

SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM, SPIRITUAL PASSIVITY AND INTEGRAL YOGA*

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Spiritual activism has recently become a popular movement in the New Age spiritual literature and community, having received strong impetus from the work of Andrew Harvey, author¹ and founder of the Institute for Sacred Activism;² Deepak Chopra, author, founder of the Chopra Foundation³ and member of the evolutionary leaders network;⁴ Michael Lerner, author^{5,6} and founder of the Network of Spiritual Progressives;⁷ Claudia Horwitz, author⁸ and founder of Stone Circles;⁹ Will Keepin, author and cofounder and director of Satyana Institute;¹⁰ Carla Goldstein, director of the Women's Institute,¹¹ a unit of Omega Institute, as well others. It has been an increasingly important topic in academics with influential books and papers by such writers as Barbara Marx Hubbard,^{12,13} AnaLouise Keating,^{14,15} Alastair McIntosh,^{16,17} Roger S. Gottlib,¹⁸⁻²³ Ken Jones,²⁴ David Loy,²⁵ Donald Rothberg,²⁶ and many others.²⁷

As AnaLouise Keating explains,

...spiritual activism is a visionary, experientially-based epistemology and ethics—a way of life and a call to action. Spiritual activism is spirituality for social change, spirituality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation... The spiritual/material, inner/outer, individual/collective dimensions of life are parts of a larger whole—interjoined in a complex, interwoven pattern. This synergistic synthesis of apparent opposites distinguishes spiritual activism both from mainstream “New Age” movements and from conventional

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organised religions. Whereas “New Age” belief systems focus almost, if not entirely, on the personal and thus leave the existing oppressive social structures in place, spiritual activism requires both the personal and the structural; it starts with each individual but moves outward as we challenge and transform unjust social structures.

Although spiritual activism begins at the level of the individual, it does not result in egocentrism, self-glorification, or other types of possessive individualism. Rather, spiritual activists combine self-reflection and self-growth with outward-directed, compassionate acts designed to bring about material change.²⁸

Harvey argues that an impending perfect storm of crises facing the world, including overpopulation, global warming, environmental pollution, corporate greed and corporate controlled media is leading towards a catastrophe that can be averted only through a large-scale spiritually-based activism.²⁹ Harvey aims to “inspire the spread of inter-linked cells of ‘Networks of Grace’ all over North America and the world.”³⁰ The Institute for Sacred Activism’s website is designed to facilitate the formation and spread of such activist networks.³¹

Various key principles for spiritual activism have been advanced by different proponents. Some of these emphasise emotional and attitudinal underpinnings, others focus on the practicalities of effecting change on the ground. For example, the first of the Satyana Institute’s principles of spiritual activism cites the transformation negative emotions such as fear, anger and despair to positive emotions of love, compassion, and purpose.³² The Humanity Healing Network emphasises the role of compassion in several of its key principles.³³ The Integrative Spirituality website cites the values of love, forgiveness, inner connection with God and others, and equanimity as its first four principles, but then discusses other practical components such as mindfulness, creativity and strategy.³⁴ The Activist.org website, based on Horwitz’s work, focuses on practical strategies that have been used successfully in a variety of different contexts.³⁵

Spiritual activism in the light of Integral Yoga

Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s Integral Yoga provides a natural and strong basis for spiritual activism, and can contribute a greater depth of insight into its spiritual dimensions. The aim of Integral Yoga embraces a spiritual transformation, a radical divinisation of individual and collective life. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother continually contrasted their Integral Yoga with the traditional yogas of the past in India which they argued focused on an inner individual realisation and neglected the transformation of the

outer life of the individual or of humanity as a whole.³⁶ The transformation they envisaged is of a thorough-going nature, and would necessarily take within its sweep the more limited political, social, or environmental aims of spiritual activism. They argued that it was only by a radical change of the consciousness that this transformation of the outer life of humanity could be realised, starting with individuals, but progressively spreading to others.³⁷ While concentrating on effecting this transformation within themselves,³⁸ they worked tirelessly to guide and materially and spiritually assist others to this change,³⁹ laid out a detailed teaching and practical method for humanity to follow,⁴⁰ and acted inwardly through spiritual means on the world at large to assist it in its progressive change and transformation.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Sri Aurobindo's Integral Yoga and philosophy should not be taken as a full endorsement of spiritual activism as it is presently articulated. Integral Yoga is a discipline aimed at an integral union with the Divine, the Divine both in its passive aspect as the underlying ground of all existence, and in its dynamic aspect as the conscious Force which drives all energies in the universe; something far more profound than an activism motivated by spiritual as well as social justice and environmental concerns. It aims at the realisation of a spiritual and supramental consciousness, a divine consciousness vastly superior to the ordinary human consciousness, involving a long and difficult discipline to achieve. It aims at a spiritual and supramental transformation of individual and collective life, not simply at social change based on moral or idealistic principles.

Sri Aurobindo did not view outer social activism as a necessary or a primary outer activity that was to flow out of the inner spiritual realisation. Indeed he suggested that during the development of this spiritual consciousness, the inner life would take precedence over the outer life so that the former would not be over-flooded and submerged by the ignorance. As the spiritual consciousness developed into the supramental consciousness, however, this vulnerability would be overcome, enabling a natural and full outflow of the established inner spiritual peace, love and power in a full engagement with the world. As Sri Aurobindo wrote:

The peace of God within will be extended in the gnostic experience of the universe into a universal calm of equality not merely passive but dynamic, a calm of freedom in oneness dominating all that meets it, tranquillising all that enters into it, imposing its law of peace on the supramental being's relations with the world in which he is living. Into all his acts the inner oneness, the inner communion will attend him and enter into his relations with others, who will not be to him others but selves of himself in the one existence, his own universal existence. It is this poise and freedom in the Spirit that will enable him to take all

life into himself while still remaining the spiritual self and to embrace even the world of the Ignorance without himself entering into the Ignorance.⁴²

Because the supramental consciousness embraces the world with which it feels its inalienable oneness, it naturally pours its influence on all around and contributes to the spiritual elevation and transformation of others and the world as whole. Thus, concern with and an extension of a powerful helping assistance on others and the world would be a natural consequence of the integral realisation, but this action could take a variety of different forms depending on the individual. It might well take predominantly the form of a silent, inner action, but would be capable of taking whatever outer forms its inner knowledge and vision saw as useful or necessary.

In order to elucidate a perspective on spiritual activism based on Sri Aurobindo's teaching, it will be useful to clarify distinctions between what I will call true and false forms of both spiritual passivity and spiritual activism. After elaborating on each of these principles, I will come back to consider what an integration of true spiritual passivity and activism might look like in light of Sri Aurobindo's teachings.

False Spiritual Passivity

At the basis of false spiritual passivity is inertia, plain and simple. This is perhaps the most likely and common mode that spirituality takes, because inertia is the dominant principle of our material existence, and the higher evolutionary principles of vital activity and mental understanding and equilibrium develop out of it, against its natural resistance. Its influence permeates, limits, and distorts the embodied life and mind's own characteristic tendencies.

False passivity is passive to all kinds of inner and outer influences. Inwardly, all kinds of mental movements—thoughts, perceptions, memories, imaginations—may impinge on the mind unfiltered and carry it away in various directions one after another. Whereas the mind may become concentrated and directed toward specific aims, it characteristically wanders and loses focus. At the same time, all kinds of lower vital movements—desires, cravings, impulses to action, anger, fear, worry, ambition, striving, struggle—are allowed to continue their unquiet, upsetting, and shifting play in the emotional and dynamic centers of the being. In addition to these varied inward influences, this type of passivity receives, with little or no discernment, all types of mental, vital, and physical influences from without—from family, friends, and acquaintances in the immediate

environment, from the media and internet including its unremitting onslaught of advertising, news, and entertainment, and the more subtle influences from the physical environments in which we live and move. All these influences impinge on the passive person in a continuous manner and the individual remains more or less oblivious of their influences upon him.

Spirituality for this type of passive person may consist mentally in interjecting into this swarm of influences some recurrent ideas of the Divine or of some spiritual ideal, whether through reading or concentration, emotionally through movements of devotion, and/or physically through engaging in religious or spiritual activities. Thus, upon this shifting basis of unconscious influences, a measure of dynamic spiritual activity is attempted or achieved, but this is done in a consciousness still passively receptive to all kinds of other influences, and interjected into this shifting flux at longer or shorter intervals. There is little or no filtering or curtailing of the mental, vital, and physical influences entering from within and from without. As a result, the spiritual activity takes place on an unsteady and shifting base, has to compete for time and attention with innumerable other influences, and when it does occur, may easily be swept away by the latter.

True Spiritual Passivity

In contrast to this troubled state of affairs, true spiritual passivity is to be passive only to the Divine Influence, and to confront whatever outside forces or contacts that may enter one's psychological field with equanimity, such that they do not upset or even touch the inner peace and contact with the Divine. While it is not advisable to indiscriminately expose oneself to adverse outward contacts or conditions, it is not always practicable to exclude them, or for other reasons, it may be deemed necessary to face them. Thus, there are two main aspects of true spiritual passivity: one is passivity to the Divine Power and Influence so that it may work unhindered in the inner and outer life; the second is the maintenance of an unmoved, impartial inner equality to all outside contacts, whatever their character.

In the course of the Integral Yoga, the Divine pours its divine power and influence upon the individual in order to purify, shape, and remould the whole consciousness. The focus of the practice is to enter into conscious relation with this Divine Presence, to open and surrender to it, so that it may act upon and transform the consciousness. The first aspect of true spiritual passivity is to open to the Divine and to no other power or influence so that it may enlighten and transform the consciousness. Sri Aurobindo explains:

In this yoga the whole principle is to open oneself to the Divine Influence. It is there above you and, if you can once become conscious of it, you have then to call it down into you. It descends into the mind and into the body as Peace, as a Light, as a Force that works, as the Presence of the Divine with or without form, as Ananda. Before one has this consciousness, one has to have faith and aspire for the opening. Aspiration, call, prayer are forms of one and the same thing and are all effective; you can take the form that comes to you or is easiest to you.⁴³

In general, a firm distinction must be seized between the influence of the higher Divine, or of that which leads towards it, and all that hampers one's spiritual progress. A conscious contact, a clear inner perception of the Presence or influence of the Divine is a necessary prerequisite to the true passivity. This inner contact and perception is something that develops with spiritual practice over time, and is not necessarily an easy achievement. It generally requires some diminution of the unquiet activity of the mind and vital nature. If the mind is constantly busy with its own ideas and preferences, and the vital nature is constantly busy with the pursuit of its own desires and the play of emotions, this noisy activity makes it difficult to become conscious of and perceive the influence of the Divine in us. Therefore an inner calm and peace are a necessary foundation for the Integral Yoga.

According to Integral Yoga, deep within each of us there is what is called a psychic being centred around our divine essence or soul. It is the psychic being in us that is most directly in contact with the Presence and Power of the Divine, open and responsive to it, and is able to clearly discern its influences from those coming from others or from our own mind and vital nature. It is through a growing contact of the outer consciousness with this psychic being and its coming forward into the outer nature that a conscious contact with the Divine and the true response to it comes about.

Therefore, as this development of the inner contact and conscious perception of the Divine proceeds, it is generally important to utilise our own mental discrimination between those influences which further our spiritual development and those which retard it. Indeed this mental discrimination should remain in place and work hand-in-hand with the development of the psychic contact and discrimination until the latter is well-established and secure. Thus, together with the development of the psychic being's more intuitive subtle discernment of what is true and to be accepted as coming from the Divine, there should be developed and enforced a quiet, dispassionate, yet vigilant mental discernment of what is helpful or harmful to one's spiritual growth to see that one is not led astray by wrong "intuitions" or "inner feelings."

The second side of the true passivity is more properly referred to in Integral Yoga by the term 'equality'. Equality is a key inner condition that is to be developed in the course of the practice of Integral Yoga. Sri Aurobindo explains that "Equality is to remain unmoved in all circumstances," and adds, "whatever the unpleasantness of circumstances, however disagreeable the conduct of others, you must learn to receive them with a perfect calm and without any disturbing reaction."⁴⁴ This unmoved inner poise has its basis in the spirit which underlies and supports all the movement and multiplicity of the universe. Firmly seated in the spiritual consciousness, no adverse event or circumstance, even intense physical pain, can break or unsettle the realised yogi's inner peace and composure. Thus, an equal, quiet, undisturbed, unrelated response to outside contacts and conditions, whether favorable or unfavorable, may appear to be a kind of passivity, but ideally the inner being is not touched or affected by them at all, and at least should not be allowed to be swept away by them as in the false passivity.

In the course of establishing this inner equality and poise of the spirit, progress may be marked by a gradual development of endurance, philosophical detachment, or a spiritual submission to outside influences. While none of these three psychological attitudes or poises are the true spiritual equality, each can be a stepping-stone towards it.⁴⁵ During the development of one or more of these attitudes, it may outwardly appear that the individual is passive to events or circumstances, but this passivity is quite different than the false passivity, because the individual's aim is to be concentrated within on the Divine and remain unaffected by these influences.

In addition, when the development of the true spiritual equality is incomplete and the contact with the divine Presence within is still tenuous and subject to breaks, the individual may elect to focus more time and effort on inner concentration, and as an aid, temporarily retreat to a more protected environment free from distractions and disturbing influences. The person may find that a partial withdrawal from external activities and contacts may be useful or necessary in order to permanently establish and maintain the inner contact with the divine Presence. To the outside world, this may appear as passivity, because he or she is less engaged with the world and with personal and social contacts. However, in actuality the individual is simply focusing full attention on the immediate aim, and is being especially vigilant to protect the developing inner contact with the Divine. It is not a relapse into inertia, but rather an intensified one-pointed concentration on the Divine. Sri Aurobindo has cautioned practitioners of his yoga not to enter into a complete withdrawal from all outer contacts, as this may lead to certain dangers, but he permitted partial temporary withdrawals from outer activities and contacts during certain phases in the

development of the inner consciousness. Furthermore, a withdrawal from contacts and activities which are both unnecessary and detrimental to the aims of the sadhana would not only be permitted, but encouraged.

False Spiritual Activism

False spiritual activism is activism that does not have a real or sufficiently stable basis of spirit behind to support and guide it, nor a real or a sufficiently pure dynamic spiritual power flowing in and through it. Instead, it is supported by mental ideas and ideals mixed with emotional reactions to perceived injustices or wrongs, and is infused primarily with the mental will for change and vital life energy for dynamic power. Because both the mind and vital are subject to error, distortions, and even perversions, false spiritual activism can be or become misguided, degraded, and even dangerously destructive. It would even seem that when it is informed or supported by a limited, narrow religious ideology, carrying a certain absoluteness of conviction and need of converting others, there is the greatest danger for wrong application and perversion, as evident in the history of violent religious persecution and more recent religious fundamentalism-inspired terrorism.

A clear distinction must be made between mental ideals and the true spiritual consciousness; the latter is something vast, calm and eternal, while at the same time extremely powerful. The mind, on the other hand, is a thing of ideas and convictions, which may be based on sound reasoning, sound data, careful reflection, but nearly always is partial and subject to errors. It often is seriously deficient and perverted by wrong influences.

Let us take the general case of science as an example. Science is supposed to be based on careful reasoning, sound evidence, experimentation and testing, and is supposed to provide us with sound and reliable data about and explanations of our existence. But even here philosophers of science have argued that it is generally based on assumptions which may be faulty, is typically oriented towards particular "fashionable" issues and tilted in favor of certain preferred outcomes, and is subject to biases of the investigator and of the institutions in which they work, biases which may be either conscious or unconscious. It should be borne in mind that scientific conclusions are never certain, and that many of even the most important and basic scientific conclusions have been overturned and undergone revision.

In some cases, scientific investigations and conclusions may inform and support activism, for example, in environmental activism. While careful scientific study can provide a strong basis or measure of support for activism, the point is that even here it is not infallible and one is likely to

find dissenting scientific opinions. Often, however, activists may have little basis of sound scientific evidence to support their cause, and it may be based more on beliefs and political preferences. In many spheres of social and political controversy, activism may be based on particular partial mental opinions and preferences, rather than either a scientific or a spiritual basis.

Whereas we may admit that many of the social, political, and ecological projects of activists may express partial viewpoints and preferences, there are certain injustices which would seem incontrovertible and absolute. Take, for example, human trafficking and forced prostitution, child abuse, the toxic pollution of the air or water of a community by a company. Surely standing up to issues such as these is not simply based on a mental preference or a partial viewpoint; can we not take up such causes as spiritual necessities, as spiritually-inspired activist causes? Whereas there certainly are causes that are just, and social changes that imperatively must be made in the forward evolution of human society, it is not the justifiability of the cause taken up that makes activism spiritual, but rather it is the underlying consciousness of the activist and the quality of the force which expresses itself in his or her acts. If these are not spiritual in their essence, even if the cause is undoubtedly just, it is simply activism and not spiritual activism. Ecological, social, and political activism have a rightful place and can serve just causes, but they should not be confused with spiritual activism or be falsely imbued with the sanctity of the spiritual label to further their cause.

When it comes to specifically religious or so-called spiritual matters, the same criteria apply. The world is now awash in religious fanaticism. Religious zealots are busy blowing up crowded airport and bus terminals, bombing places of religious worship, assassinating government leaders, and trying to replace democratically-elected governments, all in the name of God. The individuals involved in these acts are convinced of their justness, of the sanction and perhaps the command of God for their acts. While the evil of their acts may seem obvious to others who do not share their fanaticism, it may be impossible to convince these extremists. A firm distinction must be made between the spiritual consciousness, and a religious and mental and vital consciousness. The distinguishing factor that makes such fanaticism evil is the underlying consciousness that drives them—the hatred, the desire to kill, the perception of others as separate and expendable.

True Spiritual Activism

In assessing this inner condition of the activist, we must refer back to our earlier formulation of true spiritual passivity, and assert that true spiritual activism must be based on a true spiritual passivity. It is precisely on the

basis of the vast, calm, eternal spiritual consciousness that spiritual activism must be founded. If it does not have this stable grounding of spirit, this passivity and receptivity to the inspiration and power of the inner Divine, this stable basis of equality to outer circumstances and influences, it will not be the true spiritual activism. If activism is motivated by mental preferences, emotional recoils or attachments, vital desires for particular outcomes, it may be a noble activism, but it is not true spiritual activism.

While spiritual activism must be founded on a calm, equal, wide spiritual passivity, it requires something more: it also requires the dynamic inspiration, guidance, and driving force of the spiritual consciousness. According to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy and yoga, as well as to ancient Indian spiritual thought, there are both passive and active aspects of the Divine and the spiritual consciousness, represented in the Indian tradition by Shiva and Kali. The dynamic aspect is the One Force that acts in all forces, that expresses itself in all forms in the universe, but can also act sovereignly and intervene in the play of world forces. Supporting this vast dynamic movement in the universe is the passive silence of conscious Being, the Witness and Enjoyer of the creation. The ideal spiritual activist is conscious of both the underlying Oneness of Being and this One Divine Force energizing all things and flowing into him and driving all his or her activities. The spiritual activist is no longer merely a separate individual trying to effect change in a resistant world, but a conscious and responsive instrument of the Force of the Divine breaking up established forms and forces and creating new ones. It is not done out of pity or anger or revulsion, but as a conscious and natural flow of the Divine Force through the activist's words and actions. As Sri Aurobindo says,

How he shall do this, in what particular way, can be decided by no general rule. It must develop or define itself from within; the decision lies between God and our self, the Supreme Self and the individual self that is the instrument of the work; even before liberation, it is from the inner self, as soon as we become conscious of it, that there rises the sanction, the spiritually determined choice. It is altogether from within that must come the knowledge of the work that has to be done. There is no particular work, no law or form or outwardly fixed or invariable way of works which can be said to be that of the liberated being.... The action of the liberated doer of works must be even such an outflowing from the soul; it must come to him or out of him as a natural result of his spiritual union with the Divine and not be formed by an edifying construction of the mental thought and will, the practical reason or the social sense.⁴⁶

Just as it is not easy to realise the passive spiritual consciousness underlying all things, it is not easy to realise this dynamic spiritual Force

working in and through us in a free and unhindered manner. Whereas ultimately all our actions have this One Force behind them, it normally works *through* the limitations of our mental, vital, and physical nature, and therefore, not in a direct and spiritual manner. The aim here is to allow and enable it to substitute its own higher and more powerful working for our stumbling, misguided, and faltering efforts. This cannot be done at once, it occurs gradually over time through a disciplined practice of a Karmayoga in which all the parts of the dynamic nature progressively open and surrender themselves to the guidance and action of the Divine Force, rather than move in their own accustomed manner at the behest of a mixture of inner and outer influences, mental, vital, and physical.

The Bhagavad Gita is the great scriptural authority on this matter, and in discussing it Sri Aurobindo brings out the underlying principles and processes that would lead to a true spiritual activism. The central processes that lead to this taking up of the dynamic parts of the nature by the divine Force can be briefly summarized as follows: "Equality, renunciation of all desire for the fruit of our works, action done as a sacrifice to the supreme Lord of our nature and of all,—these are the three first Godward approaches in the Gita's way of Karmayoga."⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo elaborates,

This, in short, is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and a devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions, not less the smallest and most ordinary and trifling than the greatest and most uncommon and noble, must be performed as consecrated acts. Our individualised nature must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement dedicated to Something that is beyond us and greater than our ego.⁴⁸

It is through this continual reference of all our actions to the Divine Force that is their true source and power that we overcome the sense of our own ego as the initiator of our acts. As long as we engage in activism for the satisfaction of our own preferred outcomes, we are not yet engaged in the true spiritual activism. It is through a progressive and continually expanding self-offering of all our dynamic activities to the Divine Force that we remove the barriers to its unhindered and undistorted action in and through us. The spiritual activist is not merely a person fighting for higher principles, but is a consciously surrendered instrument of the Divine for His action in the world.

As this process of inner surrender progresses, we must continue to act according to our best lights, using the highest and most clear vision of what is to be done as we are capable, and carrying out the action with

as much skill and precision as possible, all the while offering the action to the Divine. The activist must continually seek and call for the guidance as well as the originating and sustaining power of the Divine in the action undertaken. We must leave the results of the action in the hands of the Divine, and remain entirely equal whether they are successful or not. It is not the end result that must be the motivation for the action, but the act of offering, the growing consciousness of the Divine Presence in ourselves and in our activity. These are the inner signs of the deeper and true spiritual activism.

Summary and Conclusion

The recent explosion of interest in spiritual activism is a healthy development in the field of spirituality, carrying it beyond a self-centered focus on individual health and development towards a fuller embrace of the world and its challenges. However, in its movement outward towards engagement with world challenges, spirituality must maintain its inner centre and poise in the spirit. Sri Aurobindo's ideal of the divine life, which entails a radical transformation of both the individual and collective existence, does just that. In order to bring to bear the necessary spiritual power that can truly transform and divinise the outer life, it strives to reach the highest heights of inner spiritual experience and realisation. It is relatively easier to attain a settled inner state of spiritual peace and harmony when one withdraws from the world and its problems, it is when one aims to change the outer life and the world that the fullness of the inner spiritual realisation is more severely tested and challenged. Thus, the spiritual activist has a double task, to attain the inner poise of the spiritual consciousness, and to maintain it in the midst of engagement with the problems of the world.

What we have called true spiritual passivity reflects this inner poise of the spirit which must attend and serve as the necessary foundation for true spiritual activism. As briefly described here, it consists of two main elements. One is an exclusive passivity to the inner Divine Presence and Power, as distinct from other inner or outer mental, vital, or physical influences. It is not that no other ordinary human forces are allowed to enter the psychological space of the individual, but rather that they are not *passively* allowed to enter. First one must become conscious of their presence and influence, and one must admit only those which are helpful or at least not harmful. The second element is the development of an entire equality or equanimity to all circumstances, conditions, and events. For this latter condition to become complete, one must have a secure poise in the inner spiritual consciousness, because this spiritual consciousness alone is pure and untouched by all that happens in the world. This spiritual

consciousness is distinct from mind, it is the fundamental ground of the universal existence we see around us.

From this poise of the spiritual consciousness, all conditions, all events appear as movements of nature driven by the one Divine Force that dominates all existence. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the world is a progressive evolution of the divine spirit that lies concealed in the stone, emerges in the plant, and becomes progressively more conscious in animals and humanity. It is a difficult evolution of consciousness in the matrix of matter. It progresses through a working out of conflicting forces towards a progressive harmony and is leading towards a divine delight. Birth and death are merely incidents in the long evolution of the eternal spirit. As the Isha Upanishad put it, "He whose self has become all existences, for he has the knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief, he who sees everywhere oneness?"⁴⁹ The spiritual activist should be able to look upon the world and its problems with a calm and equal regard, without repulsion. As the Mother said, "You want to correct what the Creator is doing?"⁵⁰ We should have, or we should try to develop, a perfect equality for things as they are.

But this does not mean that things should remain the way they are, or that we should not be involved in the change of the world. The world is a progressive manifestation of the Divine, it is not complete. It is constantly changing, constantly evolving into something that more purely expresses the higher qualities of the divine nature. As conscious instruments of the Divine, we must be instruments of its higher evolution and manifestation. But here it is necessary that we do not mistake our own limited ideas of what must emerge and when with the Divine's. We must inwardly unite with the Divine within so that these higher divine qualities may flow through us into the world and into all those who are around us, awakening them to these emerging forces within themselves. Our activism should be more as a catalyst awakening these divine powers in others than as a combatant, though sometimes combat too is required when the opposition is fierce and unrelenting in its obstruction to the truth that is emerging from within.

These are all very fine as high spiritual ideals, one might counter, but as long as we remain stuck in our limited human consciousness, tethered to our mental and vital existence, what are we to do about the gross injustices and the destruction of our planet? Are we to sit quietly and meditate while our fellow human beings are abused and the world is destroyed? This is the difficult dilemma in which we find ourselves, and we feel that we must act. It is here that the Bhagavad Gita advises us to act, but to do our actions as a conscious offering to the Divine. We must act with the sense and feeling that it is the Divine within us that is carrying out the actions through us and that we are merely conscious instruments for his work. Indeed it is

the Divine that in reality always acts through all actions, whether we are conscious of it or not. The key is to become conscious of it, and to more and more align our will and force with the Divine Will and Force, to filter out competing mental preferences and vital desires. If we act unconsciously of the divine impetus behind our actions, the Divine will work through our unconscious and limited instruments, but if we act consciously, the Divine will work through our conscious, responsive and therefore more effective and powerful instruments. This inclusion of the dynamic parts of our nature, our abilities to carry out effective and complex actions in conscious unity with the Divine, is the important and necessary ingredient in true spiritual activism. This comes only through practice, through work done while consciously referring the work to the Divine Force behind. It does not come through meditation or inaction. Act we must, it is impossible to completely cease to act, so it is best that we act consciously, referring our actions to the Divine, seeking the Divine's guidance, and progressively aligning and attuning our actions with the Divine Will and Force.

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31. <http://www.instituteforsacredactivism.org>
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35. <http://www.spiritualactivist.org/>
36. Sri Aurobindo (1970). *The Life Divine*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram. See especially pp. 23-24.
37. Ibid. p. 1031.
38. After being a leader of the early Independence movement, Sri Aurobindo “retired” to focus on the development and heightening of the spiritual consciousness, repeatedly refusing to reenter politics.
39. When Sri Aurobindo retired from politics in 1910 to focus on his spiritual work in Pondicherry, several “disciples” joined him. When the Mother joined him in Pondicherry 1920, their number gradually began to increase. In the early and mid 1930s, Sri Aurobindo kept up an enormous correspondence with them regarding their spiritual practice and other matters, at the peak working up to ten to twelve hours per day on this correspondence. In their collected and printed form, they extend to several thousands of pages. The Mother, meanwhile, looked after all the needs of the growing community of Ashramites, showering them with love and attention.
40. Sri Aurobindo’s written works extend to 37 volumes. The Mother’s collected works consist of 17 volumes, and her recorded conversations with a disciple, Satprem, extends to 13 additional volumes. These works are important sources of guidance in yoga. Just as importantly, many of their disciples feel that they are inwardly guided by them.
41. For accounts of some of Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s spiritual actions upon world events, see Nirodbaran’s *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo* on their active use of spiritual force to assist the allies during World War II, and see Satprem’s *Mother’s Agenda* for accounts of the Mother’s spiritual interventions in conflicts involving India during the latter part of her life.
42. Sri Aurobindo (1970). *The Life Divine*, p. 942.
43. Sri Aurobindo (1971). *Letters on Yoga*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, pp. 604-605.
44. Ibid., pp. 661-662
45. Sri Aurobindo (1973). *The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 681-686.
46. Ibid., pp. 272-273.
47. Ibid., p. 97.
48. Ibid., pp. 102-103.
49. Sri Aurobindo (1970). *The Life Divine*, p. 150.
50. From an unpublished, handwritten note that had been posted on a wall near the Mother’s room, but recently was removed.