

Integral Psychology: A New Science of Self, Personality, and Psychology

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This paper outlines a theory of psychology based on Sri Aurobindo's conceptualization of the human being. Starting with the basic notion of self and personhood in contemporary academic psychology, largely located in the lower levels of psychological functioning, the field of transpersonal psychology is used as a stepping stone to access the higher reaches of humanity. A brief outline of the Advaita Vedāntic perspectives on personality then paves the way for Sri Aurobindo's neo-Vedāntic depiction of the person. The contribution of the integral approach to the transformation of emotions and its role in psychotherapy are then outlined. It is the author's contention that Sri Aurobindo's system contains a comprehensive framework of psychology, which allows for both Western and Indian conceptualizations of the psyche and provides a synthesis that is more than a mere sum of parts, giving a vision for an optimistic and glorious future of humankind and paving the way for divine life to manifest upon earth.

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Introduction

Over the last seven years, I have increasingly been exposed to the writings of Sri Aurobindo, which seem to synthesise the best of what the Western as well as the Indian traditions have to offer by depicting existence from a consciousness perspective within an evolutionary framework. It is in the works of Sri Aurobindo that I get satisfactory answers to some of the most profound questions, which have haunted me for over two decades. The focus in this account is on conceptualizations of the person, that is, personality in psychology, and how a deeper understanding of the psyche and its workings provides the key to human unity and world peace. Being situated in academic psychology, I delineate those perspectives in the mainstream of the discipline that demonstrate clear links with the larger Indian perspective and to which I have personally been able to relate. This includes psychoanalysis, behaviourism, humanistic psychology, and finally transpersonal psychology, which is used as a steppingstone towards the higher reaches of Indian perspective, which, in my opinion, finds complete and perfected form within Sri Aurobindo's framework.

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Western perspectives

In the Western intellectual and philosophical tradition, the term "person" refers to human beings as entities with certain rights and duties, whereas the term "personality" refers to individuality. Both meanings derive etymologically from the Latin *persona* denoting mask and thus refer to outer appearance and behavior only. "Self" and "ego" are two other terms, more or less equivalent, referring to a particular person distinct from others. In the Indian context, the nature of the self and the nature of reality as a whole are the two central topics of inquiry in the Upanicads. The Upanicadic sages conceived of an ultimate principle of reality, or existence itself, and called it Brahman. A major conclusion of their inquiry is that the self is identical with Brahman.

I came to academic psychology to better understand aspects of myself as well as a larger reality in relation to problems in my life. This goal is now closer to the Upanicadic approach, but still somewhat removed from the concerns of the majority of conceptualizations available in exclusively Western viewpoints in psychology. But it was much later that I became aware of the Indian perspective. The framework of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis was the first major viewpoint

on psychology and the nature of the person that I was exposed to. Freud pointed out—based on his observations of mentally disturbed persons who came to him for help—that our normal waking consciousness, termed “ego,” is only a small part of the larger psychic reality and is but the “tip of the iceberg” of the deeper aspects of consciousness that are hidden from our awareness. He called the hidden part the unconscious, and it consisted of instinctual energies inherited from our evolutionary past, including our animal heritage. The two instincts that Freud largely focused on were those supporting sexuality and aggression, both of which had a survival function. The instincts resided in a domain called the id. As a human infant developed over time, she was socialized to channel her instinctual impulses in socially acceptable ways. The “super-ego” was the domain of societal codes of conduct. Thus, the major role of the personality or ego was to allow, under close supervision, the expression of the id impulses in ways that did not violate the rules of the super-ego. Growth and maturity in the Freudian system thus consisted of the emergence of a strong ego, which worked towards striking a balance between the contrary demands of the id on the one hand and the super-ego on the other; and going by Freud’s final analysis after he had witnessed the two world wars, it was a losing battle—for the dark forces residing in the unconscious ultimately succeeded in having their way. Freud was pessimistic about the future of humankind.

When I first encountered psychoanalysis, I found it extremely difficult to locate my own existence, my own experience, within this framework. Sexuality and aggression played a minimal role in my life, and social rules did not pose much of an obstacle for me. The experiences that I cherished, such as happiness, harmony, peace, and love, were not the goals of psychoanalysis, nor did the quest for the ultimate meaning of existence have any place in Freud’s system. Michel Foucault (1988, p. 18) referred to practices aiming at improving the human condition and resulting in growth as “technologies of the self,” which “permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” I find the description given by Foucault to be a useful criterion for assessing the effectiveness

of different systems of psychology, and I am unable to rate psychoanalysis as effective in this regard.

The second major system of psychology that I was exposed to was behaviorism. The behaviourists assumed that all aspects of human functioning can be accounted for via the mechanism of learning, based on an analysis of a person’s interactions with the external environment, and that the human organism to begin with is a tabula rasa—a blank slate upon which anything can be written, in the form of stimuli impinging from the outside. The behaviourists thus sought laws of learning valid for at least all mammals and assumed the extension of animal findings to human psychology. J. B. Watson stood at the head of this tradition, and his conception of psychology is clearly stated in his 1913 paper, “Psychology as a Behaviorist Views It”:

Psychology, as a behaviourist views it, is a purely objective branch of natural science. Its theoretical goal is the prediction and control of behavior. The behaviorist, in his efforts to get a unitary scheme of animal responses, recognizes no dividing line between man and beast. (Leahey, 1991, p. 190)

It was Watson’s ambition to raise the status of psychology to that of an objective natural science. To do so, he adhered as closely as possible to the methodology and principles of Newtonian mechanics, the eminent example of scientific rigour and objectivity. To subject psychological experiments to the same criteria used in physics, psychologists must focus exclusively on phenomena that can be registered and described objectively by independent observers. Thus, according to the behaviourist viewpoint, living organisms were complex machines that responded to external stimuli, and this stimulus-response (S-R) mechanism was, of course, modelled after Newtonian physics. It implied a rigorous causal relationship that would allow psychologists to predict a given stimulus’s response and, conversely, specify the stimulus for a given response. A logical consequence of the S-R model was a tendency to look for the determinants of psychological phenomena in the external world rather than within the organism.

It appears to me that behaviourism can account for many of my habits and other obvious learned characteristics of my personality, but it tells me little about the nature of self, what it means to be a person, let alone the complex issues of growth, fulfillment,

happiness, love, or the purpose of existence. The strength of behaviourism lies in its description of the process by which the immediate external environment shapes certain bodily aspects of behaviour, but not much more than that. Of course, it was a system of knowledge generated by strict adherence to a rigorous “scientific” procedure that relied exclusively on tangible observables and ended up ignoring significant aspects of human existence located in lived experience within conscious awareness—in fact, conscious awareness finds no place in the behaviourist scheme of things. In terms of “technologies of self,” the behaviourists have nothing to offer.

So far, in my journey along the pathways outlined in academic psychology, I have found no clue as to who I really am, why I came into existence, or what I am to do with my life. The third major system I was exposed to, one that I found addressed some of my concerns and was also optimistic in outlook, was that of humanistic psychology, and the major proponents of this school of thought were Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. These psychologists were critical of the limited views of human nature offered by psychoanalysis and behaviourism, where we are seen, in the former’s case, as victims of unconscious forces and, in the latter, as passive responders to external stimuli. While most humanists acknowledge the influence of external stimuli and instincts, they do not believe that human beings are unchangeable victims of these forces. We can and must rise above our past, our lower unconscious nature, and the features of our environment and develop and grow beyond these potentially inhibiting forces. The humanist psychologists’ image of human nature is optimistic and hopeful, for they believe in our capacity for expanding, enriching, developing, and fulfilling ourselves to become all that we are capable of becoming.

Thus, the humanists were the first in academic psychology to emphasize our capacity for growth, which, as Rogers emphasized, is the urge that is evident in all organic and human life—to expand, extend, become autonomous, develop, mature—the tendency to express and activate all of the organism’s or the self’s capacities. As a plant attempts to become a healthy plant, and as a seed contains within it the drive to become a tree, so a person is impelled to become a whole, complete, and self-actualized person. Now this formulation of a person was helpful for me personally,

for it outlined a positive goal of existence—growth. But at the same time, it was incomplete, for it did not exactly tell me what the end point of growth was, nor did it outline any precise or systematic “technology of the self” to help me transform myself. In the humanist view, my existence was to be understood on my own terms, within the confines of my own narrow individual experience. There was no mention in this system of my connection with other aspects of the world and the cosmos at large, and thus there was no way of addressing who or what I ultimately am or for what purpose I have come into existence.

It was only in transpersonal psychology that I got a glimpse of what I was searching for. Transpersonal psychology is concerned with the study of humanity’s highest potential and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual and transcendental experiences. Transpersonal experiences refer to those in which the sense of identity or self extends beyond (trans) the individual or personal to encompass wider aspects of humankind, life, the psyche, and the cosmos. The underlying concept of human nature in transpersonal psychology is not a new one. It has always existed in human culture and includes the following four basic premises (Fadiman & Frager, 2002):

- There is a transcendent reality or unity that binds together all (apparently separate) things.
- The ego, or individual self, is merely a reflection of a larger, transpersonal self, or the source from which we emerge and are grounded in that self. However, we have become estranged from our origins, and we need to return to them in order to become fully healthy and whole human beings.
- The fact that individuals can directly experience this reality or greater self is at the core of the spiritual dimension.
- The experience involves a qualitative shift in how one perceives oneself and the larger world. It is a powerful, self-validating experience.

Transpersonal growth as the transformation of human consciousness has been described with the help of various metaphors, such as the transforming of the caterpillar into a butterfly; awakening from a dream to reality; moving from captivity to liberation; going from darkness to light; being purified by inner fire; going from fragmentation to wholeness; journeying to a place of vision and power; returning to the source; and dying and being reborn.

In summary, whereas humanistic psychology focuses on personal growth and the full development of the personality, the transpersonal approach focuses on the expansion of the boundaries of the self, which, as we shall see shortly, is the central concern in the Indian traditions on psychological functioning and the nature of the self. Angyal describes each of these viewpoints:

Viewed from one of these vantage points (the full development of personality), the human being seems to be striving basically to assert himself and to expand his self-determination. He is an autonomous being, a self-growing entity that asserts itself actively instead of reacting passively like a physical body to the impacts of the surrounding world. This tendency—which I have termed “the trend towards increased autonomy”—expresses itself in spontaneity, self-assertiveness, and the striving for freedom and mastery.

Seen from another vantage point, human life reveals a very different pattern from the one described above. From this point of view, the person appears to seek a place for himself in a larger unit of which he strives to become a part; he seems rather to surrender himself willingly to seek a home for himself and to become an organic part of something that he conceives as greater than himself. (Fadiman & Frager, 1984, p. 481).

For the very first time, I became aware of a system within academic psychology, though it was a weak voice located at the fringe of the discipline, that addressed concerns very central and pertinent to the questions for which I sought answers. It appeared that if I were to understand my essential nature, I would need to know more about the transcendental unity that binds all together, of which my individual self is a part. I also wished to know more about this, for if I had really become separated from my origins, it was essential that I become acquainted with the different facets of this larger canvas of existence. Thus began my exploration of Indian perspectives on existence and psychic functioning.

Indian perspective

As noted earlier, the two major concerns in the ancient Upaniads were the nature of the self and the nature of reality as a whole. In a story narrated in the Kaha Upaniad, the famous dialogue between Naciketas and Yama reveals certain essential aspects of the nature of the self from the upaniadic perspective, which is, of

course, transcendental in nature. The story (based on the account given by Paranjpe, 1998) goes as follows: Naciketas, a boy in his teens, is in conversation with Yama, the gatekeeper of heaven and hell. Naciketas finds himself at Yama's gate because his father was renunciation his worldly possessions, and the puzzled Naciketas asked his father if he would also give away his son. Angered by his son's query, the angry father, in a fit of rage, replied in the affirmative. As a result, Naciketas arrives at Yama's gate but is unable to enter because Yama is on his way to earth to pick up ripe souls.

When Yama returns, he finds Naciketas waiting at his doorstep for the last three days, and thus feels embarrassed that he had been unable to provide hospitality to him. As compensation, Yama tells Naciketas that he may ask for any three wishes, which would be granted to Naciketas. The boy first asks for the complete fulfilment of his father's wishes and that he be reunited with a happy father. Naciketa's second wish was to gain a place in heaven through esoteric knowledge of the heavenly fire. The first two wishes were granted, but for his third wish, Naciketas asks Yama to reveal to him the knowledge of that which exists beyond life and death. Yama, who had unhesitatingly granted the first two wishes, was most reluctant to grant Naciketas this third and final wish. Instead, he attempts to talk the boy into accepting all sorts of worldly as well as heavenly pleasures and riches. Despite Yama's best efforts, Naciketas refuses to change his last wish and shows no interest in these pleasures and riches, as he knows them to be ephemeral.

Yama is deeply impressed with Naciketa's perseverance and his ability to distinguish between that which is merely pleasurable (preyas) with that which is the Good (areyas), good and the fact that the boy opted for the latter. Yama finally agrees to teach Naciketas about the true nature of the self, the essence in persons that is changeless. The self can neither be divided nor destroyed, and it is by gaining knowledge of the self that one becomes immortal.

The knowledge (vidy) of the eternal principle (akara) is quite different from the knowledge of changeable (kara) objects in the world. One cannot obtain knowledge by reaching out to objects in the world; knowledge of the self is hidden deep within the innermost self, in the very “heart” of the person. It lies beyond the senses, the mind, and the intellect;

its essence cannot be seen with the eyes or captured by the mind or by words, for the Self is not observable and locatable within physical bodies; it is disembodied and hence everywhere like space. Toward the end of the text, the Kaha Upaniad (6.10–11) explains that the Self is experienced when, through the practise of yoga, the five senses are held back, the mind is undistracted, and the intellect is stabilized. (Paranjpe, 1998, p. 118)

From the above passage, it is quite clear that the Upaniadic view describes the true self as transcendental, and this constitutes our essential nature underlying all forms. The true self can be experienced only upon disengagement from the outer world, which includes our thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations. In other words, we have to first go beyond the boundaries of the narrow ego or the limited self before we can begin to move in the direction of realising the true self. Sankara's Advaita Vedantic system, derived from the Upaniads (Paranjpe, 1998), emphasises that there is one single principle that accounts for the ultimate reality—Brahman—characterised by the trinity of terms—being, consciousness, and bliss (*sat, cit, ānanda*). The nature of Brahman is described with the help of the following adjectives: eternal (*nitya*), pure (*śuddha*), sentient (*buddha*), ever released or emancipated (*mukta*), existent (*satya*), subtle (*sūkṣma*), all-pervasive or ubiquitous (*vibhū*), and “without a second” or nondual (*advitīya*).

Brahma pervades the entire world and extends even beyond it; it is the transcendent and immanent principle of the entire universe. The true self is identical with *Brahman*, but in our mundane existence, it appears to be different because of the state of ignorance in which we are normally trapped. As long as we remain within the clutches of this distorted view of ourselves and reality, we fail to see the world as it really is. Realization of our true and essential nature, which is Self, thus amounts to a union with or merging with our original and actual form, from which we find ourselves separated. All suffering arises because we identify with and become attached to external, transitory aspects of existence that are impermanent and fail to grasp and apprehend that which is permanent, which is our true self, one with the cosmos. Thus, all attempts to realise or merge with our true selves become a form of *yoga*, in its most general sense. The Advaita Vedantic system is one of many paths—for example, the formal schools

of *yoga* (*bhakti, jñāna, karma*), the Buddhist approach, to name a few—that aim to guide us in the realisation of our true nature and ultimately lead us to a state of oneness with the entirety of existence.

These Indian approaches to *yoga* (in the generic sense) all fall into the category of “technologies of the self” and are clearly systems that help us generate insights about our psyche and its relation to existence in general, and through the adoption of various practices, lead to a transformation in the experience of our very being. We would then find ourselves aware of higher states of consciousness, be able to elevate ourselves to these higher states at will, become more effective in those aspects of out-worldly affairs we choose to engage in, and be able to experience far greater levels of joy and love, not to mention some of the positive effects attained in the process of *yoga*. In this section, I will outline the key aspects of the Advaita Vedāntic approach to personality. The Advaita system is generally considered to be the most representative interpretation of the Indian view on reality and existence and shares many elements in common with most other schools.

Advaita Vedic model of personality

The Advaita Vedāntic position on personhood, or who we really are, as outlined above, is aligned with the principle of Brahman. The core of each individual's being is one with *Brahman*, which is the eternal principle characterized by *Sat, Cit and Ānanda*. As we are caught up in ignorance (*avidyā*), we are oblivious to this greater truth. In Vedānta, the term “*jīva*” is used to designate a human being, though literally, “*jīva*” refers to all living beings—the higher and lower forms—where it is held that a *jīva* has to undergo a process of evolution through manifold life cycles before it takes birth in the form of a human being. The Vedāntic *jīva* (human form) has been described as a five-layered entity, with each layer enveloping the other like the sheaths of an onion.

The outermost layer refers to the body and is termed *annamayakoca*, which literally means “cereal or food sheath.” The second inner layer bears the name *prāṇamayakoca*, or “sheath of vital breath,” and refers to breathing as well as other processes of the body that ensure the functioning of the various organs. The *manomayakoca* is the third inner sheath and refers to the processes of the senses. It is also considered to be the basis of the ego in terms of “me” or “mine” awareness. The fourth inner layer is called

the *viññānamayakoca* and refers to the functioning of the intellect—thinking and reasoning, or in general, the higher cognitive functions. The *ānandamayakoca*, or “bliss sheath,” is the fifth and innermost layer of the *jīva* and is thus the seat of the true Self, the *ātman*, which itself identical with *Brahman*. Since the true self, or *Brahman*, is at the core of each and every human being, bliss is therefore our essential nature. This state is infinitely more joyful than all the pleasures attainable through wealth and power put together.

Ordinarily, most of us are trapped in a state of ignorance based on a distorted notion of who we are and thus tend to suffer. The goal of Vedānta is to gradually remove our ignorance and restore our self-awareness to its original state as the true self, one with *Brahman*, as manifested by *sat, sat, cit and ānanda*. Vedānta thus promises liberation (*moksha*) via the process of attaining self-knowledge and delivers us to a state where we experience boundless joy devoid of any pain whatsoever. The reason why we suffer and remain unaware of our pure and essential state of bliss is because of the superimposition of the fluctuating attributes of the ego (now happy, then unhappy, perplexed or clear, etc.) onto the unchanging and blissful Ātman. In reverse, the ego, which is constantly changing, derives a sense of self-sameness by incorrectly attributing the Ātman’s permanence to itself. It is the mind, or *antaḥkāraṇa* (inner instrument), that creates the properties of the ego (e.g., knowing, acting, and suffering). As Paranjpe (1998, pp. 170–171) notes,

...it is the ego that doubts and determines, feels clear or confused, agitated or arrested, exhilarated or morose. Such states, however, are attributed to the Ātman, which transcends all mutations. On the other hand, the fickle ego derives a sense of permanence, and the inert body gains consciousness from the unchanging and conscious Ātman. According to Advaita Vedānta, this is the most fundamental attributional error, in which the true self is identified with the nonself and vice versa. Such misunderstanding is the The primeval illusion (*ādimyā*) is the primary source of human suffering... As soon as one discards the erroneous identification with the ever-changing states of the ego, the true nature of the self as being, consciousness, and bliss shines forth, and one sidesteps and thereby “escapes” the miserable chains of action and its consequences.

In essence, the Advaita Vedāntic system aims at a total transformation of a person’s life by strict

adherence to a highly demanding program of study that begins with the recognition of one’s imperfections, moves through the process of the cultivation of dispassion, aided by teachings and meditation, and culminates in self-realization. I have deliberately not detailed the “technology” offered by the Vedāntists for realization of the true self, for that demands a lengthy explanation and discussion of the entire system. The goal of this paper is to introduce the Indian perspective using the transpersonal Advaita Vedāntic notion of self and personhood, and then move on to a more detailed coverage of Sri Aurobindo’s perspective on the same.

Sri Aurobindo’s perspective

The following account of Sri Aurobindo’s perspective is based on a preliminary understanding of his works. I consider it tentative, subject to revision and expansion upon greater exposure and comprehension of his integral view of human existence. Sri Aurobindo, like the *Upanicads*, has addressed the nature of the self and reality in general. Since the *Upanicadic* period, three thousand years have passed, and both the context of human inquiry and the enquirer—the human entity—have changed. Sri Aurobindo was well versed in the *Upanicadic* writings and the different systems of yoga. Based on his readings of the classical accounts and at the same time relying on his own personal insights, experiences, and realizations, Sri Aurobindo outlined a new system of yoga—Integral Yoga—appropriate for the present as well as the future.

In this paper, the focus is on self and personality, which I now outline with reference to Sri Aurobindo’s integral view. Before doing that, I first refer to Sri Aurobindo’s larger vision of the future of humanity, within which we locate individual human existence. Sri Aurobindo held an evolutionary perspective, but his focus was on the evolution of consciousness.

Consciousness is the original, fundamental, and essential stuff of the universe, which has at some point manifested itself in such a way that material form comes into existence. Now, this is not a vague or difficult idea to grasp, because when we look at the fundamental building block of matter, the atom, we find that it in turn is composed of more elementary particles, and as we go deeper in the analysis of the sub-parts, we reach a point where the distinction between particle (matter) and energy (waveform) breaks down. Finally, we end up dealing with certain forces that are organised in a meaningful and lawful manner, a kind of

consciousness force. At this point, we may once again refer to the origin—pure consciousness, which has the potential of acting out and manifesting in and as form. Since ancient times, the term “*puruṣa*” has been used to denote pure consciousness, which is referred to as “*prakṛti*” or “nature,” when it acts out of its latent state and manifests in and as form. Pure consciousness on one side and pure material form on the other are but two sides of the same coin. Thus Sri Aurobindo (1970a, pp. 236–237) notes:

Consciousness is a fundamental thing, the fundamental thing in existence. It is the energy, the motion, and the movement of consciousness that create the universe and all that is in it. For instance, when consciousness in its movement, or rather a certain stress of movement, forgets itself in the action, it becomes an apparently “unconscious” energy; when it forgets itself in the form, it becomes the electron, the atom, the material object. In reality, it is still consciousness that works with the energy and determines the form and the evolution of form.

The story of existence goes something like this: in the beginning there was one, which at some point manifested as many in terms of material forms. “In the creation of the material world, there was a plunge of this descending consciousness into an apparent inscience and an emergence of it out of that inscience, degree by degree, until it recovered its highest spiritual and supramental summits and manifested their powers here in matter” (1970a, pp. 1–2). Thus, after involution, a process of evolution sets in, and as the organisation of material form evolves, life forms emerge and their complexity increases over time. Plants are the first to appear, followed by lower animals, then higher animals, and finally the human being. Simultaneously, consciousness, the inner dimension, is also evolving—in inanimate matter, it is inscient, not aware of itself, but is nevertheless present as will or forces that sustain the existence of matter in its peculiar form. The electron revolves around the nucleus but is not aware of itself. As consciousness evolves further in plant and animal form, it remains hidden and unaware as the driving force behind their acts for survival. In humans, conscious awareness emerges to a far greater extent as compared to the animal world. However, humans are evolving further—consciousness grows to higher forms and eventually merges with the One, or the original

state of *saccidānanda*. Again, Sri Aurobindo (1970a, pp. 43–44) notes:

.....The Many exist within the One, and the differences are manifestations of that which is fundamentally always the same.”The world is a manifestation of the real and, therefore, is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, the infinite and eternal Beings, Consciousness-Force, and Bliss. By his power, the Divine created the world, or rather manifested it in his own infinite being. But, in the material world, or at its foundation, he has hidden himself in what appear to be his polar opposites: non-being, inscience, and insentience. This is what we nowadays call the “inscient,” which seems to have created the material universe by its inconsistent energy, but this is only an appearance, for we find in the end that all the dispositions of the world can only have been arranged by the working of a supremely secret intelligence. The being that is hidden in what seems to be an inscient void emerges in the world first in matter, then in life, then in mind, and finally as the spirit. The apparently inscient energy that creates is in fact the consciousness-force of the Divine, and its aspect of consciousness, hidden in matter, begins to emerge in life, finds something more of itself in mind, and finds its true self in a spiritual consciousness, and finally in a supramental consciousness, through which we become aware of reality, enter it, and unite ourselves with it. This is what we call evolution, which is an evolution of consciousness and spirit in things rather than just species evolution. Thus also, the delight of existence emerges from the original insentience, first in the contrary forms of pleasure and pain, and then has to find itself in the bliss of the spirit, or, as it is called in the Upanishads, the bliss of the Brahman.

In the earlier stages of human evolution, withdrawing from the higher planes of consciousness and returning to the lower, worldly planes involved a separation from the higher states, which could not be brought down into waking consciousness. But humanity has evolved further, and Today and more so in the near future, it will be possible for a greater number of persons to ascend to higher levels and then, upon descending, retain something of the higher, which would also transform individual functioning on the material plane. Disagreeing with the illusionist *Advaitic* perspective, Sri Aurobindo affirmed a realistic *Advaita*, as noted in the preceding passage. He emphasised the equal importance and significance of the material

world's existence as that of the spiritual and noted that the time has come when the higher spiritual consciousness will inspire and guide our life in the earthly form, thus creating the possibility of "The Divine Life." In his vast writings, numerous illustrations have been given that substantiate this view, as well as evidences of all sorts that affirm the future vision of humankind. It is beyond the scope of the present writing to explore and outline this larger vision of Sri Aurobindo, and this brief introduction has been provided as a backdrop for the portrayal of personality and self.

Sri Aurobindo's portrayal of the human entity, as of existence in general, retains the *Vedāntic* flavour in his reference to the nature of the true self, the demarcation of layers or sheaths that a person is made up of, and the possibility of liberation from ego-boundedness, that is, the state of ignorance. Sri Aurobindo's system refers to these categories, but in a somewhat different, more detailed, and expanded form, and the goal and endpoint of liberation and transformation via the process of Integral Yoga are radically different and more difficult to attain. In addition, new categories and distinctions have been added, which make it possible to accommodate Western conceptualizations of psychic functioning and personality in his comprehensive Integral view. In other words, Sri Aurobindo's perspective provides legitimate spaces for the insights gathered on human existence both from the West and the East, allows us to integrate these, and seems to go beyond what the previous systems offer in terms of growth and expansion that are possible for the human being.

Sri Aurobindo's model of personality

Sri Aurobindo's description of human functioning begins with the basis of everyday existence as experienced through the mind, feelings, and body. We have thoughts related to the outside world (mental consciousness or *manomayapuruca*), positive and negative affect associated with objects and people in the outer world (vital consciousness or *prāṇamayapuruca*), as well as experiences of the body (physical consciousness or *annamayapuruca*) in its exchanges with the surrounding environment. "The outer consciousness is that which usually expresses itself in ordinary life." "It is the mental, vital, and physical exterior" (1970a, p. 311). This aspect of personality is what Western psychology has largely been preoccupied with. Identification with only the outer aspects of our existence keeps us trapped in a

state of ignorance because we remain unaware of that which supports the outer.

The very first step in getting out of ignorance is to accept the fact that this outer consciousness is not one's soul, not oneself, not the real person, but only a temporary formation on the surface for the purposes of surface play. The soul, the person, is within, not on the surface; the outer personality is the person only in the first sense of the Latin word *persona*, which originally meant a mask. (1970a, pp. 304–305)

There are always two different consciousnesses in the human being: one outward, in which he ordinarily lives, and another inward, 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 one progresses through the sadhana, one begins to live more and more in the inner being, and the outer is perceived by many as a dream or delusion, or 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 one, which has to be changed into its counterpart and instrument, which also must become full of peace, light, and union with the Divine. (1970a, p. 307)

The inner being, which consists of the inner mind, inner vital, and inner physical, connects the psychic and the outer being. The outer being is capable of experiencing only a narrow range of stimuli and events related to stimuli impinging from the external world. But this is only a fraction of the experiences available to the person—it's like a radio dial that can only move between a limited number of frequencies. While we are asleep and dreaming, a different range of frequencies or realm of consciousness opens up, and we have access to an inner world that is not dependent on stimuli from the external world. Dreams are just one example of the world existing independently of the outside world.

On each level—mental, vital, and physical—there is a wider range of experience possible and vaster energies that can be tapped. The inner being is in contact with the universal planes of consciousness. The opening of the cakras in the process of the awakening of the *kudalinī* refers to the expansion of the boundaries of consciousness, where a vast range of experience that could not hitherto be accessed becomes

available to the outer being. Through the process of *sādhana*, the inner being awakens and gets activated, and with the opening of the *cakras*, the outer being also has access to the universal bands of consciousness. Sri Aurobindo (2005, pp. 442–443) has used the general term “subliminal” for all parts of the being that are not on the waking surface, especially those referring to the workings of the inner being:

Our subliminal self is not, like our surface physical being, an outcome of the energy of the Inconscient; it is a meeting-place of the consciousness that emerges from below by evolution and the consciousness that has descended from above for involution. There is in it an inner mind, an inner vital being of ourselves, an inner or subtle-physical being larger than our outer being and nature... There is here a consciousness which has a power of direct contact with the universal unlike the mostly indirect contacts which our surface being maintains with the universe through the sense-mind and the senses. There are here inner senses, a subliminal sight, touch, hearing; but these subtle senses are rather channels of the inner being’s direct consciousness of things than its informants: the subliminal is not dependent on its senses for its knowledge, they only give a form to its direct experience of objects; they do not, so much as in waking mind, convey forms of objects for the mind’s documentation or as the starting-point or basis for an indirect constructive experience. The subliminal has the right of entry into the mental and vital and subtle-physical planes of the universal consciousness, it is not confined to the material plane and the physical world; it possesses means of communication with the worlds of being which the descent towards involution created in its passage and with all corresponding planes or worlds that may have arisen or been constructed to serve the purpose of the re-ascent from Inconscience to Superconsciousness. It is into this large realm of interior existence that our mind and vital retire when they withdraw from the surface activities whether by sleep or inward-drawn concentration or by the inner plunge of trance... The subliminal is...the seer of inner things and of supraphysical experiences; the surface subconscious is only a transcriber. It is for this reason that the Upanishad describes the subliminal being as the Dream Self because it is normally in dreams, visions, absorbed states of inner experience that we enter into and are part of its experiences, —just as it describes the superconscient as the Sleep Self because

normally all mental or sensory experiences cease when we enter this superconsciousness.

But the essence of human personality is not to be found even in the inner being. Behind the outer being is the inner, or psychic, being, which is the true center of the person. The psychic is a portion of the Divine Self, or *jīvātman*, which manifests in the human being but is in itself differentiated from the Divine Self. The soul, or psychic, evolves from birth to birth and survives bodily death. Its evolution over lifetimes (in human form) is toward the original oneness, or *Brahman*, or, in other words, a merging with the *jīvātman*. The psychic is a drop in the ocean of cosmic consciousness, which has become separated from its source and longs once again to return to it. This is possible only through evolution, via manifestation in human form, over the course of numerous lifetimes. The true purpose of human existence is a union with the Divine, and this is what the psychic always directs us toward. The psychic is that entity within us that awakens us toward the good, the true, the beautiful, and love. The existence of the psychic remains latent (outside of conscious awareness) within most of us, but is responsible for the experience of all that is sublime.

The psychic evolves over time. At first we are not aware of its existence, but the psychic is secretly guiding the course of our lives and seeking to grow towards the light. Situations that appear to be the most difficult in our lives and with which we are repeatedly confronted teach us the most important lessons. A point comes when the psychic evolves sufficiently to make its presence felt in outward consciousness. This is accompanied by a change in the very “stuff” of consciousness as experienced by the person. There is a sense of lightness and greater freedom from the external, as reflected in the ease with which one is able to withdraw from the “noise” in the outer world. This is accompanied by an experience of silence, peace, bliss, and love—all spontaneous and not a response to anything outside of the person; though at first, one may have difficulty distinguishing between the true psychic response and distractions from the external. From this point onward, as the presence of the psychic is increasingly felt in the waking consciousness, it is possible and necessary through *sādhana* to progress rapidly, aided by conscious and deliberate effort, towards spiritual awakening—entailing an ascent to the higher planes of consciousness (to be described in the next section).

Thus Sri Aurobindo (1970a, pp. 301–302) notes:

The being of man is composed of these elements — the psychic behind supporting all, the inner mental, vital and physical, and the outer, quite external nature of mind, life and body which is their instrument of expression. But above all this is the central being (Jivatman) which uses them all for its manifestation: it is a portion of the Divine Self; but this reality of himself is hidden from the external man who replaces this inmost self and soul of him by the mental and vital ego. It is only those who have begun to know themselves that become aware of their true central being; but still it is always there standing behind the action of mind, life and body and is most directly represented by the psychic which is itself a spark of the Divine. It is by the growth of the psychic element in one's nature that one begins to come into conscious touch with one's central being above. When that happens and the central being uses a conscious will to control and organise the movements of the nature, it is then that one has a real, a spiritual as opposed to a partial and merely mental or moral self-mastery.

In another place, Sri Aurobindo (2005, p. 239) remarks:

The psychic being can at first exercise only a concealed and partial and indirect action through the mind, the life and the body, since it is these parts of Nature that have to be developed as its instruments of self-expression, and it is long confined by their volition. Missioned to lead man in the ignorance towards the light of the Divine Consciousness, it takes the essence of all experience in the Ignorance to form a nucleus of soul-growth in the nature; the rest it turns into material for the future growth of the instruments which it has to use until they are ready to be a luminous instrumentation of the Divine. It is this secret psychic entity which is the true original Conscience in us deeper than the constructed and conventional conscience of the moralist, for it is these which points always toward Truth and Right and Beauty, towards Love and Harmony and all that is a divine possibility in us, and persists till these things become the major need of our nature. It is the psychic personality in us that flowers as the saint, the sage, the seer; when it reaches its full strength, it turns the being towards the Knowledge of Self and the Divine, towards the supreme Truth, the supreme Good, the supreme Beauty, Love and Bliss, the divine heights and largenesses, and opens us to the touch of spiritual sympathy, universality, oneness.

The gradients of consciousness: the lower and higher spiritual planes

As noted above, the story of existence began with the involution of the supreme superconscience in and as gross matter. The lowest form of consciousness is that found in inanimate matter as involved in the workings of the atom with the electrons revolving around the nucleus, and is referred to as the inconscience. 'The inconscience is an inverse reproduction of the supreme superconscience: it has the same absoluteness of being and automatic action, but in a vast involved trance; it is being lost in itself, plunged in its own abyss of infinity' (2005, p. 572). The next higher level of consciousness is the subconscious, '...that quite submerged part of our being in which there is no wakeningly conscious and coherent thought, will or feeling or organised reaction, which yet receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in itself and from it too all sorts of stimuli, of persistent habitual movements, crudely repeated or disguised in strange forms can surge up into dream or into the waking nature' (Sri Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 353). Further in the gradient of consciousness is the physical or the body consciousness which is present in animals as well. 'The body...is a creation of the Inconscient and itself inconscient or at least subconscious in parts of itself and much of its hidden action...' (Sri Aurobindo, 1989, p. 10).

Next in the ladder of consciousness is the vital, '...a thing of desires, impulses, force-pushes, emotions, sensations, seekings after life-fulfillment and enjoyment; these are its functions and its nature; — it is that part of us which seeks after life and its movements for their own sake and it does not want to leave hold of them if they bring it suffering as well as or more than pleasure; it is even capable of luxuriating in tears and suffering as part of the drama of life' (Sri Aurobindo, 1970a, p. 323). The highest that is most commonly found in humans is the level of the mind. 'The "mind" in the ordinary use of the word covers indiscriminately the whole consciousness, for man is a mental being and mentalises everything; but in the language of this yoga the words "mind" and "mental" are used to connote specially the part of the nature which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental or thought perceptions, the reaction of thought to things, with the truly mental movements and formations, mental vision and will, etc., that are part of his intelligence' (1970a, p. 320). For those human beings who have not

gone deeper within themselves, mind and consciousness are synonymous. It is only when one becomes aware of oneself by a growth in consciousness, then one can see different degrees, kinds and powers of consciousness—mental, physical, psychic and spiritual.

With the surfacing of the psychic being, the higher ranges of consciousness above mind become accessible through *sādhana*. These include—Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind, and Supermind. Sri Aurobindo's depiction of psychic functioning and development thus refers to a two-tiered system—one horizontal, moving from the outer being to the inner and finally the inmost with the psychic at the centre; and the other vertical, involving ascension beyond mind to the higher reaches of consciousness and a subsequent descent of the higher consciousness which transforms the lower parts:

There are in fact two systems simultaneously active in the organisation of the being and its parts: one is concentric, a series of rings and sheaths with the psychic at the centre; another is vertical, an ascension and descent, like a flight of steps, a series of superimposed planes with the supermind—overmind as the crucial nodus of the transition beyond the human into the Divine. For this transition, if it is to be at the same time a transformation, there is only one way, one path. First, there must be a conversion inwards, a going within to find the inmost psychic being and to bring it out to the front, disclosing at the same time the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical parts of the nature. Next, there must be an ascension, a series of conversions upwards and a turning down to convert the lower parts. When one has made the inward conversion, one psychicises the whole lower nature so as to make it ready for the divine change. Going upwards, one passes beyond the human mind and at each stage of the ascent, there is a conversion into a new consciousness and an infusion of this new consciousness into the whole of the nature. Thus rising beyond intellect through illumined higher mind to the intuitive consciousness, we begin to look at everything not from the intellect range or through intellect as an instrument, but from a greater intuitive height and through an intuitivised will, feeling, emotion, sensation and physical contact. So, proceeding from Intuition to a greater overmind height, there is a new conversion and we look at and experience everything from the overmind consciousness and through a mind, heart, vital

and body surcharged with the overmind thought, sight, will, feeling, sensation, play of force and contact. But the last conversion is the supramental, for once there — once the nature is supramentalised, we are beyond the Ignorance and conversion of consciousness is no longer needed, though a farther divine progression, even an infinite development is still possible (1970a, p. 251).

Sri Aurobindo has provided detailed descriptions of the characteristics of each of the higher stages of consciousness beyond the mind. The first and most important point to note is that individuals are located at different levels and points in the gradient of consciousness. Some are totally caught up in the interchange with the external world, and in that too, there are differences. There are those who are more preoccupied with the sensual needs and comforts of the body. Others may be caught up in the play of vital forces and concentrate more on gratifying their cravings and passions. Others, on the other hand, may derive a sense of reality from mental constructions (both speculations and theorizations). All are still confined to the narrow range of their outer existence. A vaster universe unfolds when we become tuned to the wider range of energies and forces, which are only accessible when we turn inward.

The first step in accessing the inner mind is silencing the outer mind—we have to get out of the feverish mental activity that we are used to. “In fact, we gradually discover that there is no need to think: something behind, or above, does all the work, with a precision and infallibility that grows as we get into the habit of referring to it; there is no need to remember, because the exact indication comes forth just when it is needed; and there is no need to plan our action, because a secret spring sets it in motion without our willing it or thinking about it, and makes us do exactly what we have tasked.” In the realm of the inner vital, a vast calmness exists, and abundant energy is available to us. “We enter a state of tranquil, spontaneous concentration, like the sea below the waves... Depending on the degree of our development, all kinds of new capacities can emerge out of the vital stillness, but first of all, an inexhaustible source of energy [becomes accessible]. Then, in this stillness, another sign will be permanently established: the absence of suffering and a sort of unchanging joy (Satprem, 2000, p. 92). “Furthermore, as we enter the realm of the inner physical, we discover powers of the body that

we were previously unaware of.”In fact, we are now in a position to experience a new kind of freedom in the body—even freedom from the narrow confines of the body. “Once it has discovered the inexhaustible reservoir of the great consciousness can now be independent of illness, independent of food, independent of sleep... When the current of consciousness-force in us has sufficiently individualized, we notice that we can detach it not only from our senses and the objects of the senses but also from the body (Satprem, 2000, p. 122). As we move further inward, we have our first encounter with the psychic, which is that entity within us that guides us toward what is right and good for us, contributes to our growth, and allows us to experience greater love and harmony in our lives.

Higher mind

With the flowering of the psychic, we become aware of the purpose of our existence—what we have to do with our lives. This simply means that we now have conscious awareness activities and relationships we have to engage in, and these are those that take us in the direction of the Divine consciousness, the true self. Ascension in consciousness now becomes possible, and the higher planes gradually become more accessible. The experience of the higher mind includes the capacity to deal with a large number of ideas simultaneously. This is the mind of the philosopher and thinker at their highest. Sri Aurobindo (2005, p. 974) notes:

Our first decisive step out of our human intelligence, our normal mentality, is an ascent into a higher mind, a mind no longer of mingled light and obscurity, or half-light, but a large clarity of the spirit. Its basic substance is a unitarian sense of being with a powerful multiple dynamisation capable of the formation of a multitude of aspects of knowledge, ways of action, forms, and significances of becoming, of all of which there is a spontaneous inherent knowledge.

Illumined mind

When the higher mind learns to accept silence, it gains access to the domain of the illumined mind. In this realm of consciousness, there is no longer a need to communicate with words. Instead, one comes into direct contact with the body or essence of truth, and for this reason Sri Aurobindo (2005, pp. 980–981) has used the term “revelatory ideograph” for this stage:

As the Higher Mind instils greater consciousness in the being through the spiritual idea and its power of truth, the Illumined Mind instils even greater

consciousness in the being through a Truth Sight and a Truth Light and their seeing and seizing power. It can effect a more powerful and dynamic integration; it illumines the thought-mind with a direct inner vision and inspiration, brings a spiritual sight into the heart and a spiritual light and energy into its feeling and emotion, imparts to the life-force a spiritual urge, a truth inspiration that dynamises the action and exalts the life movements; it infuses a direct and total power of spiritual sensation into the sense so that our vital and physical being can contact The spiritual sage and thinker would find total and dynamic fulfilment in the transformation by the higher mind; similarly, the seer, the illumined mystic, those in whom the soul lives in vision and in a direct sense and experience, would find total and dynamic fulfilment in the transformation by the illumined mind; for it is from these higher sources that they receive their light, and to rise into that light and live would be their ascension to their native empire.

Intuitive mind

With the illumined mind settling in, we can move further up the consciousness gradient and experience the intuitive mind. Here we encounter the truth touch—knowledge leaps out at us in front of our eyes and waits for them to be clear enough to register it. Sri Aurobindo (2005, pp. 981–982) referred to intuition as “truth-remembrance”:

Intuition is a power of consciousness nearer and more intimate to the original knowledge by identity; for it is always something that leaps out direct from a concealed identity. It is when the consciousness of the subject meets with the consciousness in the object, penetrates it and sees, feels or vibrates with the truth of what it contacts, that the intuition leaps out like a spark or lightningflash from the shock of the meeting; or when the consciousness, even without any such meeting, looks into itself and feels directly and intimately the truth or the truths that are there or so contacts the hidden forces behind appearances, then also there is the outbreak of an intuitive light; or, again, when the consciousness meets the Supreme Reality or the spiritual reality of things and beings and has a contactual union with it, then the spark, the flash or the blaze of intimate truth-perception is lit in its depths. This close perception is more than sight, more than conception: it is the result of a penetrating and revealing touch which carries in it sight and conception as part of itself or as its natural consequence. A concealed or slumbering identity, not yet recovering itself, still remembers or

conveys by the intuition its own contents and the intimacy of its self-feeling and self-vision of things, its light of truth, its overwhelming and automatic certitude. In the human mind the intuition is even such a truthremembrance or truth-conveyance, or such a revealing flash or blaze breaking into a great mass of ignorance or through a veil of nescience: but we have seen that it is subject there to an invading mixture or a mental coating or an interception and substitution; there is too a manifold possibility of misinterpretation which comes in the way of the purity and fullness of its action.

Overmind

We begin to notice a greater unity, a oneness, a higher and more complete truth beyond the intuitive mind. The overmind is a global cognitive field in which there is no chaos—all is linked together. We now know that all religions are the faces of the same divine being. Sri Aurobindo (2005, pp. 984–986) notes:

The next step of the ascent brings us to the Overmind; the intuitional change can only be an introduction to this higher spiritual overture. But we have seen that the Overmind, even when it is selective and not total in its action, is still a power of cosmic consciousness, a principle of global knowledge which carries in it a delegated light from the supramental gnosis. It is, therefore, only by an opening into the cosmic consciousness that the overmind ascent and descent can be made wholly possible: a high and intense individual opening upwards is not sufficient, —to that vertical ascent towards summit Light there must be added a vast horizontal expansion of the consciousness into some totality of the Spirit. At the least, the inner being must already have replaced by its deeper and wider awareness the surface mind and its limited outlook and learned to live in a large universality; for otherwise the overmind view of things and the overmind dynamism will have no room to move in and effectuate its dynamic operations. When the overmind descends, the predominance of the centralising ego-sense is entirely subordinated, lost in largeness of being and finally abolished; a wide cosmic perception and feeling of a boundless universal self and movement replaces it: many motions that were formerly ego-centric may still continue, but they occur as currents or ripples in the cosmic wideness. Thought, for the most part, no longer seems to originate individually in the body or the person but manifests from above or

comes in upon the cosmic mindwaves: all inner individual sight or intelligence of things is now a revelation or illumination of what is seen or comprehended, but the source of the revelation is not in one's separate self but in the universal knowledge; the feelings, emotions, sensations are similarly felt as waves from the same cosmic immensity breaking upon the subtle and the gross body and responded to in kind by the individual centre of the universality; for the body is only a small support or even less, a point of relation, for the action of a vast cosmic instrumentation. In this boundless largeness, not only the separate ego but all sense of individuality, even of a subordinated or instrumental individuality, may entirely disappear; the cosmic existence, the cosmic consciousness, the cosmic delight, the play of cosmic forces are alone left: if the delight or the centre of Force is felt in what was the personal mind, life or body, it is not with a sense of personality but as a field of manifestation, and this sense of the delight or of the action of Force is not confined to the person or the body but can be felt at all points in an unlimited consciousness of unity which pervades everywhere. But there can be many formulations of overmind consciousness and experience; for the overmind has a great plasticity and is a field of multiple possibilities. In place of an uncentred and unplaced diffusion there may be the sense of the universe in oneself or as oneself: but there too this self is not the ego; it is an extension of a free and pure essential self-consciousness or it is an identification with the All,—the extension or the identification constituting a cosmic being, a universal individual.

Supermind

The final stage in the ascent of consciousness is the supermind. In fact, this is a principle of existence or a kind of consciousness that has become accessible to human beings only at the current stage of evolution. This consciousness has descended, and once we have made contact with it, it is capable of transforming our entire nature. This entails a radical and complete shift in awareness and psychological functioning, which will bring about a change in humans as drastic as the one when mental and rational faculties first emerged in human consciousness. In this process, the supramental consciousness descends into the lower mental, vital, and physical beings. In fact, the basic goal of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga is that, through the conscious

collaboration of humans, the supramental principle will lead to an evolution of the species to a new stage of being. At the present stage of human evolution, it is the rational mind that is considered the most superior faculty, and this gives us an edge over all other species. But the early humans—hominids—did not have this capacity to the degree it is developed in us. They were, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, at an "infrarational stage," where instincts, immediate needs, and desires ruled their behaviour. But humans continue to evolve further towards a "suprarational" stage marked by a higher gnostic consciousness:

Our evolution starts with an infrarational stage in which men have not learned their life and action in its principles and its forms to the judgement of clarified intelligence; for they still act principally out of their instincts, impulses, spontaneous ideas, vital institutions, or else obey a customary response to desire, need and circumstance,—it is these things that are canalized and crystallized in their social institutions. Man proceeds by various stages, out of these beginnings toward a rational age in which his intelligence will more or less developed become the judge, arbiter and presiding motive of his thought, feeling and action, aims and institutions. Finally, if our analysis and forecast is correct, the human development must move through a subjective towards a suprarational or spiritual age in which he will develop progressively a greater spiritual, supra-intellectual and intuitive, perhaps in the end, more than intuitive, a gnostic consciousness. (Sri Aurobindo, 1970b, p. 173).

Sri Aurobindo further notes (2005, pp. 1000–1001):

Supramental Nature sees everything from the standpoint of oneness and regards all things, even the greatest multiplicity and diversity, even what are to the mind the strongest contradictions, in the light of that oneness; its will, ideas, feelings, sense are made of the stuff of oneness, its actions proceed upon that basis. Mental Nature, on the contrary, thinks, sees, wills, feels, senses with division as a starting-point and has only a constructed understanding of unity; even when it experiences oneness, it has to act from the oneness on a basis of limitation and difference. But the supramental, the divine life is a life of essential, spontaneous and inherent unity. It is impossible for the mind to forecast in detail what the supramental change must be in its parts of life action and outward behaviour or lay down for it what forms it shall create for the individual or the collective existence. For the mind acts

by intellectual rule or device or by reasoned choice of will or by mental impulse or in obedience to life impulse; but supramental nature does not act by mental idea or rule or in subjection to any inferior impulse: each of its steps is dictated by an innate spiritual vision, a comprehensive and exact penetration into the truth of all and the truth of each thing; it acts always according to inherent reality, not by the mental idea, not according to an imposed law of conduct or a constructive thought or perceptive contrivance. Its movement is calm, self-possessed, spontaneous, plastic; it arises naturally and inevitably out of a harmonic identity of the truth which is felt in the very substance of the conscious being, a spiritual substance which is universal and therefore intimately one with all that is included in its cognition of existence.

The most striking aspect of the supramental transformation is that it shows us the way out of our current state of being, where we often act in ways that are destructive towards members of our own species, those of other species, and towards nature in general. This is because our present way of being emanates from a narrow and restricted consciousness where the sense of separation is experienced to a greater extent than a sense of connectedness or oneness. The only way out of these violent and destructive ways is by working towards a new way of being and allowing a transformation in consciousness to take place.

All would change, all would become easy if man could once consent to be spiritualised. The higher perfection of the spiritual life will come by a spontaneous obedience of spiritualised man to the truth of his own realised being, when he has become himself, found his own real nature; but this spontaneity will not be instinctive and subconscious as in the animal, but intuitive and fully, integrally conscient. Therefore, the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age, will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being, an evolution or conversion of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity, even as the animal man has been largely converted into a highly mentalised humanity. (The Mother, 2003, p. 165).

In summary, Sri Aurobindo's depiction of personality and human existence refers to a lesser self caught up in the demands of the outer being, which can get transformed into the greater self via a process of

development. This first entails an inward movement leading to the uncovering of the psychic, then an upward movement through the higher gradations of consciousness, taking one towards the supramental level of awareness, and subsequently a descent of the higher force into the lower parts—leading to their transformation. This simply means that our whole nature gets converted, and we are no longer caught up in the narrow egoistic confines of a delimited consciousness, which identifies with experiences limited to the horizon of the outer being. We are part of something vaster and can get in touch with that transpersonal element, which is the ground of our consciousness. It all depends on where the consciousness places itself and concentrates itself. You are identified with the ego if your consciousness places or concentrates itself within the ego. If the consciousness puts its stress outside, it is said to live in the external being and becomes oblivious of its inner mind, vitality, and inmost psychic; if it goes inside and puts its centralizing stress there, then it knows itself as the inner being or, still deeper, as the psychic being; if it ascends out of the body to the self, where the self is naturally conscious of its wideness and freedom, it knows itself as the self and not the mind, life, or body (Sri Aurobindo, 1970a, pp. 235–236). And it is not simply a matter of individual transformation. As noted above, the entire human species is undergoing evolution, and as more and more humans come into contact with the descending supramental force, the essential nature of existence on earth will undergo a radical transformation, thereby opening up the possibility of “the divine life.”

The preceding account, though only a glimpse of what Sri Aurobindo has outlined, provides the basic framework of the structure and functioning of personality as depicted in Sri Aurobindo’s *Integral Yoga*, which, in my opinion, is the most comprehensive system of psychology available to us till date. In fact, this system of psychology is so vast that it incorporates major elements of sociology and philosophy as well. A wider reading of Sri Aurobindo’s voluminous writings on a gamut of subjects reveals his extraordinary contribution to philosophy, social and political thought, the true understanding of the “Foundations of Indian Culture,” and, of course, his unsurpassable gift to humanity in the form of poetry, which culminates and illumines us in and as *Savitri* (literally meaning “light,”

the title of Sri Aurobindo’s magnum opus and final work).

Some Applications

Before I address the applications of Integral Psychology explicitly, though implicitly it should be clear to the reader, I briefly touch on the Integral view’s potential in consolidating all endeavors in psychology, both in the East and in the West. In academic psychology, the major perspectives are those offered by psychoanalysis, behaviourism, cognitive psychology, humanistic psychology, and transpersonal psychology. With respect to the integral view, psychoanalysis focuses on a narrow aspect of existence located within the subconscious—it offers glimpses of a few trees in a vast forest located on a still more vast earth. Behaviorism is concerned with outward behaviour—bodily acts in response to environmental stimuli. In relation to the integral conception, behaviourism only touches the outer physical existence. Cognitive psychology is largely concerned with the workings of the outer mind. Humanistic psychology is a step inward to the recesses of the psychic. Abraham Maslow, the major proponent of this view, referred to lower and higher-order needs. Lower needs aimed at sustenance, whereas higher ones contributed towards growth. These included the concern for beauty, truth, love, oneness, etc. In other words, Maslow in some way addressed the issue of psychic awakening without using the term. Whereas humanistic psychology takes us to the inner realms, transpersonal psychology focuses on the higher planes of consciousness—ascension. As evidenced by the outline of the Advaita Vedantic perspective, which was taken up earlier in this article, Indian perspectives have focused much more on higher levels of consciousness in this paper. Sri Aurobindo’s perspective does justice to all the above-mentioned views, but goes beyond by bringing in the issue of evolution and transformation of the human species, and thus also incorporating the aspect of “technologies of the self of the self.”

In fact, Integral Psychology offers a more complete picture of the human personality and psychological functioning as compared to the other available perspectives and goes much beyond a mere sum of the parts, which would amount to a simple amalgamation of the above-mentioned schools of psychology. Understanding isolated experiences and occurrences in one’s life against a larger canvas becomes possible with this perspective. It helps us get

in touch with the most essential and fundamental aspect of our existence. Further, the Integral view has potential applications in the areas of psychotherapy, parenting, attitude towards work, human relationships, education, organizational behaviour, social work and development, and in the general sense of understanding Integral Yoga as applied psychology. In this paper, I examine two closely related applications of the integral approach: the transformation of emotions and the place of psychic unfoldment in psychotherapy.

The transformation of emotions

As mentioned earlier, Sri Aurobindo uses the term “psychic” or “psychic being” for the soul. What is unique in Sri Aurobindo’s depiction is that, though in agreement with the pre-existing conception of the soul’s immortality and its transmigration from body to body, the psychic is not a static entity but immensely dynamic in the sense that it continues to evolve from lifetime to lifetime. The psychic is that part of us that responds to the true and the beautiful; joy and love are its essential nature. Perhaps the single most defining characteristic of psychic consciousness is its groundedness in a deep and unconditional love, devotional in essence, accompanied by a state of sincere and total surrender to the Divine.

This brings us to the subject of *bhakti*. In *Bhakti yoga*, the aspirant or seeker’s emotional life gradually transforms, and he or she begins to reside more and more in a state of pure and unconditional love for and for the Divine. Looking at it from the *rasa* and *bhava* perspectives of the Indian meta-theory of emotions developed by Bharata, the aspirant attempts to reside more and more in the eighth and highest *rasa*, that of love. To achieve this state, the devotee commonly employs the aid of chanting the name of the desired deity (*Rāma*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Durgā*, etc.) and singing about his love for the chosen form of divinity. In so doing, the aspirant, or shall we say *rasika*, experiences a dissolution of his or her ego self, wherein everyday connotations and experiences in the mundane human realm around the emotion of love are transcended, and the devotee enters into a state of pure and absolute universal love, devoid of any sense of “I” or “mine.”

In general, when we are immersed in an aesthetic experience via exposure to art (for example, music or dance), the *bhavas*, or the experienced emotions, are located in a context far removed from one’s everyday personal life, and hence we are able to derive *rasa*, or a sense of pleasure or delight, even if we are

experiencing so-called negative emotions like anger and fear. In a sense, the personal or “I” element melts away, and we find ourselves transported to the realm of pure emotion, devoid of any ego involvement. In *Bhakti yoga*, the aspirant gradually disidentifies with all emotions—except love—as a seeker of the Divine. Thus, Rupa Goswami offered a reinterpretation of the original *rasa-bhava* perspective in terms of major and minor devotional states. In this depiction, love is conceived of as the major *rasa*, the essential emotion state to be sought and attained by the *bhakta*. All other emotions, the minor devotional states, are to be understood as resulting from our seeking of love, which in the early stages of *bhakti* often eludes the devotee, resulting in a state of frustration in our seeking upon encountering failure or loss of the love we thought we had possessed.

Over time, through continuous and sincere *sādhana*, the devotee begins to reside more and more in a state of universal love and *ānanda*, which is the very nature of the soul and the Spirit. Then, out of the sheer joy and sense of completeness of the act, we surrender our entire being to the Divine. In other words, the attempts of the devotee to ground himself or herself in universal love lead to the coming forward of the soul or psychic being, our divine essence. The coming forward of the psychic being results in a shift of power in terms of what element of our being exercises control over our lives, from the ego to the psychic. This is accompanied by a major affective transformation in our lives as well as profound behavioural change. Our lives become increasingly characterised by a feeling of goodwill towards all human beings, and we view and relate to all in terms of unconditional love. And true love is not about taking or getting but only about giving, so selfless service becomes part of our very nature. Perceiving our ground in the Divine, and the ground of all other human beings, all of existence for that matter, in the Divine, we at last experience the truth of the ancient tenet *vasudhaivakumbhakam* (the world is one family). [?? the phrase is actually *vasudhaivakumbhakam*, the earth is a family’ , and it is not from Upanishads ??]

The manifestation of the psychic being has another significant ramification. The search for direction in our lives, for which we often seek a guru, comes to a close with the inner guru, our psychic, now performing that function completely and perfectly. There is a knowingness about psychic consciousness that acts as a sure guide in

matters of truth, goodness, and beauty. In a nutshell, our lives are transformed from human to divine.

Being a psychologist, I cannot stop at this point, for I must reflect on the fuller psychological consequences of the emergence of the psychic as the true centre of our being and its impact on individual and collective well-being. Notably, we go from being seekers to being finders. In general, an individual who resides in a psychic consciousness radiates an aura of “healthiness” and well-being. For the psychic always guides us to what is good for our whole being, and the dominant emotion is that of love and joy, which by their very nature are integral and complete.

The place of love in psychotherapy and spiritual healing

Consciousness is contagious. Thus, in my opinion, a psychologist, or more accurately, a counsellor or psychotherapist, who is chiefly concerned with restoring a state of health and well-being in his clients, must himself or herself be a relatively permanent member of the abode of well-being, which in itself is a hallmark of psychic existence. In other words, to be an effective therapist, a tremendous amount of self-work/*sāadhanā* has to be carried out on the part of the therapist (one who facilitates healing and thus restores health). More than anything else, it is the consciousness of the therapist interacting with the consciousness of the client that brings about a positive change in the client, from a state of suffering to a state of well-being.

In general, the Indian view of existence is that of the journey of the Divine in a person. All struggles and suffering in life represent a movement from an infra-rational (animal) existence to a more rational (human) existence, and further, towards a yet greater supra-rational (divine) existence and the end-state of truth, bliss, and beatitude. This is the human journey: from a life of obscure beginnings in a half-lit animal-human consciousness to an increasingly divine humanity. And the counsellor/therapist who can assist us in this journey is but a fellow traveller who has walked ahead of us from a life of relative darkness to a life of increasing Light. Only one who has mastered swimming to a high degree can save the one who is drowning, and so is the case with therapy.

For convenience, the process of psychotherapy can be divided into two stages. The first is the movement from a weak ego state (low level of autonomy) to a strong ego state. This is the goal of most

psychotherapy in the West. The second and, in my opinion, more important goal is the movement from the ego to the self, or the shift in government from the ego to the psychic. This is the more common goal in the context of spiritual healing. Thus Sudhir Kakar, the noted psychoanalyst, states (in personal communication) that “psychoanalysis is undergraduate work, and spirituality is postgraduate work.” Freud had stated that the goal of psychoanalysis is “to make the unconscious conscious.” In the original German, Freud said, “*Wo es war, soll Ich werden*”—where it (the impersonal and unconscious) was, let the I (personal and conscious) be. Kabir Das has beautifully expressed the transformation that takes place on the spiritual path: “When I was, God was not; Now that God is, I am not” (*Jab maitha tab Hari naahi; Ab Hari hai, mainahi*). Thus, from the vantage point of spirituality, the goal of psychotherapy, healing, and growth is summarized as such: “Where I was, let thee become.”

In general, I can confidently state that the most important prerequisite for healing to occur on the part of the therapist or spiritual guide is a posture of and groundedness in unconditional love. Without this, healing cannot begin, hence the importance of self-work/*sāadhanā*. This has been noted in the western context by the eminent psychotherapist Carl Rogers in his emphasis on the absolute necessity of the attitude of “unconditional positive regard” on the part of the therapist toward the client, and more explicitly by the eminent psychiatrist M. Scott Peck in his well-known work, *The Road Less Traveled*. A moment’s reflection on healing in the traditional Indian context immediately reveals that when individuals in distress approach their guru, the healing process begins with the guru’s love and unconditional acceptance of the person in distress. Thus, at the risk of overstating the case, I again underscore the key importance of self-work on the part of the therapist or guru.

Love has an extraordinary transformative power which can heal all breaches and wounds in our consciousness, and eventually liberate us from fear, guilt, and egoism. It is via the showering of love from without that love awakens in our being (psychic consciousness), may it be love in the romantic human sense, or in the spiritual divine sense. One of the greatest discoveries that we can make in our lifetime is that of the source of love being within us, and not without. Till some such time, we continue to roam about

lost like the musk deer, forever seeking the fragrance of love all about, not realizing that the secret source of love lies within us hid deep in our very bosom, waiting to be discovered. Thus Huston Smith (1997, p. 334) notes:

It remained for the twentieth century to discover that locked within the atom is the energy of the sun itself. For this energy to be released, however, the atom must be bombarded from without. So too, locked in every human being is store of love that partakes of the Divine – the *imago dei*, image of God, it is sometimes called. And it too can be activated only through bombardment, in its case, love's bombardment. If we too felt loved, not abstractly or in principle but vividly and personally, by one who unites all power and perfection, the experience would melt our fear, guilt, and self-concern permanently. As Kierkegaard said, if at every moment both present and future I were certain that nothing has happened and nothing can ever happen that would separate us from the infinite love of the Infinite, that would be the reason for joy.

An equally or even more profound impact of love is its capacity to transform evil. As a therapist/spiritual healer, one encounters all sorts of individuals, even those who have a chequered past and may best be described as 'bad' or even 'evil'. These are individuals have no regard for the happiness and well-being of others, and do not hesitate to hurt others, even those who are supposedly close to them. Upon encountering such persons, one feels disgust in their presence, and the first reaction is to distance oneself from them. As a therapist/spiritual healer, one may at times be unable to feel love for these individuals, and is thus unable to help them. In such cases, the person remains unchanged, the world remains the same, and evil continues to exist. Yet, perhaps the only truly effective way to deal with evil is to transform it through love. M. Scott Peck (1990, p. 309) who has deeply reflected on this issue and has worked extensively in this area, points out that:

The healing of evil—scientifically or otherwise—can be accomplished only by the love of individuals. A willing sacrifice is required. The individual healer must allow his or her soul to become the battleground. He or she must sacrificially absorb the evil. Then what prevents the destruction of that soul? If one takes the evil itself into one's heart like a spear, how can one's

goodness still survive. Even if the evil is vanquished, thereby will not the good be also? ...I do not know how this occurs, but I know that it does. I know that good people can deliberately allow themselves to be pierced by the evil of others, to be broken thereby, yet somehow not broken. To be even killed in some sense and yet still survive and not succumb. Whenever this happens, there is a slight shift in the balance of power in the world.

In this way, we obtain a glimpse of the extraordinary transformative potential of *bhakti*. To begin with, to reside more and more in a state of love is in itself an extremely positive state of being, one most conducive to health and well-being. This has a significant impact on one's interactions with others, as they are characterized by a posture of giving and serving, with no ulterior motives of gaining something. Further, the increasing experience of universal love facilitates the act of complete surrender to the Divine as a spontaneous and integral process. This is an extraordinarily empowering experience—the shift from a narrow, ego-bound consciousness to a psychic consciousness grounded in the true Self.

A groundedness in love is perhaps the most important quality that a psychotherapist or spiritual healer must possess. This quality cannot be obtained by any external study or degree and can be acquired only through intense self-work/*sādhana*. The role of love in the healing of psychological wounds and hurts and the transformative power of love in its encounter with evil are only beginning to be fully appreciated by psychologists, in India and elsewhere.

Concluding remarks

The future of psychology as a truly useful, emancipating, liberating, and life-giving discipline lies in bringing back soul and spirit to their rightful place at the center of psychology and existence at large. To this end, Integral Psychology has a great deal to offer. But most important in the present context are the insights provided by the Mother and Sri Aurobindo for attaining individual and collective transformation, leading to lasting human unity and global peace. Guided by their vision, I continue to be astounded by the increasingly clear indications of a new social order—one characterized by a deep and unconditional love, joy, peace, and harmony. The signs may be dim and indirect at times, but their certain implications are abundantly clear.

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