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Long-Term Spiritual Growth and its Influence on Professional Endeavor

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This paper presents a qualitative study of how long-term practitioners of Integral Yoga working in four fields of professional endeavour—business management, education, health care, and the arts—have applied Integral Yoga in their work and how they perceived its influences. The paper gives a brief overview of the nature of Integral Yoga, especially its aspect of *karmayoga*, and an explanation of the study's method which involved semi-structured interviews with 12 residents or regular visitors to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville. Ten common themes were identified which emerged in at least three of the interviews and in at least two fields of work. The report of the findings focuses on the participants' lived experiences of Integral Yoga and its perceived effects in their various fields of work.

Keywords: Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo, The Mother, spiritual practice, karmayoga, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville

Evolutionary spirituality, an integration of Eastern and Western concepts, refers to a general approach towards spirituality that emphasizes the idea that humanity is undergoing an evolutionary process leading towards a spiritualized life and society, and stresses the integration of spirituality into all aspects of life, including work. While this approach is now gaining prominence in Western spirituality (Lerner, 2000; Redfield, Murphy, & Timbers, 2002; Tolle, 2005), two of its early forerunners were an Indian spiritual teacher, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) and his French collaborator, Mirra Alfassa (1878-1973), who came to be called the Mother. The present study examined how long-term practitioners of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's Integral Yoga have integrated spirituality into their lives and work in four fields of endeavour: business management, education, health care, and the arts.

Sri Aurobindo (1997) argued that although later developments in Indian spirituality emphasized withdrawal from the world into higher states of consciousness, the aim of spiritualizing life in the world was important in ancient Indian scriptures and indeed shaped the early development of Indian culture such that spirituality and religion came

to be infused into all aspects of worldly life. Sri Aurobindo put spiritual evolution and the spiritual transformation of the outer life of humanity at the forefront of his teaching.

Sri Aurobindo based his teaching in part on an integration of two schools of Indian spirituality, Vedanta and Tantra (Sri Aurobindo, 1999). Along with Vedanta, Sri Aurobindo assumed there is an underlying Oneness in which all things are united, a common ground of Spirit which could be described as a fusion of infinite existence, consciousness, and bliss. He argued that this Spirit could be experienced as a single spiritual essence of all the diversity of things and energies in existence, however, consistent with Tantra, it could also be experienced as a dynamic Divine Power that drives all other energies in the universe and constitutes their forms, but which can also override its natural processes and act sovereignly as the Divine Force and Grace (Sri Aurobindo, 1999). He indicated that two fundamental aims of the Integral Yoga are the perception of the passive infinite Spirit underlying and supporting all existence, and the Divine Force and Grace permeating and driving all action (Sri Aurobindo, 1999). Integral Yoga aims at these perceptions not only in brief experiences, but

as abiding realizations, the conscious basis of one's life and action in the world.

In Sri Aurobindo's (1999) main treatise on Integral Yoga, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the section on the Yoga of Divine Works deals with the spiritualization and transformation of the will and life energies through the progressive inner offering of all one's work and action to the Divine, doing all for the sake of the Divine and not for the ego. The yoga of divine works includes the development of an entire non-attachment to the results of one's actions, for one's actions are not to be done for the fruits that they may or may not bring, but are to be done solely as an offering to the Divine. Over time, this discipline was said to lead to a state in which one consciously sees and feels that it is the Divine who initiates all of one's actions, and indeed all action in the universe, with oneself and other individual beings as merely instruments of the One Divine Being and Force.

Sri Aurobindo developed an enormous body of correspondence with his disciples, which was later collected, organized, and published in four volumes of *Letters on Yoga*, a volume of *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*, and a volume of letters on the Mother.¹ The *Letters on Yoga* dealt largely with the practice of Integral Yoga, and they included in-depth discussion of the yoga of work and action, or *karmayoga* as it is called, as it was formulated for the Integral Yoga. One of these letters will help to further illustrate the nature of this discipline, or *sadhana* as it is called. In this letter, "The Mother" and the "Divine Shakti" refer to the Divine Mother, the One Divine Force that is behind all action in the universe.

The signs of the consecration of the vital [the vital energies, the dynamic part of one's nature] in action are these among others:

The feeling (not merely the idea or the aspiration) that all the life and the work are the Mother's and a strong joy of the vital nature in this consecration and surrender. A consequent calm content and disappearance of egoistic attachment to the work and its personal results, but at the same time a great joy in the work and in the use of the capacities for the divine purpose.

The feeling that the Divine Force is working behind one's actions and leading at every moment.

A persistent faith which no circumstance or event can break. If difficulties occur, they raise not mental doubts or an inert acquiescence, but the firm belief that, with sincere consecration, the Divine Shakti will remove the difficulties, and with this belief a greater turning to her and dependence on her for that purpose. When there is full faith and consecration, there comes also a receptivity to the Force which makes one do the right thing and take the right means and then circumstances adapt themselves and the result is visible.

To arrive at this condition the important thing is a persistent aspiration, call and self-offering, and a will to reject all in oneself or around that stands in the way. Difficulties there will always be at the beginning and for as long a time as is necessary for the change; but they are bound to disappear if they are met by a settled faith, will and patience. (Sri Aurobindo, 2013, pp. 233–234)

There are a few implicit points in this passage which can be brought out and elaborated. First, the passage assumes that any kind of work can be done in the spirit of *karmayoga*; that it is not so much the type of work that matters, but the way in which it is done. *Karmayoga* is a matter of attitude towards work and action, not of doing "important" work or service to others. Second, the passage suggests that the development of the true attitude for *karmayoga* is progressive; it takes time, it may even take many years. The true attitude develops as the consciousness develops and as the inner relationship with the Divine and Divine Force develops. As this process proceeds and the relation with the Divine grows increasingly close and intimate, one feels the Divine initiating one's actions and even carrying them out with oneself as a willing and conscious instrument of this higher, spiritual working.

In addition to providing guidance in the practice of *karmayoga* in general, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother also provided practical guidance

for working in particular fields, such as the fields examined in this study: business management (e.g., Sri Aurobindo, 2013; The Mother, 2004a), education (e.g., Sri Aurobindo, 2003; The Mother, 2004b), health care (e.g., Sri Aurobindo, 2011; The Mother, 1979), and the arts (e.g., Sri Aurobindo, 1997a; The Mother, 2003). While they wrote no formal texts on business management or health care, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother provided substantial guidance to various disciples who were working in these fields through written correspondence, much of which has been collected together and organized in their respective sets of collected works. Sri Aurobindo wrote formal texts on education and the arts which applied principles of Integral Yoga (Sri Aurobindo, 1997a, 1997b, 2003), while the Mother established a school based on these principles and was herself an accomplished artist. She also guided various disciples who were teachers and artists in their work through correspondence and in person. Because the present study focuses on general principles of applying the Integral Yoga in work which cut across these various disciplines, details about applying Integral Yoga to these specific fields were beyond this study's purview. It may simply be said that for work in any field, a primary aim of the Yoga is for the worker to become inwardly conscious of the Divine's Presence, and to become receptive and flexibly responsive to its guidance, influence, and action in the respective field of work (Sri Aurobindo, 2013).

Since its inception, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the community of disciples that had gathered around Sri Aurobindo and the Mother to practice Integral Yoga, has had a focus on work as an important aspect of the discipline. All the inmates of the Ashram were assigned or expected to take up a work that would be a field for the development of their consciousness. Sri Aurobindo's spiritual collaborator, the Mother, was from its beginning in charge of the Ashram, and developed and organized the growing community. Various units and departments were set up for farming, food preparation, dining services, medical care, dentistry, clothing making, laundry, transportation, manufacture of steel vessels and utensils, wood working and furniture making,

building construction, a printing press, a school with a first-rate physical education department, various handicrafts, and others. Various businesses were set up. There were individuals who were encouraged and guided in writing prose or poetry, or in various arts and crafts. Under the Mother's direction, over time the community grew to more than 1000 people that provided for most of its own needs, and today has approximately 1500 members, 400 students, plus many nonmembers who participate in the life of the community as volunteers, devotees, and practitioners of Integral Yoga (Sri Aurobindo Ashram, n.d.).

At the age of 90, the Mother founded Auroville, an international intentional community located approximately 15 km from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, which was focused on the development of human unity. Auroville has a broader mission than that of the Ashram, and while the practice of the Integral Yoga is neither a requirement nor a focus for many of its members, many Aurovillians do attempt to bring a spiritual impetus into their life and work. The scope of Auroville's work is more diverse than that of the Ashram, as it involves the creation of a brand new experimental township on what was once a barren stretch of land among various poverty-stricken villages. It has developed into a vibrant community of settlements, businesses, and experimental and cultural activities in the midst of a freshly grown forest. It has approximately 2300 members, about half Indian and half Western, but also many nonmember participants and visitors, and much involvement and interaction with the local villagers (Auroville, n.d.).

The growth and vibrancy of these two spiritual communities is remarkable, particularly in light of the fact that the Mother, their spiritual head and founder, left her body more than 40 years ago, did not appoint a successor, nor has any other spiritual figure assumed leadership. While the two communities have had their share of difficulties since the Mother's departure, they continue to develop successfully along the lines established, due largely to the written teachings and spiritual guidance of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. A primary aim of the present investigation was to examine the ways in which participants of

these communities put into practice the *karmayoga* as taught by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as the spiritual basis and impetus of their work and action.

Study

Put succinctly, the primary aim of the study was to shed light on the experience of spiritual change in life and work that occurs in the long-term practice of Integral Yoga. "Shed light" in this context means to describe, but also to discover meaning and the greater possibilities of life and work suggested by the literature and the experiences encountered in this exploration. It aimed not only to describe, but also to inspire and show pathways to significant and positive change.

Method

The study's focus on these aims and its embrace of a relatively subjective approach to data analysis and the presentation of the findings were inspired by the approach and methods elaborated by Braud and Anderson (1998), Braud (1998a), and Douglass and Moustakas (1985).

Participants. In the present study, twelve long-term practitioners of the Integral Yoga from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville were interviewed about their practice of the Yoga and its integration into their work. Eight of the participants were from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, five of whom were members, one who was an independent resident who volunteered in the Ashram and was involved in its activities, and two who were long-term recurrent visitors. Four of the participants were members of Auroville. Of the total participants, seven were men and five were women. Seven participants were originally from Western countries, five were from India. They ranged in age from 32 to 84. Although the youngest had only 11 years of experience in the Yoga beginning after finishing college, he had attended the Ashram school and lived in the Ashram atmosphere since his early childhood. Most participants had 30 or more years experience in practicing the Yoga. Four of the participants were primarily associated with business management, three with health care, two with education, and three with the arts. Of the business managers, one was in charge of an Ashram commercial unit; the second ran an Auroville commercial unit, the third

was self-employed part of the year and worked part of the year in an Ashram commercial unit; the fourth was a business consultant who periodically visited the Ashram and Auroville, and worked primarily with business managers in a Western country. Of the health care workers, one was a homeopath; the second was a psychotherapist and healer, and the third was a nurse, dentist, and social worker. The two teachers taught in the Ashram school. Of the artists, one was a painter and two were musicians. However, two of the artists were also teachers (one of painting and one of music, making four teachers in all), and the other artist was also involved in business management (a business related to music). It should be mentioned here that the present study focused on commonalities in the application of the Yoga to work that cut across the different fields of work; it did not examine specificities in the application of the Yoga to the individual disciplines. The inclusion of participants having different fields of work, different residential communities, nationalities, ages, and sexes provided greater generalizability of the findings regarding the commonalities in the application of the Yoga in work than would have been the case with a more homogenous group. Participants were selected based on three criteria: they were long-term, serious practitioners of the Yoga, they were accomplished and respected in their chosen field of work, and they were familiar to the research interviewer and forthcoming in their participation.

Interview procedures. The recorded interviews were semi-structured, that is, there was a standard set of questions pre-prepared for all the participants, but variations were made based on the unique circumstances of the individual and the course of the interview. Typically, such variations included additional questions that probed more deeply into the primary questions, or into interesting material that the participants brought up in the course of their answers. Most of the interviews lasted from an hour to an hour and a half, but one of the interviews with a particularly concise individual lasted only 21 minutes. Participants were informed that they would not be identified in reports of the findings, that identifiable information would be excluded, and that for the

most part their responses would be combined with those of other participants. Ten of the interviews were conducted by the primary investigator, and two were conducted by an experienced research assistant. The first question was intended as an ice-breaker, and inquired into the circumstances of the person's first encounter with the Integral Yoga. The next three questions inquired into the broader nature of their practice of the Yoga. Twelve more questions were focused on the integration of the Yoga into their work (see Appendix).

Data management. To organize and analyze the information collected, the recorded interviews were first transcribed and edited slightly for grammar. The typed transcriptions were then subdivided wherever there was a significant change in the ideas being expressed. These separate ideas ranged in length from part of a sentence to several paragraphs. The subdivided transcriptions were entered into a spreadsheet database, each successive idea entered as a separate line of data. Each discrete idea was then concisely summarized and represented by a phrase or brief sentence in a separate column. A code number from 1-4 corresponding to each idea was entered in another column: '1' representing the most important and relevant responses, '2' representing less important and relevant responses, sometimes responses that were more specific to particular aspects of their work; '3' representing material that was peripheral; and '4' representing more personal material that potentially could identify the participant. The importance/relevance ratings were based on subjective judgments of substantive importance and interest, but not on any preconceived ideas of what would constitute interesting content. Finally, significant commonalities in the discrete ideas that had been given importance/relevance codes of '1' were identified subjectively, without use of formal rule or method, by examining the summary phrases or sentences that had been assigned to represent the discrete ideas. Common themes were coded with a suggestive word or phrase, and entered in another column. Themes with substantive theoretical interest that were common to the discourses of three or more participants were selected for discussion. The concise summaries, codes, and

identification of common themes were made to facilitate the identification and organization of the most relevant material for presentation; they were not subjected to any quantitative analysis. Other columns of data recorded the pseudonym assigned to the participant, the primary question associated with the responses, and when relevant, a second primary question that was addressed in the response.

General considerations. While focusing on individual experiences, it must be born in mind that most of the individuals involved in the study practiced the Yoga in the specific context of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville, two spiritual communities founded by the Mother. At times, this social context came directly into the experiences reported, at other times it was implicit. Finally, while most of the experiences reported occurred in the context of practicing Integral Yoga in these two communities, it is not suggested that such experiences occur only in this context, but rather that they show the spiritual possibilities of life and work available to people everywhere.

Results

The transcribed, subdivided, and coded interview data were analyzed for commonalities in content themes. Ten substantive themes were identified that were common to at least several of the interviews. These themes are described below along with some relevant quotes from the interviews that express them. To help show the relations of these themes to the Integral Yoga, each section begins with one or two relevant quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

Meaning.

The true aim of life is to find the Divine's Presence deep inside oneself and to surrender to It so that It takes the lead of the life, all the feelings and all the actions of the body. This gives a true and luminous aim to existence. (The Mother, 2004d, p. 5)

One of the most basic results of Integral Yoga, as with other spiritual paths, is that it gives deeper meaning and significance to one's life. Several of the interviewees indicated that they had gained meaning in their lives through the Yoga.

Perhaps most to the point, Nilima (all names have been changed) said:

Well that there is a purpose to all this. I mean, before I thought do what you can, have a happy life and a kind life, that sort of thing, but that there is actually a purpose to this whole adventure with the evolution, the descent of light into matter, the descent of divine into matter, to transform matter and make a supramental world, that this process is happening changes your outlook on everything. There is nothing that does not change in that light. So your work, your friendships, your everything just changes. It's not just to have a nice time.

Nilima's comments reflect Sri Aurobindo's teaching that there is a purpose and aim in life, that it is not simply to live happily, but to participate in the evolution of consciousness toward a divine life. The aim of life is to open more and more to the light and power of the Divine so that it may transform the life and material existence. At the first encounter with the Yoga, this new worldview may completely change the mental outlook and orientation to life, and as the consciousness develops and the Divine is more concretely seen and felt, life itself undergoes a transformation. It changes from being a struggle for survival and happiness of an isolated individual in a separate, often hostile environment, to one of being a unique individual expression of the Divine, a soul growing toward ever higher and wider vistas of consciousness.

The Yoga gives meaning, purpose, and direction not only for one's own life, but to the world also. As Bina put it:

I can see the Earth growing into something what will be. I don't know how long it will take, but for me that is not the thing, because I can see that it is happening. I know that it is happening. When I see all the oppositional experiences, everything going to pieces, this and that, before I was irritated by all these things: "Oh my God, what is all that."

But now I can see that it is a period, and the light is stronger . . . and also the light can go there. It is not like this, that one has to fall

into the darkness again and again. I think that is to a certain degree over. Even if one falls constantly into darkness, but the light will be there, to be found also there. Because there, [it] is already done . . . the connection [with the light] is there. In that sense, it is no more as fearful as it was before. Even if it appears like that, because it is old experiences which were always the same, always it was the same [thing] happening again, and one could not get out of the catastrophic thing. But now it is opening.

Bina has described here not only a change in her perception of the world, but what she perceived as a change in the world itself. She perceived a recent and rapid advance in the world's evolution such that its higher potentialities are now closer to the surface, emerge more easily, and though they may get covered again, reemerge more readily. Whereas darkness is still there, the light too is there and cannot be entirely extinguished. It dims, but only to grow brighter again.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the world as a whole is evolving towards greater unity, harmony, and delight. But when we look at the world around us, or read the evening paper, we are often confronted by its ignorance, discord, senseless violence, pain, and destruction. Where is the meaning in this? Sri Aurobindo assured us that it does have meaning. It is going through a necessary stage in the evolution from gross matter through the development of life and mind towards a supramental consciousness and a divine life here on earth. When we look at the pain and evil in the world in this larger framework of spiritual evolution that is unfolding over millennia, it helps put everything into a new perspective.

Merging of life, work and yoga.

In the right view both of life and of Yoga all life is either consciously or subconsciously a Yoga. For we mean by this term a methodised effort towards self-perfection by the expression of the secret potentialities latent in the being . . . (Sri Aurobindo, 1999, p. 6)

Some of the participants seemed to make little or no distinction between work and sadhana,

or between work and life, or between sadhana and life. One of Sri Aurobindo's most famous sentences is "All life is yoga" (Sri Aurobindo, 1999, title page). There are perhaps several layers of meaning to this. All of life is to become the field for yogic practice, such that the practitioner is to be engaged in the practice of the Yoga at all times, in all contexts. But it also suggests that life itself is the unfolding of the Yoga, life itself is the process of development from ignorance to knowledge, from pain to spiritual delight, from egocentrism to universality, from weakness and limitation to mastery, freedom and wideness. Similarly, one's work is to become a field of one's practice, and at the same time, a growing and increasingly refined expression of the divine action through oneself as a unique instrument.

Susan, who is a musician and teacher, simply said,

There is no difference between my sadhana and my work. . . . I came to India in search of the Truth. I wanted to know what is the Truth. Circumstances seemed to draw me into music. Music gave me the most wonderful experiences in my early days, and even now. So there was no question for me whether I should follow the musical path. And my music, path, and life just began to merge into one. It's hard to say. Everything has helped everything else.

Susan further elaborated on this identity between her sadhana and music: "Before coming to India, I had never heard that music could bring me to a state of realization. But in India I hear of music saints, like Swami Haridas or Saint Tyagaraja, music saints who are there in Indian history for hundreds of years. These musicians have realized the Divine through their music." When asked whether the music itself has become a way for her to move toward or to enter into unity with the Divine, Susan replied, "Yeah. With the example of the musician saints of India, it is like a big 'yes' for me in my life that I can follow this path."

Thomas, who works in business, described the merging of life and Yoga succinctly, "Everything is Yoga and everything is coming in, and everything is running contemporarily." He then elaborated, "Work is basically the checkpoint to see how far

you can put in practice what you are trying to attain in the sadhana. It is a reference point. It is nice to read and be quiet, but as soon as you come into contact with others, then things start to change." He added,

In the work field, your sadhana is easily tested. It is concrete, like the material world. That is why I think that Sri Aurobindo finds it very important that you work. It is something that makes you see where you are with your sadhana, in the sense of what changes you made and how you are doing your sadhana and where to improve. [It is] something very concrete.

Study participant Kant, when explaining what was important in his sadhana, mentioned "to channelize one's energies for something that is more meaningful." And then he added, "And in that direction, in that something more meaningful, I would like, through art, to see how I can realize that, to make work for art as my sadhana." Kant also showed how art is closely intertwined with his sadhana from another angle. When asked whether he discovers something about himself through his art, he replied,

In fact, you come to know yourself more and more. And also we realize that we don't know ourself. And then you are searching to understand your true self. I think art is the best vehicle for doing that, because art is where there is nothing else in between, it is you and you confront yourself. That is exactly happens in meditation and yoga. I would say that the only difference is that here you express it through something that has a material manifestation, which is the artwork. While when you meditate or do your yoga it is completely inside.

Further in this direction, he indicated,

more and more, I am trying to call for a completely blank mind, so that you are not disturbed by your own mundane thoughts, and then you can just allow whatever wants to come. In fact, that is, I think, not an easy exercise. That is what I would like to achieve, to feel just like a mirror, or just an empty space.

Kant also discussed the transformational *function* of art. He said,

Sri Aurobindo said that there are three roles of art—I am [paraphrasing] from *The National Value of Art*: the first role of art is decorative, the second is educational, and the third is spiritual . . . where it has to transform us, it has to change our consciousness. This understanding of art becomes another means of self-transformation. It is something very deep.

Further along this line he said,

I think [art] is the best reflection of the personality of anyone. At the end, if you want to create something beautiful, you have to first yourself be beautiful, you have to yourself first think beautifully. You cannot be thinking that I will make something and I will be something else. That is the main thing: that changing one's self first, working on oneself. Actually, doing the painting is actually insignificant; that also is not the aim. The true purpose of painting, you actually get to converse with yourself. It is like a soliloquy with yourself that you have. And that is the best thing that I find about my work.

Money is usually absent as a motivating factor in work.

You must neither turn with an ascetic shrinking from the money power, the means it gives and the objects it brings, nor cherish a rajasic attachment to them or a spirit of enslaving self-indulgence in their gratifications. (Sri Aurobindo, 2012, p. 10)

Thomas, who was self-employed in his native country part of the year when not doing volunteer work for the Ashram, explained that the motivation in his work for making money

is less and less. Before I thought I should gather certain sums, which I always did, by the way. I put a goal, and usually I went even beyond it. But now, as I told you before, I think that what you need will come. That gives me a lot of peace. It won't make me a rich man. You do your best, the results you leave to God.

Kant echoed the same thing while also elaborating on the use of money,

Money is an important power because it helps you to do something. But you should never be ridden by money to the extent that you forget what it is for. In that context, I have realized that money—it is quite interesting—it is something that comes when it is needed. If you really need it, it comes. . . . For me it's a miracle, because there would be a day when I wouldn't know how I would buy the milk tomorrow, and the next day I would have to write a check for one lakh rupees [100,000 rupees, or roughly \$2000]. . . . I have had these kinds of days. And you cannot imagine, it has just come—sometimes sent by someone in the family, a friend would give a loan, sometimes someone donated some money.

Bhaskar, who was a teacher, explained his attitude toward money this way:

I have been very fortunate, my family has been very supportive. At the same time, I feel that whatever I get should be used to whatever extent, as much as possible, towards getting my work as perfect as possible. So it's not that I am averse to using money or even requesting for something specific that is going to help me in my work. But at the same time, if for some reason I don't get it, I say, "Ok, what is the best I can do with what I have." So that's the attitude towards money.

Gopal, a business manager in Auroville, explained his relation with money like this:

With money what I can say is that I have always gotten what I needed. I have never gotten anything given free from a grant or donation; I had to work for it. But I get enough opportunities that I get what I need, but I have to do something. I am not going anywhere else to ask for money. I have not done anything like this, ever. I have not gotten anything from Auroville; everything I am working for and earning myself. That is my standard.

Shanti, a health care professional, explained that she has not to be concerned with money because of the Mother's care.

Money is necessary, but my needs are very limited. That's why I found, in whatever situation, Mother arranges things for me. So even without spending anything, I get things. So I do not bother about it.

Question: Is it a motivation or concern in your work?

Answer: No. money is not in any way any obstacle or any concern, or anything. Even if somebody is offering or not offering, that also I don't want to do. Because I don't want to divert my attention from my [work] to something else. Whatever I have, it belongs to the Mother. Today or tomorrow I am [going to die], so everything [that] is mine belongs to Mother. So I don't even think about it, and she is taking care of everything. . . . No. money is not in any way any obstacle or any concern, or anything.

Service.

In this way of doing and seeing all works and all life become only a daily dynamic worship and service of the Divine in the unbounded temple of his own vast cosmic existence. (Sri Aurobindo, 1999, p. 113)

To be at the Divine's service is the surest means of attaining realization. (The Mother, 2004d, p. 111)

Rather than money, service has become a predominant motivation for several of the participants. For Shanti, this was quite consciously a service to the Divine. As she simply put it, "The main thing is that the work is a service to the Divine. That I am working for the Mother. That is my main motivation."

Similarly, Bhaskar related how the concept of "remember and offer," which the Mother gave as a key formula for the sadhana, was an essential part of his practice. But he also mentioned how this seemingly simple formula is not so easy to put into practice in real life.

I would think her simple formula of remembering and offering. That is something I try to keep in the background, and I find that easier to do when I am not, say, specifically doing some sort of an intellectual work or talking to people or interacting with people as such. So I really value my time in my own space, when I am with myself, and at the same time, I find it quite challenging, even this very simple thing of remembering and offering, especially in today's context where we are constantly surrounded with technology, even though you might be yourself alone as such.

Nicolas has tried to make service a primary aspect of his musical work. He explained its importance like this:

And I think a big factor is there, is the service character. Because as an artist, you are mostly preoccupied with yourself. Everything comes around yourself: your creativity, and your project, and your blog, and this thing, and that process towards that thing. . . . [P]eople think, "Oh you're an artist, you're free and you can do what you want." It is much more challenging, because you have many more dead ends, where you can get stuck in your own process.

Nicolas makes service predominant not only is his music, but in other facets of his work and life as well. He finds that it is one of the master keys to sadhana and spiritual growth:

Then on the practical side also that whatever one does is as a service, is an offering. It is not like it is pulling in, doing it for me or doing it for this, or to enhance more of the personality. . . . In one way, you could almost say that that is the secret, the key mantra: "remember and offer." In offering also, as I said before, [it] is a service . . . but not, how to say, service for others, but that it services that evolutionary process of which I am also a part.

Feeling the Divine's Presence.

In the very depths of your being, deep within your breast, the Divine Presence is always there,

luminous and peaceful, full of love and wisdom. It is there so that you may unite with it and it may transform you into a luminous and radiant consciousness. (The Mother, 2004a, p. 365)

One of the most essential realizations that is aimed at in Integral Yoga is an abiding sense of the Divine Presence. Nevertheless, this experience may differ in its quality or nature for different individuals, or at different times. It may also be experienced more as an impersonal spiritual Peace or Force, or as the Presence of a Divine Being, with or without form. In this Yoga, it may be experienced as a feeling of the Presence of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother, not necessarily in form, but as Divine Presences carrying something of their personality and force. It is something more easily experienced when one is quiet and concentrated within; it is less easily experienced when one is actively engaged in outer work or activity.

David first experienced the Presence palpably while meditating at a shrine that held relics of Sri Aurobindo: "In the Shrine, it was the Presence there all the time, there was no question about who was in charge there, and what the Presence was." Later, staying in this Presence became a focus for his spiritual practice. In the course of our interview, he explained, "In this conversation here I am chanting in my interiority: 'ma, ma, ma,' so that with every moment, every word, I can be a little better at seating myself with her Presence in the midst of the world." He explained that in his work as a consultant with various groups of business or organizational leaders, finding this Presence was key: "I know that at the center of that interiority of a person is a resonant Presence that we could articulate as a soul. I have found that in myself getting to that point is paramount, and I believe that it also paramount for any group of people." His work entailed moving the groups towards their interiority and its center, as far as that was possible for each particular group.

Keeping the sense of the Divine Presence was also paramount for Nicolas:

I think it is trying to bring Presence in whatever is happening, and whatever I am doing.

I mean, when I am coming too outward, then I realize the balance is lost, the balance and the possibility of awareness, of constant Presence.

And it took maybe 10 years of living here that I could say, hey this is interesting, it doesn't matter what one does, it doesn't matter in which activity one is, the possibility of Presence, of a spiritual Presence, is in anything.'

You can say it like this: My move towards music and the arts was because I always felt like music offered me the possibility to bring the inner state and Presence from meditative practices into outward life. And, when outward life was too strong, music again made a bridge to the inner. So music was a step to an outer activity, a creative activity where I still could stay in Presence.

For Bina, being in the Presence was fundamental to her work as a healer:

Question: What do you most value in your work?

Answer: The Presence. Without Presence it would be nothing.

Question: So you bring that in your experience when you are working with others?

Answer: Yeah, I cannot work otherwise. That is the connection in both directions.

I always feel that it is a Presence in which this influence is concentrated, and how I communicate it. Then I try to be aware, that I stay as much as possible present. . . .

It is the same Force. I don't do anything, because I think also that Mother and Sri Aurobindo do the work with each one. I don't want to interfere with my own thing. What He has shown me, I should do it. . . . Otherwise I would not know. And for me it is so natural that I don't think about it. I do like this and then it starts.

For Bina, the Presence is intimately connected to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as well as to the Divine Force which works to heal her clients. By staying in Presence herself, she makes the connection between the Divine Force and the client conscious and therefore more effective.

Nilima, a teacher, said that "I know that The Mother is with me and I can call on Mother to be

with me in the class and I am sure She is." In some of her work outside the classroom, she also had "times of very obvious inspirations, . . . moments where I felt really the Presence."

To feel that one is an instrument of the Divine.

But a time will come when you will feel more and more that you are the instrument and not the worker. For first by the force of your devotion your contact with the Divine Mother will become so intimate that at all times you will have only to concentrate and to put everything into her hands to have her present guidance, her direct command or impulse, the sure indication of the thing to be done and the way to do it and the result. And afterwards you will realise that the divine Shakti not only inspires and guides, but initiates and carries out your works; all your movements are originated by her, all your powers are hers, mind, life and body are conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe. (Sri Aurobindo, 2012, pp. 12-13)

As the connection with the Divine grows, as self-offering becomes more complete, then the feeling develops that it is the Divine who does work and the person is merely an instrument. One participant said that the feeling that one is not the doer of one's actions but merely an instrument was one of the main changes he had undergone as a result of yoga. He described how he experienced being an instrument of the Divine in his work with patients this way:

I pray, I report [to the Divine]. I go every day and I report whatever patients have come and whatever the difficulties are there I tell . . . these are the difficulties coming, or this thing is there. . . . I don't have patients, because I don't feel responsible. I feel it is Mother's responsibility to take care. If they become alright, then alright. If they do not become alright, then also it is alright. So I become more and more peaceful I pray that [She] works through me. She gives me intuition or like this, whatever the way, She can use me.

Nicolas, a musician, described the nature of this instrumental relation with the Divine in this way:

It is more like all the creative work is how can the [human] instrument become a better instrument. And for that we are fortunate, because there is this image of the hollow bamboo opening up to let the light through, or let the music sing through. So I think for me one attraction was, you could say, musical practice is per se, the motivation in that practice, is how can you become that transparent and skillful that *it* plays. I think it is a beautiful metaphor; working with music is basically how can the Force more and more work and take over.

For Nicholas, this focus on becoming an instrument of the Divine was not just in playing music, but in all of life.

I use a metaphor from music, where I said it is all about tuning. It is about having myself tuned, that I do through my morning discipline, I am tuning this instrument so that it can be confronted with any challenges and not lose center and alignment.

Feeling connected with the Divine leads to harmony and efficiency in the work.

And there comes a time when one feels a kind of inner guidance, something which is leading one very perceptibly in all that one does. But then, for the guidance to have its maximum power, one must naturally add to it a conscious surrender: one must be sincerely determined to follow the indication given by the higher force. (The Mother, 2004c, p. 359)

Several of the participants indicated that sometimes when they felt strongly in contact with the Divine the work they were doing flowed naturally, harmoniously, and more effectively. Susan put it this way: "Sometimes, on special occasions, it seems like Mother is just present, and then it seems that nothing can go wrong. I feel supported in everything, so everything can change." Concerning her teaching, Susan said,

My work is a lot about interacting with children and students. . . . While I am using my musical knowledge, I am interacting with others, I am

giving what I have learned. But I feel very much Mother's help while doing that. It seems that when I demonstrate things, it seems to come out better when I am demonstrating to a student than when I am playing for myself or in a concert even. So I feel good in interacting with others that way.

Similarly, Nilima often felt that remembering the Mother while she was teaching changed the tone of the interaction with the students. She said,

It does help and the more I remember . . . sometimes I don't. If I am caught up in my day then this is just one other class, I can completely forget to do it. But if I do call, the class changes its tone because Mother said as soon as you . . . and I can feel [it]. If I say, "Please be with me in this," it's there and the class changes. . . . The quality.

In his work in a commercial unit, Thomas explained that through his concentration on the work, solutions came automatically:

For instance, I don't know a lot of software, I just click here and there and it comes. Just don't ask me to do it again. Of course, when you do an operation again and again, it becomes part of your critical knowledge. Otherwise it's kind of "purely intuitive." The vibration comes from above and it gets realized. You're not the one doing it. That is a beautiful sensation. You make the moves: you take the scissors when you need it, you need a number of cards and you take exactly the right number of cards. Those are nice moments. The more you are concentrated and penetrating into the things you have to do . . . the more this comes. Those are again what I call Ananda [divine bliss] moments.

Gopal, a business manager, found that openness and receptivity brought an automatic flow of inspiration and progress that carried things forward:

Question: Do you ask for spiritual guidance or inspiration for your work?

Answer: Not directly, but it is coming, possibly. If you are creative, you need this flame to be open to come up with new ideas. . . .

Question: So you don't specially ask for inspiration, but you feel that it comes?

Answer: It comes automatically. Then some new project is coming, or new idea, then some people are coming, and all these situations, and all this. You really dive into that.

Kamal, who ran a commercial unit, described a control and harmonious flow of activity directed from the Divine that occurred in his work:

Something arranges. Suddenly, something happens.

Somebody comes asking for work. I mean, amazingly, something happens. So again and again I say, "Why do I have to think, or worry, or anything?" "You haven't thought who is going to replace you?" people say. I don't know, but sometimes I think, "Who are you to wonder, when somebody else [the Divine] is looking after all this."

Receive concrete help from the Divine.

The more complete your faith, sincerity and surrender, the more will grace and protection be with you. (Sri Aurobindo, 2012, p. 8)

With the Divine's help nothing is impossible. (The Mother, 2004d, p. 90)

When the participants' felt a conscious connection with the Divine, they often felt supported, guided, and helped by a higher Force in carrying out their work. This did not appear to be limited to a subjective perception, but seemed to have concrete results in the physical world. We have already seen that at such times, the work seemed to them to flow more effortlessly and effectively. But sometimes if the conscious connection with the Divine was temporarily interrupted and they experienced obstacles or difficulties, they called the Divine for help. And when they did, they reported that they typically received a ready response.

Thomas, who worked in business, described his approach to dealing with problems:

If I will meet difficulties, then I will solve them. And if I can't solve them, I keep on trying to do my best without making too much a problem of

it. I pray to the Mother. And then usually after some time the solution comes.

Every time I ask for help, in what I call in a very sincere way, and you are open, then it comes, straight away, instantaneous. You don't even have to wait. It's there, boom! At maximum, the day after. But usually it comes, poof.

Gopal, a business manager in Auroville, continually relied on the Mother's help in difficulty:

Mother gave us this way. And to do it here is much more easy than to do it outside. So you just try to give what you can for this project of Auroville. And the rest we have to leave to Her and say, "Please Mother, do something. I can't go and do only up to here, I really try, the rest I can't do, you have to do something." So you are in a constant dialogue. Each time you come to a dead end, you have to call her and say, "Please do something." And mostly it is going on, in difficult times.

Nilima, a teacher, spoke about her approach in dealing with difficulties in her work this way:

Now I am really trying to follow the Mother when I work with them [the students]. But if . . . there are these difficulties then you just push through the difficulties or work them out. You sit back in the evening and just say, "Why aren't they listening to me?" And you call on the Mother's guidance and you ask her to help you figure out what you could do to help them to listen. And it comes! You go to [pray] before that class or something, there are a lot of things you can do that will eventually get you the way you need to be.

Sujatha, a health care worker, also felt that she received help from the Divine in her work:

Question: Do you sometimes call to the Divine for concrete help in your work?

Answer: Yes. If things are more difficult or I feel that I am not able to manage, then I can think about Mother and talk to her. Always she is with me.

Question: You said that you sense she is always with you, so then she in a way is always helping you in your work?

Answer: Yes. Sometimes I can ask, "Why does this difficulty come to me? Why am I facing this difficulty? *You* have to solve the problem." Somehow *she* has to give that knowledge to me to solve the problem.

Question: So you look to her for insight into the problem?

Answer: Yes.

Similarly, Nicolas said,

The beautiful thing here is that there is this possibility of consecration, that you can be in an inner dialogue with the Force. And I think that is what for me is happening. Even in other domains of life, but it is often more when it doesn't happen, doesn't flow, I can be in a communication . . . asking sometimes very concrete things, asking for change, asking for insights.

For Kamal, the union with the Divine had become so close and intimate that he did not even have to ask for help. The Divine was always there.

You see, there are two different things. When there is a division, you ask for help. When you go deep inside, it is She that works. There is a difference. I don't say, "Please come and be with me when I am doing this." It doesn't come like that.

Question: It is already there?

Answer: Yeah.

Question: But when there is a [difficulty]?

Answer: I know that I don't do anything, someone else does it. So slowly this has grown, and slowly it has come. So for me . . . when somebody says, "Okay, you do Mother's work." I don't know. It is *not* me. It is somebody else.

Question: So that is your experience now, it is more that She is doing it?

Answer: This I have experienced always.

Question: You don't really feel it is you?

Answer: No.

Difficulties seen as part of the yoga.

The difficulties come always to make us progress. The greater the difficulty, the greater can be the progress. Be confident and endure. (The Mother, 2004d, p. 236)

Some of the participants could not readily identify difficulties in their work; it seemed that they had been reconceptualized in such a way that they were not seen as difficulties, but rather as opportunities for growth and making progress, and as an inevitable part of the sadhana that they had undertaken. For example, in her growth as a musician, Susan said that she didn't have difficulties, "because it seems like it is her path, not mine. I am simply cooperating, participating, or it is like I am putting up the sail to catch a little bit of that divine breeze. But it's her path."

After being unable to identify any difficulties, Thomas expressed it this way,

Nothing. I can't think about difficulties. What I notice now by your question is that I really don't see difficulties. I don't make them beforehand. What I notice is that I start living more and more now, in the moment. If difficulties will come up, then I will solve them. And if I don't solve them then the solution might come later. For me, I just try to do things as good as I can at that moment. If I will meet difficulties, then I will solve them. And if I can't solve them, I keep on trying to do my best without making too much a problem of it. I pray to the Mother. And then usually after some time the solution comes.

Gopal, who is a business manager, explained his attitude towards the obstacles that come in his business this way:

Normally I would say I don't have difficulties. It is just movement, something is finished and the next one is coming. There are small things popping up, like it is not ready, or now I have . . . not enough money to pay [a bill]—but I know it will come. We got [some money coming in] the next four months, and then we have enough to pay for this, and then something else is coming, like this it is going. But they are not

really difficulties, because somehow it is the way how you do it and the way it is going and it works.

Fulfillment.

It is only the Divine's Grace that can give peace, happiness, power, light, knowledge, beatitude and love in their essence and their truth. ...

The Grace is equally for all. But each one receives it according to his sincerity. It does not depend on outward circumstances but on a sincere aspiration and openness. (The Mother, 2004d, pp. 88-89)

At least a few of the participants expressed fulfillment in their life of sadhana and work. They felt settled in their life and work, and while even *they* experienced difficulties, these difficulties did not appear to cut across a general feeling of deliverance and contentment. Probably most participants felt that their sadhana, and also their proficiency in their profession, was a work in progress and were conscious of limitations or defects that they were aspiring to overcome. Nilima expressed the importance of accepting one's limitations, while at the same time striving to surmount them with the aid of the Divine. One important aspect contributing to a feeling of fulfillment was the sense of being supported and even being carried forward by the Divine on the spiritual journey towards greater truth, harmony and delight.

One participant who seemed especially fulfilled in his life and work put it this way:

Question: What is the most rewarding experience or insight that you have gained through your work?

Answer: To participate in the life and the yoga in the Ashram. Before [I came here] I had this marvelous experience which brought me to India, and the experiences that I've had here have left that one far behind. So the life here, if we can follow the yoga, participate in the yoga, is a great thing. We've had so many sadhaks before us who very quietly lived their life and make so little noise about it. This would be a

model to follow. . . . It is simply that the life, the music, the teaching is sufficient wonder and reward.

And I value very much working in music. I feel I am very fortunate to be spending time in music. I feel that Mother has given me this work. I get a lot of satisfaction in working in music.

Gopal who runs a commercial unit, expressed his fulfillment in his work and life like this:

Yeah, it is a joy, it is fun. We are lucky. Most things, if you look at it, you don't have these kinds of jobs like at a call center, or working in a shopping mall or something like this. We don't have that here. We have so many opportunities. Sometimes, still we are demanding and unhappy and complaining with everything. When I am sitting here at lunch time with other people, and after lunch, it is like another day in paradise. You can look at things like that. When you look at how things are going on outside, how much we have here.

Bina felt that her present life and work was the culmination of a life-long development of spirituality and professional work as a therapist and healer. While she had found peace and contentment, she felt inextricably intertwined with the collective society around her where there remained much discord, inner and outer conflict, and suffering. Her work, then, was to help others to resolve these discords, with herself being an intermediary channel between the Divine and her clients. She stated it briefly in these words:

Because one could say that what I wanted to do from the beginning of my life I can do more and more. [What] I wanted to look for [and find] is that . . . *something else* which is really happening, and so this I try to live now and try to do with others.

Nicolas said that most fulfilling for him were the times when he could communicate, or be a part of, the emergence of the Divine Presence in

groups of people, both in his organizational work and in his musical performances.

My [most rewarding] experiences . . . were when the Presence and the consecration appears, emerges, in a group of say seven people. I've never experienced it with more than 12 people [except] maybe in a cultural context. In a performance you can get them into this state where you feel like it is flowing through you, you are not doing it, and there are 60-80 people participating in it; that is a beautiful gift.

Shanti seemed particularly at ease, carried by the Divine in her life and work. She seemed to have managed to surrender herself into the hands of the Divine to the degree that she felt her life and work were the Divine's responsibility, not her own. Through this surrender she had found peace and contentment. She felt her life, including her work as a health care provider, was being completely taken care of, and she had no worries or anxieties about it. This is something that had developed over many years; she had not always been this way.

Whenever ego comes, I found that there is some upset there. . . . [The] more and more I become egoless, more and more I get better here. . . . I became more and more calm and quiet, that is my reward. My anger has reduced a lot. That is my reward . . . I used to be very impatient. Now I am quiet, calm, patient. That is my reward.

Discussion

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given a detailed map to progress through Integral Yoga towards a divine kind of life and work in the world. This map was based in part on ancient spiritual teachings, such as the Bhagavad Gita, but was unique in other ways, and they described it in great detail in their voluminous writings and recorded conversations. In his *Letters on Yoga*, Sri Aurobindo (2012a, 2013) explained many of the experiential nuances of the spiritual discipline while addressing practitioners' questions and difficulties. While there is certainly a timeless quality to these principles and guidelines, such that they will remain inspiring to

spiritual seekers far into the future, they nevertheless were often directed at particular individuals in particular situations at a certain time and place. As expressed by one of our participants, the Ashram at that time was very different from the Ashram of the present day. In particular, the people, the spiritual atmosphere, the culture, the customs, the ways of doing things were all quite different. Of course, the community of Auroville was only started towards the end of the Mother's life, and its development has mostly occurred after her passing. One of the main aims of the present study was to see how these principles and guidelines were being lived out by individuals in the present day communities of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville.

Thus, the experiences of these participants point to the possibilities of the long-term practice of Integral Yoga, and not just theoretical possibilities, but possibilities within the reach of present day practitioners. The participants in this study were not famous or extraordinary, though they seemed to be sincere practitioners and dedicated in their work. While most were residents of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville, a few lived outside and came periodically for visits. They were a varied group of different nationalities, ages, and fields of work. It is likely that similar experiences would be reported by other long-term practitioners.

In the present paper, I have focused mainly on basic issues relating to the practice of the Integral Yoga as it relates to different types of work—business, education, health care, and the arts—often in similar or related ways. For example, calling for help from the Divine when confronting obstacles in work was something done by participants in all four fields, and seemed to work effectively whatever the difficulty. Future studies should examine in more detail applications of the yoga that are particularly relevant to the individual fields of work.

While this study concentrated on relatively basic concomitants of practicing the Integral Yoga that were applied in the various fields of work, this is not to say that these particular findings were universally expressed by all the participants or necessarily in all four fields. My aim was not to demonstrate the *universality* of the yogic principles or their application by all practitioners, but simply

to show how various yogic principles are being applied in these particular contexts. The particular concomitants of the practice of the Yoga which have been discussed were things expressed by at least several participants in somewhat different ways. There were many individual differences in the experience and practice of the Yoga among these practitioners, and the fact that these particular issues were discussed by at least several of the participants suggests that they are relevant to and probably fairly commonly experienced in one form or another by other long-term practitioners of the Yoga. The unique and particular expressions of these issues in the lives of the individuals in the study illustrate the variability in how these basic principles can get expressed in real life and in different fields of work.

I do not deny that my own experience and understanding of the Yoga may have influenced the selection, organization, and interpretation of the material selected from these interviews. Indeed, the formulation of the questions asked of the participants circumscribed the kinds of responses that were received. While this is something that influences even research that purports to be objective, the findings of the present study are admittedly subjective and partly shaped by my own particular perspectives. A different investigator would likely find different things to focus on and interpret. This need not be viewed as a defect or falsifying influence; it can also be viewed as an important asset and integral component of the findings. I myself have had a long-term involvement with the Integral Yoga, and my involvement in various kinds of work has always been an important part of it. My own understanding and experiences of the Yoga have helped me to sift out what I believed were important and meaningful commonalities and patterns in the ideas and descriptions expressed by the participants. The quotations from the participants stand as evidence of the significance of the ten themes that have been extracted. It is this extraction of significance and meaning from the large body of transcribed conversations that has shaped the findings and their presentation. The validity of the findings may be measured by their meaningful coherence, the value their meaning has

for others, and their resonance with readers' own experiences and perceptions (Braud, 1998b), rather than their objective reflection in the overall body of transcribed interviews.

A different kind of subjectivity that may have influenced this study is related to the participants themselves. Was it really true that they received help from the Divine Force when they called for it, or was it simply their imagination or perception as shaped by their acceptance of the teaching of the Integral Yoga? This study did not aim to disentangle these two possibilities. What this study examined was the participants' subjective experiences, not objective reality, if there is an objective reality separate from people's experiences. It is my contention that the subjective understandings and experiences of these practitioners of Integral Yoga was a worthy object of study in itself, regardless of whether these understandings and experiences are consistent or not to some external standard of truth.

Of course, it would be a somewhat different matter if the participants had consciously fabricated or exaggerated their reported experiences, in which case the reports would be less interesting and valuable to others. However, the participants in this study were personally known by the interviewers and believed to be sincere, grounded individuals who were experienced practitioners of Integral Yoga and accomplished in their line of work. They appeared to have genuinely expressed their experience of the Yoga and how it influenced their work. In most cases they elaborated in detail and with idiosyncratic nuances their own unique experiences of the various common principles that were identified; they did not merely make broad claims. There was little incentive to exaggerate their claims, as they were informed that their identities would be withheld from the reports of the findings. Typically, they were as forthcoming about their limitations and defects as their spiritual accomplishments. Thus, the findings reported here showed a certain consensus in the possibilities of how one can spiritually approach and experience one's work through the Integral Yoga.

In examining how these practitioners approached and experienced their work, it can be seen that they conformed well to the principles and guidelines laid down by Sri Aurobindo and

the Mother. Service, rather than financial reward, became the primary motivation for work. Work, life and sadhana merged into one, consistent with Sri Aurobindo's adage, "All life is yoga." Work was a powerful vehicle for spiritual development by testing the participants' inner development and motivation in the crucible of human interaction and material resistance. The difficulties and obstacles of work were viewed as opportunities for growth, or as an impetus to turn to the Divine for aid, thus strengthening the inner reliance on the Divine Power. In turning to the Divine for help in surmounting difficulties, it was the common experience that help came and problems were solved. Turning to the Divine for inspiration, guidance, and aid in work and service helped to strengthen the inner conscious connection with the Divine Presence. For some, this Divine Presence was palpable, a source of joy and support, and maintaining it constantly was a primary objective in their lives. Participants felt themselves to be instruments of the Divine Force, and felt inspired, guided, and sometimes almost physically moved in their work. For several, the inner contact had grown intimate, such that they felt continually in dialogue with the Divine Mother, inwardly discussing their questions, decisions, and courses of action, while asking for guidance and aid. Some were able to turn over responsibility for their work to the Divine, feeling that the results were in the Divine's hands, which gave a sense of equanimity, peace, and security. In general, the participants exhibited a joy and contentment in their lives, and for several this contentment extended to a deep and complete sense of fulfillment.

Notes

1. *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo* is published in 37 volumes, each of which are available for free download in pdf format at: <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/ashram/sriuro/writings.php>

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions:

Questions on the general practice of Integral Yoga:

1. How did you come to Integral Yoga?
2. How has Integral Yoga changed the way you look at the world?
3. At this stage in your practice of the yoga, what aspects or processes are most prominent?
4. How important is work for your sadhana? How does it contribute?

Questions on the applications of Integral Yoga in the various fields of work:

1. What do you most value in your work?
2. What is your central motivation for work?
3. In what ways does Integral Yoga help you in doing your work? For example, do you sometimes ask the Divine for concrete help in your work? How do you do this? What happens or changes when it comes? Can you give an example?
4. Do you ask for spiritual guidance or inspiration for your work? How do you do this? What happens or changes when it comes? Can you give an example?
5. What attitudes or practices from the yoga do you apply most in your day-to-day work? What effects do they have?
6. What is the relative balance of freedom and structure in your way of working? Which do you emphasize more? In what ways?
7. How would you describe your manner of dealing with your (employees/competitors, patients, audience, students)?
8. How would you describe your way of using your power and influence over others in your work? How important is it as a factor in your work?
9. What is your relationship with money? How important is it as a motivation or concern in your work?
10. What are the main or recurrent difficulties you face while working? How do you deal with them in actual practice?
11. Are there areas where you feel there is a conflict between the demands of sadhana and your work? If so, what are they and how do you deal with them?
12. What has been the most rewarding experience/insight you have gained through your work?

About the Author

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