



## Aspects of Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga: A step further than the physical and mental benefits of yoga

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### Abstract

Integral Yoga as conceptualized by Sri Aurobindo after his lifelong experiments and experiences, both by design and accidental, put forward multi layered benefits and possibilities for a person to make accelerated advancement in physical, mental and spiritual realms in a single lifetime, compared to evolution where the same may happen over a period of several lifetimes.

While the concepts of Traditional Yoga, the practitioner's objective was mainly to gain an inner freedom or strengthen their capability for indifference to the happenings around them, the Integral yoga's aim is to integrate inner as well as outer life of men for gaining perfection in his entire existence.

Present paper is an attempt to discuss about the main concepts of Traditional yoga like Hath yoga, Pranayam, Rajayoga, Karma Yoga, Gyana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga and how they are assimilated in Integral yoga. Also there will be discussion about some other concepts like Prayer, Aspiration and Super mind, along with processes and methods where the means is to open your heart, mind and body to the larger consciousness.

**Keywords:** Integral yoga, aspiration, will power, prayer, divine grace

### Introduction

Yoga, as the masses know it today, is mainly for physical benefits which can then also start providing psychological peace if the practitioner pursues it further. On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo put forward the concept of Integral yoga, which begins with invoking the Divine Grace through Prayer and Aspiration. Prayers and aspiration are like two strong activities which are perfectly in a person's grasp and control that ascent upwards from the soul to the heavens above. In Sri Aurobindo's words, "Souls that do not aspire are God's failures." Aspiration is utmost movement of the soul that has the power of bringing the Grace towards us. It is more intense, inward and one-pointed than a prayer, though both are equally valuable. A sincere aspiration will bring about an opening to the grace for utter fulfillment of the aspiration, which will bring the much-needed help and guidance. A sincere aspiration is a mighty 'soul force' leaping up out of the psychic centre.

Prayer and Aspiration can precede or succeed each other depending upon the life status of each person at any given point of time. But mostly, aspiration is beginning of this Integral Yoga and by its intense will power; it can slash the veil that hides God from man. Prayer brings the being in touch with the divine, who grants the objects of desire. Prayer is always formed of words and directed towards a person, but aspiration need not be towards any person or always expressed in word. Prayer generally seeks an external object; but of aspiration the Mother (at Aurobindo Ashram) says. "It is something much more intimate, much more self-forgetful, and living only in the object it wishes to be or to do almost identified with it". (The Yoga 108)

The tradition and process of yoga in India is as old as the Vedic period. It was accepted as the sure path for the realization of supreme truth. The basic principles of yoga was given by sage Patanjali which runs as the most

systematic lines with eight steps in it: namely- *Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharna, Dhyana and Samadhi*. These steps involve the ethical, physical, psychological and metaphysical aspects and ultimately the state of *Samadhi* to be reached where the yogi realizes the supreme truth and achieves the goal of yoga. Patanjali attached great importance to ethics in the yogic practices and believed that a Yogi cannot adopt the higher steps unless he passes in through the word code and conduct.

Sri Aurobindo agrees only with the mental attitudes of Patanjali, but he does not agree or admit the Asana and Pranayama aspect of Patanjali. He does not believe in any *karmakanda* of *Raja Yoga* or any other form of yoga, as they relate mainly to the physical and vital aspects of our being which are of no good for the highest attainment in life. Sri Aurobindo says, "Our effort is quite different. We want to bring down the Supermind as a new faculty". (Letters on Yoga 67) *Veda* and *Vedanta* are one side of one truth, *Tantra* with its emphasis on Shakti another, in Integral Yoga all sides of truth are taken up, not in the systematic forms but in their essence, and carried to the fullest and highest significance.

As *Vedanta* deals more with the principle and essentials of divine knowledge and therefore much of its spiritual knowledge and experience has been taken bodily. *Tantra* deals more with forms and process and organised powers and involves ascent of the consciousness through the centres in the body and other Tantric knowledge are behind the process of Transformation. Sri Aurobindo stated, "In our integral yoga there is no willed process of the purification and opening of the centres, no raising up to the Kundalini by a set process either". (Letters on Yoga 73)

The Yoga of the *Gita* is a large, flexible and multi sided system with various elements, out of which *Rajayoga* is only one and not of the utmost importance. This yoga does

not adopt any strict and scientific gradation but is a process of natural soul- development. Integral yoga is not identical with the yoga of the *Gita* although it contains all that is essential in the *Gita's* yoga. Integral yoga begins with the idea, the will, the aspiration of the complete surrender, but at the same time it has to reject the lower nature, deliver our consciousness from it, and deliver the self-involved in the lower nature by the self-rising to freedom in the higher nature.

In *Jnana yoga*, first the Sadhaka becomes aware of his inner self and spirit. Next, he becomes aware of that self and spirit are one with thine in others. This method of synthesis is imposed on our mind and our mental ego, because all that is eternal, infinite, and absolute is super conscient to mind. Mind and its ego cannot remain awake in that greater consciousness, they must disappear. Integral Yoga believes that if we can change or evolve from mental into superamental being, then the super conscient becomes our normal consciousness. We can then hope to wake in that and not fall asleep in it, to grow into it and not abolish ourselves in it, to last in identity and not lose ourselves in identity with the supreme

Bhakti Yoga or yoga of devotion proceeds in seven stages; each of which opens out from the one that proceeds it. Sri Aurobindo borrows heavily from Devotion yoga: "Faith is our first need, for without faith in the divine, in the existence and the all-importance of the divine Being, there can be no reason to aspire or to consecrate, there can be no power in the aspiration or force behind the consecration. (Sri Aurobindo Essays 364)

### **Integral Yoga and Its Important Components**

The process and method of integral yoga is an integral opening of the whole consciousness, mind, heart, life, will, body to that reality, to the divine existence, consciousness, beatitude, to its being and its integral transformation of the whole nature. According to Sri Aurobindo in integral yoga, the personal effort required is a triple labor of aspiration, rejection and surrender. It should be an aspiration which is vigilant, constant and unceasing- the mind's will, the heart's seeking, the assent of the vital being, the will to open and make plastic the physical consciousness and nature. Sri Aurobindo calls it as, "Aspiring to the nature of Gods". (Savitri 6.1.427)

The process of integral yoga has three stages not indeed sharply distinguished and separate, but in a certain measure, successive. There must be, first, the effort towards at least an initial and enabling self-transcendence and contact with the divine. Next, the reception of that which transcends, that with which we have gained communion, into ourselves for the transformation of our whole conscious being, last the utilization of our transformed humanity as divine centre in the world, so long as the contact with the divine is not in some considerable degree established, so long as there is not some measure of sustained identity, sayujya, the element of personal effort must normally predominate. Sri Aurobindo says, "Aspired to reach the being's absolute". (Savitri 2.12.279)

### **The Foundation of realization -- Faith**

Faith is a glimpse of a truth, which the mind has not yet seized as knowledge. It is an intuition, an intuition not only waiting for experience to justify it, but leading towards

Experience. It is a clear fact that faith leads towards experience.

### **Patience and Perseverance**

Sri Aurobindo guides the direction that the very first lesson in integral yoga is to face life and its trials with a quite mind, a firm courage and an entire reliance on the divine shakti.

### **Sincerity**

According to Sri Aurobindo, sincerity means more than mere honesty. It means that you mean what you say. Feel what you profess, are earnest in your will. As the Sadhaka aspires to be an instrument of the divine and one with the divine, sincerity in him means that he is really earnest in his aspiration and refuses all other will or impulse except the divines.

### **Surrender**

Sri Aurobindo explained that surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the divine, to offer all that one is and has, not to insist on one's ideas, desires, habits etc. but to allow the divine truth to replace this by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.

### **Realization through Meditation and Concentration**

In integral yoga, concentration means when the consciousness is fixed in a particular state (peace) or movement (aspiration will, coming into contact with the mother, taking the mother's name). Meditation is when the inner mind is looking at things to get the right knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo exclaimed that concentration is a gathering together of the consciousness and either centralizing at one point or furring on a single object, e.g. the whole being, not at a point. In Meditation, it is not indispensable to gather like this, one can simply remain with a quiet mind thinking of one subject or observing what comes in the consciousness and dealing with it. The higher consciousness is a concentrated consciousness, concentrated in the divine unity and in the working out of the divine will, not dispersed and rushing about after this or that mental idea or vital desire or physical need as is the ordinary human consciousness - also not invaded by a hundred haphazard thoughts, feelings and impulses, but master of itself, centered and harmonious.

### **Mantra and Japa in Integral Yoga**

In integral yoga no stress is laid on mantra. The stress is rather on an aspiration in the consciousness and a concentration of the mind, heart, will, all the being. If a mantra is found helpful for that, one uses it.

Thus, Integral Yoga is the application for this process of divine self-revelation, of the supreme force of tapas by which God created the world, supports it and will destroy it. It uses divine means in order to rise to divinity. In nut shell, Integral Yoga is the means by which the quest of the emotions and the intellect becomes possible. Sri Aurobindo describe it as to enter into the entire consciousness of the divine reality with all our being and all pasts and in every way of our being and to change all our now ignorant and limited nature into divine nature so that it shall become the instrument and expression of the divine reality that in our self and essence we are, this is the complete fulfillment of our existence and this is the integral yoga.

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