

**Integral Soul Work:**  
**The Integral Marriage of Spirit, Soul, and Social Activism**

**By Terry Patten**

**Integral Theory Conference 2015: Integral Impacts**

**Abstract**

This paper examines subtle and causal/nondual spirituality, describing the enduring values and the limiting tendencies of each. It notes that the “nondual consensus” has led to the *spiritual bypassing* of the subtle, and introduces a new synthesis, “Integral Soul Work” based on an incarnational, relational, integral nondual view. Authentic self-transcendence in this context is the basis for coinciding non-egoically with the subtle and causal psychophysics of the soul’s specific character, purpose and destiny. It is also the basis for groups, in awakened mutuality, coinciding with the psychophysics of the world soul, and co-enacting a new kind of social action.

### **Transcendental Spirituality**

The highest radical nondual spiritual teachings regard unchanging ever-present consciousness as the foundational nature of reality, ever-present; the nature and animating energy of all that changes — all forms, beings, bodies, states, and experiences. As embodied in traditions like Vajrayana and Zen Buddhism, Vedanta Hinduism, Kashmir Shaivism, and some schools of Sufism and Taoism, they point to awakening beyond the gross, subtle, and causal fixations of attention, to the Radiant Transcendental Nondual Consciousness that expresses itself in the form of all outer and inner experience, the very Ground of Being.

These traditions orient us to the transcendental with radical simplicity. “There is only Ati”, said Chogyam Trungpa (Wilber, 2000, p. 30). “Find the permanent in the fleeting, the one constant factor in every experience”, said Nisargadatta (1973, p. 119). “Show me your original face, the face you had before your parents were born”, says the famous Zen koan. Their practice injunctions instruct us to relax the fixation of attention upon the content of gross, subtle, and causal experience so as to awaken to the nondual reality of consciousness-itself, and to return again and again, forever, to that recognition.

Integral Theory has been grounded from the beginning in this radically nondual integral evolutionary panentheism. Panentheism points to the divine being both utterly transcendent to and immanent in the world at the same time. Ken Wilber has remarked that the place where Radical Spirit can be found in his classic diagram of the quadrants and levels is “the paper on which the diagram is written” (Wilber, 2006, p. 288). Using the ancient gross-subtle-causal Kosmological map, he has pointed out the limitations of approaches oriented only to subtle experience and the presumption of an actually real separate individual (which is how he defines “soul”; Wilber, 1995, p. 290). Higher than the physical is the subtle, higher than the subtle is the causal, and higher than the causal is the nondual. This four-part structure is sometimes simplified into three, and the *causal* (the body and state of witnessing consciousness) is conflated with the *nondual* (the paradoxical state in which causal consciousness coincides with gross and subtle experience, and in which the experiencer and the experienced are not-two).

In integral spirituality, we grow into higher states and stages of consciousness, eventually awakening not just from limiting perspectives and identities and states of mind, but even from the illusion of our very existence as a separate individual. And then, even as a separate individual, we can give ourselves to knowing and living Reality. As we awaken, level-by-level, it can seem as if consciousness and identity *ascend*, expand, and dissolve in and as the Universal Self, even as we enact a particular life with a unique character and destiny.

This radical transcendental spirituality implies a mystical path that can be seen as analogous to *space*, in that the practitioner continually awakens from living inside all limited identities, expanding into our ultimate identity as the universal Self, reality itself. All suffering and experiential limitations are tacitly transcended.

### **The Subtle Mysticism of the Soul**

This contrasts with the most prevalent type of mystical experience across humanity's history, subtle mysticism, which I associate here with "soul work." Much of human spirituality does not focus on transcending the experience of being a unique and separate individual, but instead on deepening the individual's locus of experience and identity, exploring its depths, engaging its subtle dynamics and cooperating with them to actualize one's richest expressions. This approach posits the unique soul nature of the individual, and the journey, across one or more lifetimes, of progressively fulfilling its destiny, always unfolding in new ways. In different forms, it can focus on either a path of descent into the deep psyche and embodied somatic experience, and its relatedness to the natural world; or on a path of ascent into ever higher subtle dimensions of experience, intuitive openings, psychic experiences, astral travel, and/or realms of intuition, light, love, or illumination.

Across history, most human "spirituality" has been associated with breaking the fixation of attention in the mind and emotions oriented to gross physical experience in the waking state, and opening up into "journeys" into subtle realms. The most primal, ancient, universal indigenous mysticism is shamanism, in which practitioners take

shamanic “journeys” and open to participate in the play of subtle forces that give rise to changes in the gross physical world. In the ancient kosmological map, the unmanifest first becomes manifest tacitly at the *causal* level, then down from the finest through the many levels of the spectrum of *subtle* domains (all seven chakras denoting different gradations of subtlety, including domains that are at times called bliss, astral, psychic, mental, subtle, emotional, and etheric), and finally manifests as concrete gross physical reality. Thus, it is when attention rests powerfully enough in subtle dimensions of experience that psychic abilities and a magical relationship to experience occur. Subtle forms of spirituality include most forms of magic and prayer, including the whole Western hermetic tradition, alchemy, most Eastern yogas, much of Jewish and Sufi mysticism, Christian charisms and all gifts of the “Holy Spirit”. And of course a tremendous concentration of fraudulent nonsense hides within these guises too. But there is validity and substance to some subtle spirituality, and it is the place where we can find the intuitive depth and soul of our best decision-making and heroism. Just as an integral relationship to gross physical experience transcends and then re-includes full engagement with it, it must not just transcend but also re-include full engagement subtle experience.

Most popular spiritually oriented self-improvement teachings make use of the power of subtle intention and energy to affect events in the plane of gross physical reality. Popular teachers of this type (at least those who are not charlatans nor entirely deluded) generally teach people to orient to gross experience from a freer, more expanded subtle perspective. These approaches are eternally popular because they offer what the ego wants—often promising, or at least suggesting, that when people master these principles, they can create life success through visualization, change deep unconscious beliefs, discover their right work and life partner, create true love, and fulfill their life purpose. Examples are too numerous to cite, but they include programs such as Avatar trainings and books such as *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006).

Deeper, more psychologically sophisticated soul work in the West is influenced by the view that comes to us from the ancient Greeks. Socrates, according to Plato in *The Republic*, described the following version of what happens between lifetimes. After death each soul drinks the water of Lethe and forgets everything of the life just ended and all

past identities. But your character, shaped by the virtue you cultivated in your previous life and lives, remains. And on the basis of your character, you are assigned your *daemon*, your life's soul companion, the carrier of your deeper flavor, your soulful nature and guiding spirit. Then you go before the Fates: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos. On the basis of your character and *daemon*, Clotho spins your "spindle destiny"—the time and place of your birth, whether in war or peace, prosperity or famine, and chooses the womb of your mother, the life of your father, their relationship, your siblings, your family of origin, your community, your region, your world, your time, your tendency toward acne, your nice hair, your flat feet, your bad knee. Clotho spins forth the unique circumstances of your birth—including everything we ordinarily associate with both heredity and environment—as your "spindle destiny". Next you go before Lachesis, who assigns your luck, the subtle magnetism that surrounds you and attracts and repels whatever it attracts and repels. This too is responsive to your character, and like your character, this magnetism remains malleable as you continue to practice and cultivate virtue. The last fate, Atropos, assigns the moment of your death, before you are even born. She was thought not to be malleable. We are influenced by this ancient Greek view if we think a soul's task is to cultivate virtue, to develop character and build a relationship with one's *daemon*, to learn to listen to the voice of the *daemon* with the "ear of the heart", and to realize one's Soul's highest destiny. This is the basis for James Hillman's "acorn theory" (1997) in which the soul, like an acorn expressing its character by, over decades, becoming the unique oak it is potentiated to become, gradually reveals and realizes its unique character across the trajectory of a human life.

Serious subtle soul-oriented mystical paths intend this trajectory. Significantly, it doesn't lead only to the transcendence of gross and subtle limitations but to their actual *transformation*. Rightly understood, they also support nondual awakening. But they take on a different lens. Instead of seeing through "the emptiness of" self and time, this lens presumes the perspective of the self that is always moving through time. In fact, soul work can be seen as analogous to time, in that the practitioner is a traveler, taking a journey across one or many lifetimes, receiving a call, being tested, fighting battles, being transformed, and thus engaging an adventure. The Soul understands that we are always enacting archetypal stories, such as the hero's journey, romance with the beloved, giving

birth to a baby and nurturing it into autonomy, death-and-rebirth, or the maturation of the soul. From the perspective of this great journey, any and all spiritual experiences and realizations—including radical transcendental awakening from all limited identities, and awakening as the eyes of evolution seeing itself directly as incarnate consciousness, Reality itself—are understood as events framed within and given meaning by that great soul journey.

### **Relating Soul and Spirit**

Each of these two kinds of mysticism have often critiqued the other's orientation and focus. The radical nondual traditions generally criticize any focus on subtle experiences, pointing out that they can be a diversion, an indulgence or fascination with passing experiences, and very often a playground for rampant “spiritual materialism” (Trungpa, 1973) in which expanded subtle experience is appropriated in service of deluded egoic motives. Most of the ancient and diverse traditions and literature of subtle “soul” mysticism were unaware of the radical nondual “secret teachings” that critiqued them. Recently, many contemporary mystics and psychologists — particularly Jungians engaging depth psychology in the tradition of James Hillman (1997) and Marian Woodman (2001), such as Bill Plotkin (2008) and mystic Sera Beak (2015) — are quite cognizant of radical causal and nondual dharmas, and have critiqued their predominantly immature expressions and the shadows of transcendental spirituality. They argue that it is usually an early phase, a less mature expression of the spiritual impulse, preliminary to arrival in a transformative relationship with the soul's deepest character, voice, purpose, and guidance. Further, they assert that transcendental spirituality very often functions negatively, delaying or preventing the transition into a soul-initiated life.

In the “retail” spiritual marketplace, radical causal and nondual approaches to transcendental consciousness often have trouble competing. They promise only “ultimate” truth, freedom, and enlightenment, which can seem ascended, heady, dry, and abstract compared to the popular soul-focused subtle spiritual teachings that promise to teach the ego to create whatever success it visualizes by changing its deep unconscious beliefs, and that celebrate its glorious uniqueness, giving life meaning, purpose, and true love with a perfect soul mate. All this only seems to confirm the nondual critique that

subtle soul sadhanas are a “lower” ego-bound form of spirituality.

### **The Nondual Consensus—Its importance, virtues and excesses**

Over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a new integration began taking place among spiritual teachers, practitioners, writers, and commentators, who developed a certain informal agreement about the depth of intellectual rigor and discernment that needs to be brought to bear on how we evaluate spiritual experience. Through these considerations, over the last 30 years or so, there has developed something only slightly short of a total consensus—a predominant agreement that nondual awakening, when authentic, truly represents the highest realization, and that any and all subtle spiritual experience holds a junior rank to this, and is subsumed within it. Steve McIntosh is a prominent dissenting voice, even defining Evolutionary Spirituality as the transcendence of nondual spirituality by a synthesis of nondual and theistic (or panentheistic) forms of spirituality (2013, 2015). In a sense, I am joining him by championing Integral Soul Work. However, I am more interested in resonating with the enormously illuminating “nondual consensus” than critiquing it, because I see it fully empowering the panentheistic fullness in which both McIntosh and I find so much value.

Of course, a vast body of subtle spiritual teachings pervades the spiritual marketplace, but I would suggest that this is more an expression of what appeals to people as relevant and useful to the day-to-day life issues that they face as individual selves attempting to navigate the world. Subtle spirituality helps us answer the all-important content-specific practical questions with which our lives confront us—In what direction should I steer my career? Where should I live? Who should I be friends with? Who should I marry? It helps to transform our energetic patterns and enables us to magnetize the people and experiences we are meant to attract. It has much less influence in the marketplace of spiritual ideas and philosophies, the intellectual arena where teachers, practitioners, writers, and commentators have been exploring how we are to understand, represent and honor the deepest and highest reaches of spiritual experience. Within the contemporary spiritual field, the success and esteem accorded to teachers and schools such as Ramana Maharshi, Sri Nisargadatta, Advaita Vedanta, Vajrayana Buddhism, Kashmir Shaivism, Zen Buddhism, Theravada, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Ken

Wilber, Eckhart Tolle, Byron Katie, and Adyashanti—and now even Sam Harris—are an expression of the predominant influence of our current nondual near-consensus.

There is now wide agreement in sophisticated spiritual circles (even while hot debate still remains in the general culture) —that consciousness cannot be separated from matter or energy, that interiority is the fundamental nature of atoms, subatomic particles and photons, no less than their exterior mass, charge, momentum, and vibrational “shape”. As Ken Wilber succinctly puts it, consciousness “goes all the way down” (Wilber, 2001, p. 395). It is also widely agreed that nonduality is the philosophically coherent context for understanding the phenomenological reality of dualistic experience and healthy conscious participation in it. This nondual consensus is extremely culturally important. It is philosophically consistent with our current scientific view of reality, and provides the necessary basis for a marriage between the views of reality implied by science and spirituality.

If  $E=MC^2$ , then matter and energy are at root, the same “stuff”. If we do not exist in space and time, but in “space-time”, then even the very context of our lives, time and space are intertwined, and nothing like they seem. If our origin story is the Big Bang, then 13.8 billion years ago, we and all existence, including space and time, were a non-separate singularity. If atomic spin is “remembered”, then even the tiny building blocks of matter possess a kind of proto-sentience or interiority. Many of the founders of quantum theory regarded *consciousness* as the fundamental nature of subatomic matter, and despite skeptical detractors, this view is regaining credibility.

This marriage of the highest spiritual wisdom with a rational scientific view is still in its infancy, but when it fulfills its potential, will have enormous historical and cultural implications and significance—on the scale of the Reformation or the Western Enlightenment. This integration could never have begun if contemporary spirituality were primarily focused on theistic spirituality, dualism, subtle energies, and experiences. Our data about subtle energies and experiences are too subjective and inconsistent. The emerging integration of science and spirit depends upon the contextualizing of subtle dualistic spiritual experience as an expression of the “liveliness”, or material and energetic embodiment, of consciousness itself. I entirely agree: nondual transcendental

spirituality provides a comprehensive “view” or context from which the vital reality of subtle experience and soul work can be sanely and healthily engaged. On this basis, aspirants are less prone to lose their bearings, fascinated by and reifying extraordinary subtle experiences and the self who has them. And the fundamental point—that spirituality is about self-transcendence, doing the yoga of learning to live as love—is given its appropriate emphasis by that perspective.

However, like any perspective regarded as ultimate, nondual transcendence can be taken too far. Critiques of “spiritual bypassing” are widely understood today; some individuals who identify with spiritual ideals tend to turn away from full engagement with their ordinary incarnate lives, neglecting their careers, relationships, communities, and physical fitness. This pathology is now well recognized when applied to our concrete behaviors in the waking state.

I am proposing here that transcendental spirituality also often leads individuals into a “spiritual bypassing” of the *subtle* dimensions of their lives. We are gross *and* subtle *and* causal beings, living in a world that is multidimensional and psychophysical — or “ensouled”. Many contemporary practitioners fail to engage consciously in syncing up with the archetypal energetic forces and subtle psychophysics of their lives—simply because they mentally understand that the *ultimate* nature of all matter and energy is consciousness itself, and that the *ultimate* highest spiritual realizations are nondual in nature. Seeking the most direct path, they try to take a short-cut to ultimate awakening, imagining they should subsume their “personal” experience in the impersonal, and thus bypass the rich, juicy, magical and archetypal subtle (and sometimes even emotional) dynamics of their inner lives—the very practices, processes, and forces that could actually catalyze the transformational high realizations they seek.

### **Integrating Nondual Spirituality and the Subtle Mysticism of the Soul**

There is a nascent intuitive recognition of the value (and limitations) of both transcendental (causal and nondual) and soul-based (subtle) mysticism — the fundamental importance of awakening to both spirit and soul — but there has not yet

been a coherent integration of an Integral Evolutionary Practice that engages with and realizes the uniquely important transformative potentials of both kinds of mysticism.

The impulse towards their integration goes back to the first large-scale cultural exchanges between Eastern and Western mystical and scientific philosophies at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and can especially be seen coming forward a century later, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century heyday of the Theosophical Society. More recently, other models have been proposed to integrate these two dimensions of spirituality, at least philosophically. Integral readers are perhaps most familiar with Marc Gafni's *Unique Self* (2012), which has posited a higher "unique self enlightenment" (p. xxii, 7, 47, et al). Gafni makes the very important, praiseworthy distinction between "separateness" (which is ultimately illusory) and "specialness" or "uniqueness" (which is essential and real). However, he problematically reifies "Unique Self" and "Unique Self Enlightenment", as if they possess a durable ontological status. He does not describe an integrated approach to practice that effectively builds a bridge into the awakened mutuality that deepens and awakens non-separateness and uniqueness.

Thus, all existing approaches to the integration of spirit and soul leave much work to be done, and many important gaps to be bridged. At times, they have attempted to formulate the integration in terms of a model that implicitly partially bypasses and marginalizes one of these mystical streams. At other times, the attempted integration has been philosophical only, without being expressed as a coherent practice. Generally, there hasn't been a clear delineation of the self-transcending function of spiritual practice and its relationship to the incarnational function of soul work. Previous attempts at synthesis haven't answered the core questions, addressing how the soul's emergence and actualization is given ground and context by the principles of spiritual practice, how both spiritual and soul work relate inclusively and fully to the gross, subtle, and causal dimensions of our being, how this integrated soul work is grounded in and guided by a self-transcending nondual intuition, and how, on that basis, the apparently dualistic individual, grounded in a nondual context, engages with the total psychophysics of his or her journey.

The Integral Soul Work that I have been developing incorporates a theoretical

framework and an organic embodied process that integrates both of these kinds of mystical experience, practice and growth. Grounded in a radical nondual view, I teach an approach to Integral Life Practice that deepens 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> person spiritual experience, and also opens into a relationship to the “strange attractor” of our *daemon* or soul, and the field of subtle energies, influences and experiences. In Integral Soul Work, our unique journey — to be lived by our soul, and express and incarnate our unique character and divine nature — can potentially culminate in an ultimate realization that releases us from all separateness. However this is extremely rare, and it is entirely inappropriate to aim for a “shortcut” to it that bypasses subtle “soul” level practice. I will next offer a series of practice distinctions that significantly build upon the mutual honoring of *spiritual* and *soul* work as they have been articulated by others, and also points to their coherent integration—a process of simultaneous self-transcendence and mystically creative personal incarnation.

### **The Evolution of Radically Incarnational Nonduality**

Integral Soul Work rests upon a fully evolved, entirely incarnational understanding of nonduality. A truly radical nondual view, by definition, is capacious, not reductive or monolithic. It recognizes the inseparability of consciousness (emptiness) and form, and thus includes all dualistic appearances. It can engage with them flexibly, spontaneously, and wholeheartedly, without attachment, recognizing all selves, others, environments, and processes as expressions of a radically single, inner-and-outer, “onlyness.”

Even so, nondual spiritual realization has been communicated to us through traditions of mystical practice in which it was the ultimate realization of yogis who first purified themselves and freed their attention from its habitual fixation in ordinary gross experience, then introverted their attention in a series of progressively rarer and more intense meditative samadhis. They only broke free from all dualism after an intense course of practice. Necessarily, then, it required turning *away* from internal meditative phenomena. And the previous attainment of those subtle experiences had required turning away from ordinary external experience. Thus, even the great Ramana Maharshi sat silent and unmoving for years in a temple in Tiruvannamalai. Since his death, his example and

image have become one of our most recognizable icons of radical enlightenment. This same period has also seen a dramatic evolution in the fullness and freedom with which nonduality is understood to be expressed in life.

The first phase of this clarification has been to outgrow immature expressions of nondual consciousness. There are many, for it is in many respects a dangerous teaching. It was traditionally a *secret* teaching, held back until practitioners had matured, usually through decades of intensive esoteric practice. This contemporary history of nonduality in the West illustrates some of the good reasons it may have been kept secret. It gives license to immaturity and even self-indulgence. In effect, when everything is sacred, nothing is sacred. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s some nondual aspirants would avoid using the first person pronoun “I” when they spoke, in order to demonstrate their recognition of the illusory nature of any sense of self, instead uttering comical workarounds like “the one who is speaking right now...”. Luckily, this awkward phase has passed. A related error, still not entirely extinguished, takes too literally the distinction between insight (jnana yoga) and love (bhakti yoga), seeing them as entirely separate paths, and chooses discernment over love, taking this as license to spiritualize personal tendencies to be cold, unfriendly, and socially indifferent. In some nondual teachings, there is still something of a Spartan-like cutting away of life, a humorless, reductive, and even authoritarian focus on transcendence. There is rarely the full expression of ragged open-hearted love. It is extremely difficult to break the fixation of attention on the stream of experience and the wandering mind, so many teachings, entirely appropriately, emphasize the limiting nature of experience and the mind and its content. However this distinction often opens the door to dissociation from the mind. This tendency remains prominent, especially in the anti-intellectualism that continually resurfaces in postmodern spiritual circles, in many circles in the Neo-Vedanta movement, and in the Zen and Theravadin traditions of Buddhism.

Mature nondual teachings understand that whether aspirants focus on a path of insight or love, the end result of these paths is ultimately the same: direct insight into the nature of reality becomes awake freedom, boundless awareness, timeless wonder and amazement, simplicity, acceptance, peace, bliss, and love so vast, selfless, atemporal and secure that it is beyond mental understanding. Many traditions add that it occasions a

transformation of the subtle body, the irradiation of the very flesh so that the most fully enlightened body-mind is pervaded by and radiant with spiritual light, a spiritual fragrance that radiates from the heart through its very presence and especially via direct eye contact or touch. This recognition of one's identity as awareness and love opens nondual realization to express itself through a heightened domain of feeling, both in terms of sensitivity and transmission. Nondual realization cannot be identified with any particular state or feeling, but it certainly doesn't *exclude* feeling, and so is expressed via intensified intelligent feeling, and is far less likely to coincide with negative feeling states than states like joy and bliss.

Integral philosophy represents another major extension of classical nondual teachings. One of its innovations has been to redefine enlightenment to recognize the importance of growth not only through states, but also through stages. Ken Wilber summarizes this essential point:

*“We saw that a “nondual mysticism” was a “union with everything in the gross, subtle and causal realms.” But, as we have often seen, you can have nondual state experience at almost any stage, including magic and mythic, and these stages do not contain phenomena from the higher stages. So at the mythic stage, for example, you can have a realization of nondual, ever-present, Big Mind awareness that is a pure unity experience with everything in your world, but that experience leaves out a great deal of the universe. Generally speaking, this is not good. This is the part of the relation between states and stages that has proven to be the most difficult, and the solution I have suggested is also rather intricate.... Suggested answer: Enlightenment is the realization of oneness with all states and all stages that have evolved so far and that are in existence at any given time.”*  
*(Integral Spirituality, p. 95)*

Wilber's inclusion of *structures* of consciousness implicitly critiques the *exclusive* traditional focus on nondual *states* of consciousness. These structures, true to their name, *structure* how we interpret and respond to experience. His emphasis implies that the manifest relative conditional expressions of unconditional realization are important. If ultimate realization is the union of transcendental consciousness with gross, subtle, and

causal manifestation, then freedom from conditional experience doesn't exempt us from engaging the messy complexity of our lives consciously, and with care. The implication is ultimately that enlightenment *is* as enlightenment *does*. These implications of Wilber's point have been widely accepted by contemporary spiritual culture, if not always understood in their most radical terms. It's important to note that this re-embrace of conditional experience represents a *further evolution* of transcendental enlightenment into incarnation, not a retreat from transcendence into conventional preoccupation with dualistic life concerns. Already free of conditions, we care about engaging them with care, skill, and excellence. And we are free in relation to it all, not attached to or identified with any of it—just given over to living. This is the return to the marketplace pictured in the 10<sup>th</sup> Zen ox herding picture.

Integral spirituality contributes another essential distinction—that of a *post-metaphysical* basis for practice (Wilber, 2006). This means, essentially, that “you have to *do* something to *see* something. You have to *look* to know that it's raining. You have to use a microscope to observe an amoeba. You have to meditate to understand what Zen masters are really talking about.” (Wilber, Patten, Leonard & Morelli, 2007, p. 22) Whereas “old-fashioned metaphysics assumes that reality is just given to awareness, unmediated by the contexts and actions of a person...”, [the] “post-metaphysical, Integral approach claims that you must actually *do* an Integral practice to *experience* an Integral reality... Instead of naïve belief or skeptical disbelief, a post-metaphysical approach requires an open, inquisitive attitude. In a sense, post-metaphysics is an expression of the scientific impulse—i.e., of empirical experimentation and experiential validation—but expanded to all levels and dimensions of our being, instead of only the material plane.” (Wilber, Patten, Leonard & Morelli, p. 23-24) This is of special significance when applied in Integral Soul Work, as we shall soon discuss.

Another important evolution of contemporary nonduality is the emergence of awareness of what I, borrowing from my friend Saniel Bonder (1994, 1998), call the

*hypermasculine error*.<sup>1</sup> Hypermasculine spirituality often shows up as single-pointed, unrelenting striving, and rejection of one's "lower" or "egoic" or "false" inner experience in an attempt to exclusively conform attention to what is "higher" and "truer". A bright line is drawn between that which we are idealizing and that which we are intending to outgrow. Certain ways of being are not simply critically understood, but effectively anathematized. When the masculine mode is able to operate in the context of a deep acceptance of everything just as it is – awake or not, full of thoughts and emotions or not, in physical pain or pleasure, progressing in our path or not – it is essential to our health and sanity and growth. But without the context of such unconditional acceptance, *hypermasculine* spirituality very easily functions to split our inner life, enacting subtle intra-psychic violence. This hypermasculine orientation pervades the ancient traditions of spiritual seeking. Most spiritual aspirants have at least to some degree been scarred by this dysfunctional dynamic, and thus tend to feel at least partially estranged from virtue, defective, and inadequate, and thus tend to approach spiritual practice reactively, as a way to eradicate these unwanted aspects of themselves.

An important aspect of my approach to Integral Life Practice and Integral Evolutionary Practice has been to embody and teach a non-hypermasculine disposition that can rest in the sacred feminine capacity to accept, honor, bless and *be with* what appears exactly as it is, even while it can differentiate and set boundaries, and choose to awaken, evolve, and love. A non-hypermasculine approach is characterized by tenderness

---

<sup>1</sup> In order to understand this term, we can, at least in this context, regard as *feminine* the aspect of consciousness that can just unconditionally *be with* whatever is, without judging it, analyzing it, or trying to make anything happen, and we can regard as *masculine* the aspect of consciousness that sets apart subject from object, discerns, notices distinctions, analyzes, judges, chooses, and efforts. Because that masculine mode of consciousness is so powerfully effective in life, it is the primary basis for both outward-directed Western worldly cultural achievements and inward-directed Eastern spiritual cultural achievements. Thus, it tends to be privileged, even embraced exclusively, in both spiritual and worldly circles. Many people even lose the ability to access the feminine mode, to unconditionally rest with experience, just as it is, accepting it, communing with it, and fully knowing and being with it in its totality. They lose their ability to move back and forth in a healthy flow, like the cycles of the breath, between masculine and feminine modes of consciousness. This loss of access to the feminine mode defines the *hypermasculine* mode.

towards ourselves and others. It does not try to override our humanness or idealize our higher potentials. It brings a disposition of compassionate tenderness as well as clear discernment and uncompromised will, or toughness, to *all* arising experience, to both self and other.

This lays the groundwork for a new level of mutual trust. When we are practicing as described above, we are *trustable* on an entirely new level. This helps give us the basis for entering into awakened mutuality in a community devoted to growing always in heartfelt, paradoxical, multidimensional, integral evolutionary practice, and evolving more enlightened intersubjective structures, making use of everything we are learning about higher we-space.

### **Integral Evolutionary Practice and Integral Soul Work**

Integral Evolutionary Practice, as I have refined it, based on the principles of Integral Life Practice, is grounded in a radically nondual understanding, and yet it is also incarnational, evolutionary, panentheist, integral, devotional, post-metaphysical, non-hypermasculine, and lived in awakened mutuality. (I include this long string of modifiers because each of them explicitly excludes one more common misunderstanding of how nonduality appropriately expresses itself in life and practice.) All of life is recognized as practice. The practitioner is inseparable from the world and the Mystery of Existence itself; practice is allowing oneself to be lived by, breathed by, and practiced by the Mystery. The Living Mystery continually awakens to itself through us. This life-as-practice is also expressed through many discrete practices. Those practices include a daily meditation practice, devotional prayer, conscious exercise and diet, as well as a life of mental study, relational, emotional and psychological practices, work, disciplines of attention and feeling, and responsible participation as a citizen of one's communities, regions, nations, and planet.

In the context of this paper, what is most important is that Integral Evolutionary Practice is *self-transcending*, rather than being directed toward self-fulfillment. It is a very happy way to live, and yet it is not directed at *seeking* the goal of personal happiness. Again and again, the practitioner acts on and affirms their understanding that

personal happiness comes through awakening from false identifications, through loving service to others, and through devoting oneself to what is greater than the self. Practitioners discover the happiness of devotional surrender, the disposition summarized in the great Christian prayer, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke, 22:41-42, St. James Version). Practice involves the continual conscious natural reorientation of attention—a continual rediscovery of freedom, a continual reawakening of joy, and a continual return to love. This life of practice orients the practitioner to the inherently happy “True North” of self-transcending love and service.

In the context of such a life of self-transcending integral practice, the practitioner is not concentrated in the self-oriented motivations that animate conventional soul-oriented spirituality. He or she is no longer craving to be fulfilled by life’s experiences. He or she of course would appreciate better health, more money, and more fulfilling relationships—but no longer focuses on attaining these things, or assumes they will lead to fulfillment in life. Equally, s/he is no longer seeking to escape the frustrations of life by attaining fulfillment in subtle or astral experiences. She recognizes the essentially *sacrificial* nature of life; sacrifice means “to make sacred”, and the very word points to the fact that in relation to the great Mystery, taking toxifies us. We cannot “consume” holiness. We receive our spiritual nourishment only as the natural response of a living universe to our unselfish self-giving. It is only in self-transcendence that we have a healthy experience of the kind of wholesome thriving and fulfillment that life can truly offer. In our surrender of defenses and symbols of imaginary security, we become grateful conduits, vehicles for the flow of Grace into the world.

This transforms the context and arena of subtle mysticism, and its telos. Now it is no longer the story of the separate soul as if it were the center of its universe. It is the story of how our common soul finds its way through our unique expression into the whole world of relations, enacted archetypally, through many energies, enacting many stories, dancing with each other on many levels. This is the domain of Integral Soul Work — it is the wide-ranging poetry whose vocabulary is the mythic structure of archetypal stories—the hero’s journey, the divine romance, giving birth and nursing, the saga of death-and-rebirth, and the story of growing up.

In this greater context Integral Soul Work can engage specific soul-oriented subtle practices from the many traditions of subtle soul-focused spirituality such as shamanic ritual and ceremony, exercises to develop intuitive and psychic abilities, dream work, subconscious belief change, and much more. They offer potentially valuable skillful means for opening up intuitive contact with hidden subtle dimensions of reality, awakening subtle capacities, and helping us make contact with the voice of our soul. But we are careful how we relate to them. Integral Life Practice at first disregarded these practices for some good reasons. It is rare for any of them to be taught in the context of a radical commitment to self-transcendence, so most such practice instructions are implicitly phrased and coded to address (and even trigger) deluding self-oriented motives toward personal success and fulfillment. Since this fundamental shift of motivation is one of the principle defining characteristics that distinguishes Integral Soul Work from conventional subtle spirituality, practices borrowed from conventional sources must be translated into a self-transcending orientation and given meaning and relevance to the archetypal story of the emergence of the one soul in its unique expression in each individual.

### **The Integral Yoga of the Soul**

As we begin to allow ourselves to participate in the subtle structure of our lives, we learn to conduct a whole symphony of animating poetic energies through our bodies and psyches. We become lightning rods to the greater energies of the *anima mundi* or world soul. This is the field in which we learn the yoga that teaches our gross life how to resonate with the subtle in a new way, with a new dimension of creativity, to really let go into a bigger force that wants to find its way through you to enact a *heroic* or *tragic* or *tantric hero's journey* or other archetypal story.

How do you come to know the *narrative thrust and arc* of your life? A visioning process must enact itself. In Integral Soul Work, you drop down into whatever it is that glows in your bone marrow, and ask from the heart, and from the very bottom of your being, for help to align you to your Soul, to help you learn to hear its voice. Knowing that you cannot come to know its unique contours simply via awakening as nondual open intelligence recognizing everything that arises as itself, the liveliness of awareness (as

important as that is), you begin to feel into the pulse of the sap that rises through your body and soul. You wait to hear a new, deeper, previously hidden voice. You open your feeling to learn what is being said to you by the DNA of the protoplasmic informational energy that surges, nurtures, and replenishes your very consciousness, the actual nerve spark in your cerebrospinal fluid. Your Soul or *daemon* is recognizable because it speaks in chorus with your heart and blood. Life wants to live. That which has always animated evolutionary emergence is still alive in you and wants to keep evolving. And it has a particular way it wants to more fully express this right now through your body, your emotions, your mind, your imagination, your relationships and your creativity.

Our body-minds are structured to experience this somatically. Applying the implications of Integral Post-Metaphysics, we see that we can more easily mobilize a coherent somatic embodiment of our highest gross, subtle and causal possibilities by a kind of “method acting”, inhabiting a new role in a narrative, enacting a new story. This is a practical application of Integral Post-Metaphysics. “You have to do something to see something.” Inhabiting a character playing a role in an archetypal story that makes a kind of internal sense resonates. It neatly enlists a wide range of hidden abilities because it reverse-engineers the neurological cues that trigger the highest capacities of the brain, the nervous system, and our biochemistry. Without focusing on the ontological status of the mythic narratives (without “believing in” them as a magical or mythic mind would) we freely discover and inhabit them and let this, with remarkable efficiency, organize and liberate our gross, subtle and causal (especially subtle, and therefore gross) capacities. Integral Soul Work is thus a form of skillful means that enables our total psychophysical capacities to self-organize and make their highest art.

Living a new story is tremendously powerful. And it is unavoidable in any case, now that we have entered an era when our world drama has flashed its apocalyptic teeth and stopped making sense. The absurdity of our slumbering world crisis grants us a new degree of artistic license to take theatrical poses, to assume the mantles of our archetypes, to lovingly and playfully unleash their power through a kind of ceremony of transformation, doing a magical dance, whose intent it is to conjure forth a four-quadrant emergence into a higher structure, a better story. To the degree that our larger human

world is in crisis, facing new challenges that require new responses, this is expressed not just in gross physical terms but also in subtle energetic and psychic and causal informational terms. Thus, there are larger subtle dynamics, an impulse in the soul of the world, that is trying to express a new level of intelligence through each of us. Seen thus, Soul Work opens up a political practice, a form of subtle activism. Each aspirant explores and learns how to make his or her way back energetically (and thus shamanically and ceremonially, ritually and mythically) to learn their unique art, their way of entering and inhabiting that wild new world creatively. We each do the art of showing up face-to-face with the soul of a world that has summoned each of our souls to its unique destiny, in play with other souls, to become new human beings in a new kind of human culture, one that naturally co-creates a healthy future for one another and for our species and all our other relations on this planet.

It is clear to most climate activists that our governments and industry are responding too slowly to global warming. Perhaps with the help of subtle and other non-linear dynamics we will meet our challenges, and embody our opportunities. These non-linear dynamics are rich and diverse, and yet it is important to note how powerfully they are mobilized via inhabiting a narrative. (It is also worth noting that authentic ceremonies and rituals are often communal psychophysical enactments of archetypal metaphors and narratives.) Making use of these subtle technologies is not regression, it is the application of post-metaphysical *skillful means*.

Metaphors are central to coaching integral change, metaphors that make vivid our transformation from “Before” to “After”. In the integral coaching methods taught by Integral Coaching Canada (2011) and New Ventures West (2015), metaphors for the client’s *Current Way of Being*, and *New Way of Being* are the central tools through which the individual is helped to orient toward development, to building new inner muscles and outer capacities. Such metaphors describing our arc of growth, metaphors that resonate with the archetypal narratives we are living, can help attune us to the soul and character of a *New Way of Being*. This is then the vibrational signature through which we can attune to, resonate with, and transmit the conscious energy of our next higher possibilities. We can transition, for example, from “The Warrior” to “The Sage” (Integral

Coaching Canada, 2008), learning a very new “way of being”. The creative affair of our lives requests and supports us in imagining what it is to join with others in doing the good works of love in action, each of us playing our unique role in the drama. The subtle domain is a symphony of karmic influences, of causes and effects, of larger powers we can serve and conduct.

Certain aspects of the soul work journey—such as the soul’s journey to the underworld and its battle with the nemesis—are intensely personal ordeals, events that occur only in a profound existential depth, in the solitude of soul’s very beingness. The greater context of the Integral Soul Work journey, however, needs mutuality if it is to be lived fully. We need to share the process with fellow practitioners who are vulnerable, real, and passionate, people who can be trusted and who are similarly awakening. Cooperative mutuality and intimacy teach us much, of course. But what is most essential is that integral soul-and-spiritual fellowship allows us to experience the *anima mundi*, the world soul who is incarnating through us all together. A presence and intelligence arrives that is more than the sum of the presence and intelligence of the individuals. And its character, passion and heroism are a necessary source of strength, inspiration, and guidance, juice, higher energies and blessing powers. Mutuality is a key ingredient in what makes it possible for a community of integral practice to break new ground.

Who do we think we are to assume that we can actually *be* the change we want to see in our world? That question can only be answered with another question: Who are we not to make the attempt to do it to the best of our abilities? This is Integral Soul Work—a capacious art-form, grounded in self-transcending practice and lived in mutuality.

### References

- Beak, S. (2015). *Red Hot and Holy: A heretic's love story*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Bonder, S. (1994). *The White-Hot Yoga of the Heart*. San Rafael, CA: Mt. Tam Awakenings.
- Bonder, S. (1998). *Waking Down: Beyond hypermasculine dharmas*. San Rafael, CA: Mt. Tam Awakenings.
- Byrne, R. (2006). *The Secret*. New York, NY: Atria Books.
- Chogyam Trungpa (1973). *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Gafni, M. (2012). *Your Unique Self: The radical path to personal enlightenment*. Tuscon, AZ: Integral Publishers.
- Hillman, J. (1997). *The Soul's Code: In search of character and calling*. New York, NY, Warner Books.
- Integral Coaching Canada. (2011). Retrieved from: <https://www.integralcoachingcanada.com/>
- McIntosh, S. (2013). *Integral Consciousness and the Future of Evolution*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.
- McIntosh, S. (2015). *The Presence of the Infinite: The spiritual experience of beauty truth and goodness*. (pre-publication manuscript) Wheaton, IL: Quest Books.
- New Ventures West. (2015). Retrieved from: <http://www.newventureswest.com/>
- Plato & Lane, M. (2007). *The Republic*. London, UK: Penguin Books Ltd.
- Plotkin, B. (2008). *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

- Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. (1973). *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*. Mumbai, India: Chetana Ltd.
- Wilber, K. (1995). *Sex, Ecology, Spirituality: The spirit of evolution*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (2000). *One Taste: Daily reflections on integral spirituality*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (2001). *Eye of Spirit: An integral vision for a world gone slightly mad*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications.
- Wilber, K. (2006). *Integral Spirituality: A startling new role for religion in the modern and postmodern world*. Boston, MA: Integral Books.
- Wilber, K., Patten, T., Leonard, A., & Morelli, M. (2007). *Integral Life Practice: A 21<sup>st</sup> century blueprint for physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity and spiritual awakening*. Boston, MA: Integral Books.
- Woodman, M. (2001). *Bone: Dying into life*. New York, NY: Penguin.