

# SELF SURRENDER IS THE KEY TO INTEGRAL YOGA

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Sri Aurobindo explains the triple labor of Integral yoga as aspiration, rejection and surrender. Aspiration should be constant and complete for the realization of the Divine consciousness, and it should always be vigilant. The rejection of all lower impulses, i.e. of the physical, vital and mental is also important in Integral yoga. Every false impulse or desire has to be rejected. Challenges are present at every point of life for the sadhak of Integral yoga and a constant vigilance is essential. Though aspiration, rejection and surrender go hand in hand, my position in this paper is that the third aspect, surrender, is the most important. When an individual is completely surrendered to the Divine, everything in life becomes an opportunity for progress. But for that it is absolutely necessary that surrender is constant, active and vigilant, not merely an inert passivity.

I will first examine the role of surrender in four major aspects of the Integral Yoga, i.e. knowledge, devotion, meditation and work or service. I will also show that the central importance of surrender is what makes Integral yoga different from other yogas. Thus, I will show that self-surrender is the key to Integral Yoga.

In preparing this paper I have relied extensively on three key works of Sri Aurobindo: *The Mother*, *The Synthesis of Yoga* and *Letters on Yoga*. Wherever I have used a direct quote from any of these texts, I have given the exact reference as per the best of my ability.

## **The Role of Self Surrender in Integral Yoga**

A major part of the life of an individual is concentrated on the outside, one is always more attentive to outward appearances, actions and influences than an inner life. In contrast, in Integral yoga every action should be directed by the psychic. The recognition of the psychic and an unconditional surrender to the Divine is the first step in this path. The soul becomes the guide and leads the individual through the outer life.

Self surrender is often mistaken with inert passivity. It is not just mental acceptance, but also a focused effort on the part of the sadhak. Inert passivity means one is not receptive to the Divine force and hence is inactive. But a truly surrendered individual is open to the Divine grace and is a receptacle of the Divine power, the opening within is towards the Divine influences only. Initially in the path of Integral yoga, surrender is not complete. Hence an active personal effort is required at this stage.

The ultimate purpose of self surrender is the complete transformation of the individual self, which is the aim of Integral yoga. It is the harmony of the outer and inner life, the outer life is guided by the soul and the realization of the Divine happens in all walks of our life. For the psychic to be prominent, the replacement of the lower impulses of the physical and vital by the influences from the higher consciousness is required.

Two most important signs of progress in Integral yoga may be the realization of the Divine in the self and the identification of the self with the universal consciousness. The Divine spark within is the guide, but it is veiled due to the darkness in the individual. During the initial stages of Integral yoga, it is difficult to identify the Divine spark within. There are obstacles on the path, like the vital impulses which mask themselves and are mistaken to be the voice from within, or the biased mental impressions which often come up, which have to be recognized as not the Divine influence and overcome before the true self within can be recognized. It is

constant vigilance and surrender which help in the realization of the individual Divine Consciousness. In the path of Integral yoga, a time comes when the individual realizes that it is the One Divine in all—the realization of the universal consciousness. It is definitely an achievement, but not the goal.

The progress on the path is directly related to the self surrender of the individual. Sri Aurobindo says “In proportion as the surrender and self consecration progress, the sadhaka becomes conscious of the Divine shakti doing the sadhana, pouring into him more and more of herself, founding in him the freedom and perfection of the Divine nature” (*The Mother*, chapter 2, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 8).

Self surrender and consecration of all is not limited to some particular period or time in the everyday life of the sadhak. It is commonly held that a person remembers and offers self to the Divine while sitting in meditation, but as soon as the meditation is over, the remembrance is also over. This is not the case in Integral yoga. Surrender should be constant, happening throughout the day, throughout every activity in which the sadhak is involved.

Sri Aurobindo says, “Life, not a remote silent or high uplifted ecstatic beyond—Life alone is the field of our Yoga” (*The Synthesis of Yoga*, CWSA, p. 89). Surrender has a role in every activity of the life.

### **Role of Surrender in Knowledge**

Though learning can be considered a mental activity, in actuality it is much more than that. Mostly it is only analysis and synthesis that are done by the mind. But the true knowledge lies within. One cannot read and know what is not already known. Reading, understanding and learning are just means to unravel this knowledge within. With self surrender, there is a psychic opening and knowledge is revealed. The knowledge is acquired directly from the one and only real teacher—the Divine. Learning can happen from the teachers and the shastras, but it is not complete knowledge. They impart the knowledge which has been revealed to them. They have the wisdom of the ages and their progress helps the new sadhak on his way. The physical teachers or shastras can be road maps, but one should not be completely dependent on them or blindly follow them. It is always important to remember that the real teacher is the Divine. Even on the physical level, surrender helps an individual to acquire knowledge, as the opening in the mind leads to better understanding. Thus, spiritual knowledge is better acquired with the opening of the psychic. Surrender results in this opening.

There are obstacles also in the path of knowledge. Mental pride, the satisfaction of the knowledge acquired from the books read or even the feeling of advancing on the path of yoga come in the way of progress. The sadhak has to be constantly vigilant and offer to overcome such impulses which are a contradiction of true surrender of oneself to the Divine.

### **Role of Surrender in Work and Action**

For an ordinary person, major part of time is devoted to some external work or action. Much attention is given to external appearances, contacts, relationships, job and career etc. Following the path of Integral yoga does not mean giving up all outer work and life. It is a change of consciousness which is the determining factor in Integral yoga. Initially, mental acceptance that every work is a service to the Divine has to be present. This understanding and acceptance is the result of self surrender. Once self surrender happens, there is no personal work, every thing is done as a service to the Divine.

Cessation of demand and choice of work, lack of desire towards the results, abundance of energy for work and equanimity towards all work happen when the individual has offered oneself to the Divine. Though there is no desire for the result, dedication is still present. The

difference between the work of a follower and a non-follower lies in the interest in the work. It is very rare that a person who has not surrendered to the Divine would put in 100% of his ability and knowledge to the work given, but in the case of a follower, it is not the result but the knowledge that the work is being done for the Divine which is important. Every action is offered to the Divine. There is a constant remembrance of the Divine. During the initial stages, when the surrender is not complete, personal effort from the sadhak is essential for constant remembrance and offering, but as yoga progresses, surrender becomes more complete and the remembrance of the Divine is present at all times, even while involved in the most tedious physical work.

Constantly remembering the Divine even when working does not mean that there is lack of attention towards the work being done. Once the self has surrendered to the Divine, the psychic opens and there is a separation between the inner and outer consciousness during the work. The outer consciousness may be fully involved in the work at hand, but the inner consciousness always guides it as well as opens continuously to the Divine.

In ordinary situations, vital is the seat of all action, but for the follower of the Integral yoga, the psychic is the guiding force behind all action. This happens when the individual is completely surrendered to the Divine. The consecration of the vital can be identified by different signs. Sri Aurobindo explains the signs of consecration of the vital in action as a feeling that all work and life belongs to the Divine and a joy experienced, calm and disappearance of the egoistic attachment, the feeling of the Divine behind all the actions and a persistent faith. Persistent effort and self surrender are essential to come to this stage of Integral yoga, but it is not unachievable. The key point to be remembered is the self surrender. Once the surrender is complete in all parts of the individual, integral yoga becomes easier.

Equanimity in all the work done also becomes evident with the surrender. Not the position or the importance of the work, but rather the spirit in which the work is being done is the essence.



*Loving Surrender*

*Photo credit: <http://www.blossomlikeaflower.com/2008/05/surrender.html>*

### **Role of Surrender in Love and Devotion to the Divine**

Sri Aurobindo asserts that the soul's turning to the Divine is essentially a Divine love. But the initial manifestation comes as human love and devotion to the Divine. The one important characteristic of Divine love is the lack of demand or desire. There is no wish for anything, no gains in physical, vital, mental or spiritual level is required, and the happiness and joy is in the

experience of the love itself. When surrender to the Divine is complete and the Divine becomes the most important aspect of one's life, nothing else matters. Whatever happens in life is accepted as the will of the Divine. Thus surrender helps the opening to the Divine and the filling up of the person with love and wisdom. The individual becomes a perfect instrument for the Divine. "True love for the Divine is a self giving, free of demand, full of aspiration and complete surrender" (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 757).

Sri Aurobindo explains bhakti as not an experience, but as a state of mind. When the individual is devoted to the Divine, the psychic becomes awake and prominent. This is one important step in the Integral yoga. The ultimate level of devotion to the Divine is a complete surrender.

As a beginner on the path of Integral yoga, effort is required in devotion as in any other area of life. Initially, the experience of bhakti and the surrender to the Divine are mental. One has to constantly remember and offer, till the time the psychic opens up and yoga becomes life itself.

### **Surrender in Concentration and Meditation**

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother do not insist on hours of meditation as the most essential part of Integral yoga. Though meditation and concentration have a role in opening of the psychic, it should not be an escape from life, as in doing nothing else but sitting in meditation.

Concentration helps in the progress in Integral yoga. Sri Aurobindo explains concentration in Integral yoga as "Concentration for our yoga, means when the consciousness is fixed in a particular state (e.g. peace) or movement (e.g. 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" (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 723).

Concentration leads to the emptying of the mind, leaving it open to the Divine influence and knowledge. It is a means to ultimate calm and peace. It also helps in the surrender to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo explains "The power of the concentration in the heart-centre is to open that centre and by the power of aspiration, love, bhakti, surrender remove the veil which covers and conceals the soul and bring forward the soul or psychic being to govern the mind, life and body and turn and open them fully to the Divine, removing all that is opened to that turning and opening" (*Letters on Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 23, p. 725).

### **Surrender in Other Systems of Yoga**

Though the aspiration for the Divine is a common factor in all the systems of yoga, the focus is different in different systems. Rajayoga stresses on the knowledge aspect, the people who follow this system devote their life to acquiring knowledge of the shastras and meditation and contemplation. Hathayoga, on the other hand, focuses on the perfection of the physical as an instrument for the Divine. They follow hours of physical exercises to attain perfection. The other aspects of life are ignored in this process.

These other systems hence do not focus exclusively on the complete submission to the Divine, whereas in Integral Yoga it is the whole individual who practices the yoga. The first step towards perfection of the whole individual is the acknowledgement that the Divine is the doer and we are just instruments in His hands. This understanding leads to the complete surrender to the will of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo says "The Mother's power and not any human endeavour and tapasya alone can rend the lid and tear the covering and shape the vessel and bring down into this world of obscurity and falsehood and death and suffering truth and light and life Divine and immortal's Ananda" (*The Mother*, SABCL Vol. 25, p. 41) This recognition is the major difference between Integral yoga and other systems of yoga. It is the surrender of the individual which leads to this recognition and working of the Divine power in the human.

## Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have explained the importance of complete surrender to the Divine in very clear terms. It may be seen that surrender is the key to the opening of the psychic which is the essential component in the progress of Integral Yoga. Surrender means a complete offering where the individual becomes an instrument in the hands of the Divine. There is no ego, desire for the egoistic satisfaction or personal demands even that of the spiritual achievements when complete consecration has happened. Surrender helps the psychic come forward and guide the individual's life.

Integral Yoga is not an easy path. Progress may not be seen in days, months or years. It is the surrender and the trust in the Divine which keeps the individual going through even the dark periods. It is the light of Integral Yoga.

Aspiration, rejection and surrender go hand in hand in Integral yoga, but among these, surrender is the key. Once the individual is completely surrendered to the Divine, the path becomes easier. Initially, the sadhak has to put in a lot of personal effort, constantly remembering and offering the self and all activities at all time to the Divine, constantly rejecting the impulses of the lower levels of consciousness and aspiring at all times for the manifestation and realization of the Divine consciousness. The mental effort of the initial stages gradually becomes effortless. Whatever the activity, whatever the state of the outer consciousness, remembrance of the Divine is always present in the inner consciousness. This is progress in Integral Yoga. Surrender also leads to a complete change of consciousness of the individual. It also leads to the psychic opening and transformation. Eventually the realization of individual consciousness and the universal consciousness also happens. Hence it can be safely concluded that surrender to the Divine, complete consecration of the self is the key to Integral Yoga.

Published in *New Race: A Journal of Integral Studies*, volume XI, issue 3.

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