

BOOK REVIEW

BECOMING ONE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTEGRAL YOGA: A Compilation
from the Mother's Writings.

RUNNING HEAD: Becoming One

David Johnston

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BECOMING ONE: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INTEGRAL YOGA: A Compilation from the Mother's Writings. Paulette Hadnagy, compiler. Auroville, January, 2008. 406 pages. Reviewed by David Johnston

As the title indicates, *Becoming One: The Psychology of Integral Yoga* is about psychology as practical yoga, more specifically, integral psychology as practical integral yoga. The book begins with a sound description of Sri Aurobindo's system of psychological classification; the principal focus is a thoughtful selection of commentaries by the Mother on the psychological nature of being, along with counsel about the need for progressive individualization, its meaning and significance. There is, in addition, an interesting appendix with provocative material on Freud and Jungian psychology and the nature of the Shadow, an often misunderstood and undervalued concern that is common to both the yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and Jungian psychology.

In Western cultures and modern and post-modern cultures everywhere, there is considerable pressure, subtle or otherwise, to seek human meaning in the objective external world where, in fact, it does not exist. What is normally overlooked is the unique authentic subjectivity of the individual, which is the true location of human meaning and creative renewal of culture. Individualization first requires developing a solid sense of "I"-ness through the development of the thinking and/or feeling ego [function] and reason while becoming an effective center of proactive power, either through ego-centric individualism or individualism with social interest. The development of the true individual, however, surpasses both forms of individualism, and its development requires

that one's energy is directed towards the integration of disparate aspects of one's nature around the Self or psychic being.

Inasmuch as yoga is practical psychology, integral yoga can be viewed as integral psychology with practical value that, although based on metaphysical truth, is concerned about hard realistic day to day issues of life. In comparison to the Integral Psychology of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, other philosophies and paths of yoga and, with one notable exception, psychologies, have not developed a complete and valid classification of the nature of the psyche. In some older traditions such as *Advaita*, emerging Knowledge and Consciousness in the world of Ignorance [*Avidya*], however imperfect, was either not clearly acknowledged or the implications were not fully developed.

Even if there is now a belief in the reality of the world, either through a new-found path or re-definition or re-vision of these traditions, the in-depth understanding of the significance of individuals and their importance for the transformation of society and culture is typically understated and ill understood. There is one psychology of an integral nature from the West that has, in fact, developed into a practical yoga, empirically determining that the psyche is centered on the Self, and that is the Psychology of C.G. Jung. In fact, Jung's psychology is grounded in metaphysical truths that, although not as well differentiated as the metaphysical position of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, have many points in common. Most importantly, there is in common a cosmic centre that includes

both unity and multiplicity, which in the end proves that matter and psyche are based on a transcendent unitary reality. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother referred to it as the Supermind, the experiential reality of which has far-reaching implications for the transformation of being. Jung referred to it as the *unus mundus* which, from his observations, has enormous implications for the nature of day to day psychological reality and the practice of psychology based on the primacy of the non-dual laws of synchronicity, an acausal connecting principle, while allowing for the secondary truth of causal laws.

Not only are individuals the source of creative renewal, they are equally the source of expressing destructive forces as well. According to both the Mother and Jung, the individual human psyche consists of an equal amount of light and dark forces as does the manifest Deity. The Mother saw the need of separating the shadow from the light and forcefully rejecting the shadow, although allowing for the possibility of its eventual transformation. For her, the shadow represents unacceptable formations and emotions that contradict one's spiritual ideals. Sri Aurobindo referred to the Evil Persona, as the being that attaches itself to *sadhaks*, which contradicts the spiritual work to be done when one takes up Integral yoga.

In the West, Christianity has already forced a radical separation of good and evil to the point that there developed considerable repression and moral intolerance. Thus, the shadow, for Jung, represents inferior qualities that are unadapted,

repressed or forgotten, which do not harmonise with conscious ideals and beliefs about the nature of one's personality. The first task of individuation, as he defined it, is conscious assimilation of the shadow, which leads to accepting of some hitherto repressed qualities along with more conscious self-discipline. Repression leads to perversion and destructive behaviour, while conscious assimilation releases vital energies that can be harnessed for the good.

Sri Aurobindo and Jung's systems of classification of the psyche are comparable, with the former's earth-centred fourfold division into mental, vital, physical, and psychic beings being more conceptually differentiated, the latter's being more imagistic and practical in terms of psychological immediacy. In addition to the shadow, with Jung, there is the psychological problem of assimilation of the anima and animus, the female aspect of the male psyche and the masculine aspect of the female psyche, each of which has its peculiar perversions and difficulties. Consciousness of the anima for men brings greater sensitivity towards women and increases values of relatedness and feeling sensibilities, and artistic creativity. A more conscious relationship to the animus for women brings purpose, strength and courage, spiritual meaning and differentiated thinking, as well as the ability to relate better to men.

In order to genuinely participate in the creative transformation of the community, there is a need to become conscious of a deepened and heightened relationship to the personified Self, what Jung referred to as the *anthropos*, the symbol that

unites the opposites of unity and multiplicity as well as all levels of being from the ordinary person to the spiritually and culturally differentiated. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, as the avatars of our age, are the most complete embodiments of the *anthropos* and the meaning of evolutionary life in our time. As such, they personify the instinctual and spiritual basis and foundation for creative social interrelatedness in the unfolding new world.

For Jung, the royal road to the unconscious requires relating to the complex, with its archetypal core, and he put prime importance on active imagination for the purpose of engaging this aspect of the psyche for in-depth personality transformation, as did Sri Aurobindo and the Mother with regard to dynamic meditation. He also highly valued dream work and recognised the wisdom of the dream. Dreams, he realized, show the situation as it is from the point of view of the unconscious. According to his empirical findings, their importance lies in that they reveal the compensatory nature of the unconscious vis à vis consciousness and can, when understood, add to conscious awareness. Although concerned about not imposing an interpretation on his clients, Jung discovered the key to understanding the wisdom of the dream that the competent practitioner can use to help others in their search for psychological self-knowledge.

Inasmuch as the Mother acknowledged that attending dreams can be important in a path to self-knowledge, her view is in agreement with Jung's empirical findings. She was, however, apparently not aware of the empirical discoveries of

Jungian depth-psychology and its ability to interpret dreams, often in a way that is significantly different from the Mother's. As Jung's view resonates with my personal experience and as a psychologist, I urge caution and discernment in accepting her statements as universally valid in this regard.

Becoming One: The Psychology of Integral Yoga plays the invaluable role of presenting a differentiated picture of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral Psychology and what they mean when they said that yoga is practical psychology. Fully recognizing that Integral Yoga is practical integral psychology is an important reminder of the need to sincerely understand who and what one is and the actual state of one's psychological development. The book has the great merit of not only differentiating Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's Integral Yoga, but Paulette Hadnagy, the compiler, has also judiciously chosen passages from the Mother's works that are a treasure of practical psychological understanding and food for the soul. She has also made an important contribution to integral psychology by presenting writings on the nature of the Shadow, as well as considerations on the two main fathers of Western psychology, Sigmund Freud, and C. G. Jung, especially the latter, by different authors and disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

The compiler let the Mother speak for herself, with the exception of correcting her understanding of the nature of Freud's superego. She interwove other people's opinions on Jung in relationship to Integral yoga and she herself did not hesitate

to express her own view on Jung in relationship to *Advaita*. This format recognizes the value of individuals and their search for understanding, even if they are sometimes contradictory, as well as allowing her to express her primary devotion to the Mother [and Sri Aurobindo]. The search for truth is a concert of many voices and individuals play an exceptionally important role in its unveiling. Although, in general, I am in essential agreement with the different commentators on Jung and his psychology, I did not always find myself in full agreement with the sentiments and expressed opinions. That does not mean that I do not appreciate their comments and rather take any disagreement I might have as an invitation to further refine my personal understanding of Integral psychology and Jung's potential contribution to it. Let this book then serve as an important catalyst for individuals in their progressive search for understanding the nature of the requirement for the transformation of both the individual and the community.