind is provided in Book I ch.28, and Book II ch.26, of Sri Aurobindo's philosophical opus *The Life Divine* (IP 2011 & Ghose 1949).

Supermind

Supermind refers to the infinite unitary Truth Consciousness or Truth-Idea beyond the three lower planes of Matter, Life, and Mind. Supermind is the dynamic form of *Sachchidananda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss), and the necessary mediator or link between the transcendent Sachchidananda and the creation. (Ghose 1949)

4.6 TYPES OF BEING

There are different types of being or "concentric" divisions in Aurobindo's integral vision of philosophy.

The Outer Being

The Outer Being refers to the superficial and limited surface existence which characterises our everyday consciousness and experience. It includes a physical, vital, and mental aspect, and is also the location of the desire soul. In Integral Yoga it is necessary to go beyond the surface

consciousness to the larger life of the Inner Being, which is more open to spiritual realisation. Outer, Inner, and Innermost Being form a "concentric" sequence or hierarchy, which is a counterpart to the "vertical" hierarchy of Physical, Vital and Mental.

The Inner Being

The Inner Being is the wider and more plastic subliminal faculty of one's being, that lies behind the narrow surface consciousness. As with many contemporary thinkers, Sri Aurobindo speaks of larger and deeper potentials of human nature which can be contacted through spiritual discipline and higher states of consciousness (IP 2011). This Inner Being includes the inner realms or aspects of the physical, vital, and mental being, which here have a larger, subtler, freer consciousness than in the small outer mental, vital, and physical nature of everyday consciousness and experience, and its realisation is essential for any higher spiritual realisation. The Inner Being is also transitional between the surface or Outer Being and the Psychic Being, which is also for this reason known as the "Innmost Being". Outer, Inner, and Innermost Being form a "concentric" sequence or hierarchy, which is a counterpart to the "vertical" hierarchy of Physical, Vital, and Mental (IP 2011).

In the Master's own words: "There are always two different consciousnesses in the human being, one outward in which he ordinarily lives, the other inward and concealed of which he knows nothing. When one does *sadhana*, the inner consciousness begins to open and one is able to go inside and have all kinds of experiences there. As the *sadhana* progresses, one begins to live more and more in this inner being and the outer becomes more and more superficial. At first the inner consciousness seems to be the dream and the outer the waking reality. Afterwards the inner consciousness becomes the reality and the outer is felt by many as a dream or delusion, or else as something superficial and external. The inner consciousness begins to be a place of deep peace, light, happiness, love, closeness to the Divine or the presence of the Divine, the Mother. One is then aware of two consciousnesses, the inner one and the outer which has to be changed into its counterpart and instrument-that also must become full of peace, light, union with the Divine. At present you are moving between the two and in this period all the feelings you have are quite natural. You must not be at all anxious about that, but wait for the full development of the inner consciousness in which you will be able to live." (Ghose 1969).

Psychic Being

The Psychic Being is Sri Aurobindo's term for the Personal Evolving Soul, the principle of Divine spirit in every individual. The Psychic is the "Innermost Being" and is the permanent being in us that stands behind and supports the physical, vital and mental principles. It takes the essence of experience in the Ignorance to form a nucleus of growth in the nature; it "puts forth and uses mind, life and body as its instruments, undergoes the envelopment of their conditions, but it is other and greater than its members" (Ghose 1949).

Sri Aurobindo is careful to distinguish between the Psychic Being as defined in the Yoga and the ordinary meaning of "psychic" which refers more to the desire soul, or to psychological or paranormal phenomena which are connected with the inner mind, inner vital, or subtle physical subliminal nature rather than the true Soul. The Psychic begins its evolution completely veiled and hidden, but as it grows through successive lifetimes it gradually exerts a greater influence, organising the elements of the being, and taking on the role of spiritual Guide (Ghose 1949).

In Integral Yoga the goal is to move inward and discover the Psychic Being, which then can bring about a transformation of the outer nature. This transformation of the outer being or ego by the Psychic is possible and called Psychicisation; it is one of the three necessary stages in the realisation of the Supramental consciousness. This Psychic transformation is the decisive movement that enables a never-ending progress in life through the power of connecting to one's inner spirit or Divine Essence (IP 2011).

Sri Aurobindo asserts that both Psychicisation and Spiritualisation are equally necessary, and complementary prerequisites in the drawing down of the Supermind. So he affirms that “the psychic entity in us persists and is fundamentally the same always: it contains all essential possibilities of our manifestation but is not constituted by them; it is not limited by what it manifests, not contained by the incomplete forms of the manifestation, not tarnished by the imperfections and impurities, the defects and deprivations of the surface being. It is an ever-pure flame of the divinity in things and nothing that comes to it, nothing that enters into our experience can pollute its purity or extinguish the flame.” – (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 891.) In this context he further says, “Everything is dangerous in the *sadhana* or can be, except the psychic change” (Ghose 1969).

Central being

Central Being is a technical term used by Sri Aurobindo to designate the transcendent and eternal spirit, as opposed to the incarnate and evolving Soul, which he calls the Psychic Being, although sometimes it refers to both of them together as the essential spiritual core of the being (IP 2011). These definitions are found in Letters on Yoga, Vol.I under "Planes and Parts of Being" (pp. 265ff in the 3rd ed). The Central Being "presides over the different births one after the other but is itself unborn". This transcendent Central Being or Spirit is also designated the *Jiva* or *Jivatman*, although the meaning of these terms in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy differs greatly from that of much of conventional Vedanta. This in the perspective of Aurobindo the whole reality, including being at different levels are inter-connected, inter-related and form an integral whole. Such a worldview, where things may be different in our world (physical, mental and spiritual), but they are connected and evolving to the final fullness. This is the integral worldview of Aurobindo, which is both appealing and relevant for the contemporary world. This we take up in the next section.

4.7 RELEVANCE OF INTEGRAL WORLD-VIEW

The Integral worldview has emerged in the age of global world where the totality of every knowledge, discipline and the wisdom of all existing and previous cultures is readily available. It is very relevant for this age. As noted by Lawrence Wollersheim (2011), for the modern men and women, the new Integral worldview has the following features: It provides a deeper and broader map of the evolution of known reality that embraces an inclusive, multiple perspective way of looking at and understanding personal, cultural and biologic evolutionary development. It excludes nothing needed for balanced understanding and/or growth or wholeness in any area.

It anticipates what more appropriate solution comes next in the unfolding of the evolutionary process. These new solutions are shifted away from today's polarizing and marginalizing, right or wrong, either/or, left or right partial choices toward more inclusive, comprehensive both/and solutions. That's because its new solutions embrace the entire evolutionary developmental

spectrum of life and humanity, allowing the lessons of previously exclusive and competitive worldviews to be systematically meshed, layered and harmoniously integrated to serve the well-being of the whole spiral of life. It is based upon the integral method of inclusion, transcendence and synthesis. It includes the most useful perspectives and values from all previous worldviews where contextually appropriate, while simultaneously pruning away contextually inappropriate perspectives and values.

It unites all things in a coherent and structured matrix of relationship. It combines inner (subjective), outer (objective,) and the inter-subjective (relational) perspectives on any phenomena, whether singular or collective. It re-embraces new forms of non-pathological, integral religion and integral personal spirituality that is congenial to science, philosophy and art and, more universal in its perspectives. Given the contemporary context, its relevance can be seen by its following features. It creates more effective and life-affirming solutions for every challenge or dream we have, whether your interests are culture, politics, religion, science or the environment. It can do this more effectively than ever before because of its new perspectives and understandings relating to personal, cultural and biologic evolutionary development. Armed with this vital new information we now can more wisely participate in actively co-evolving any area of your own life and future. It heals and rebalances the subtle cynicism that results from the fragmentation and complexity of 21st century living by creating a new holism as well as a revitalized sense of achievable purpose. It releases vast untapped personal growth potentials by dramatically expanding who or what you conceive of self, nature and culture to be. (Wollersheim 2011)

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) How do you understand the term 'Integral'?

2) Explain the world view of Aurobindo as integral.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

In the worldview of our Master, the whole of reality, including physical, psychological and spiritual, is integral. In the ever evolving process of reality, the whole reality is made of different levels of being. But without losing their individual identities, they are all part of one journey to the Supermind. Such a philosophy is relevant to our times.

4.9 KEY WORDS

Overmind: In Integral Psychology, it is the adaptation of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual teachings, referring to the understanding of the various planes and parts of being, which is essential to the practice of integral yoga. The highest, single, non-material consciousness composed of the consciousnesses of a large number of beings,

Integrality: The state of being total and complete

4.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

Ghose A. *Bases of Yoga*. Calcutta: Arya Pub. House, 1944.

Ghose A. *The Life Divine*. New York: Greystone Press, 1949.

Ghose A. *On Yoga II: Letters on Yoga*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1969.

Ghose A. *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Silver Lake: Lotus Light Publications, 1992.

IP (Integral psychology- Sri Aurobindo). (2011, January 7). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 04:48, May 27, 2011, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Integral_psychology_\(Sri_Aurobindo\)&oldid=406559107](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Integral_psychology_(Sri_Aurobindo)&oldid=406559107)/ Retrieved on January 7, 2011.

Karmayogi 2001 “Integrality of Life” The Mother’s Service Society, <http://www.motherservice.org/content/integrality-life>. Retrieved on January 23, 2011.

Pandikattu K. Ed. *Science-Religion Dialogue and Cosmic Future: The Perspectives of Teilhard De Chardin and Sri Aurobindo*. Pune: Indian Institute of Science and Religion, 2006.

Sobel, Jyoti and Prem. *The Hierarchy of Minds*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1984.

Vrinte, Joseph. *The Concept of Personality in Sri Aurobindo’s Integral Yoga Psychology and A. Maslow’s Humanistic/Transpersonal Psychology*. South Asia Books, 1994.

Wollersheim, Lawrence. “The Integral Worldview Made Simple” <http://www.integralworld.net/wollersheim2.html>. Retrieved on January 2, 2011.