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Rudolf Steiner and Sri Aurobindo:

An Introductory Comparison

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## Abstract

This essay explores similarities and differences between the profound contributions of two of the modern world's most important spiritual figures: Rudolf Steiner and Sri Aurobindo Ghose. As an introductory work, I offer summary comparisons of their philosophical, cosmological, and spiritual worldviews, attitudes towards human development and stages of growth, personal biographies, and their lasting contributions to the world. Although I am more familiar with Steiner's work, these two towering figures stand in remarkable general agreement with respect to their core values and pictures of human and cosmic development. Both offer a spiritually-based view of an evolving cosmos within which the continuously developing human being has a profound and important place, a multi-leveled and complex picture of cosmic involution/evolution that is compatible with a modern scientific understanding of evolution, an integrated view of the different aspects that make up a human being, and practical insights concerning how humans can take up their own self-transformation for the benefit of all. Despite a number of less consequential differences, when taken together Steiner and Aurobindo offer a uniquely thorough and practical integral view of the cosmos and the human beings' place within it that weaves together the most profound wisdoms from both the East and the West.

### Rudolf Steiner and Sri Aurobindo: An Introductory Comparison

Rudolf Steiner was born in 1861 in what is now a part of Croatia, and died some 64 years later in 1925. Sri Aurobindo Ghose was born in 1872 in Calcutta, and died in 1950 at the age of 78. These two contemporaries never had the chance to meet in the flesh, but they shared a remarkable amount.<sup>1</sup> If we only look at their outer lives, the basis for this comparison would be somewhat weak (although key similarities still exist). No, it is to the inner life that we must turn in order to see how Steiner and Aurobindo, in their separate ways and through quite different contexts, attempted to help humankind *as a whole* along its rocky and marvelous path of development. Luckily both men made great and significant efforts to communicate what they perceived inwardly to the world, leaving behind both fixed records and ongoing living communities and initiatives within which their integral visions have been continuously explored in the context of the changing modern world for almost a century.

#### **Cosmology**

To begin with, we can note that both Steiner and Aurobindo, over the course of their lives, came to a view of the cosmos that is profoundly spiritual. This is meant not only in a colloquial sense of having to do with spiritual *values*, but ontologically, in the sense that the cosmos is, in its most fundamental root, spiritual in nature. Everything these two men brought to the world is predicated on an understanding that the human being is not solely a being of matter, but is simultaneously a being of spirit, and that the human being, *along with the cosmos itself*, is continually involved in transformative movements that proceed along developmental and evolutionary lines. Unfortunately today, *cosmology* often carries pejorative connotations outside of the dominant purview of contemporary science, which has reduced the study of the nature and being of the cosmos to purely materialistic elements. Yet it is upon and through their

cosmologies that Aurobindo and Steiner were able to achieve their remarkable insights. It is my contention that the vast bulk of the similarities between Steiner and Aurobindo rest upon the correspondences in their cosmological pictures, which were arrived at not theoretically or upon the basis of intellectual effort, but through direct involvement in the various aspects of the cosmos by virtue of their individual spiritual work. Because no real understanding of these figure's contributions is possible without recognizing their basis in a spiritual-cosmological worldview, the bulk of this essay summarizes the basic cosmological features of each system. Upon this foundation it will be possible to point out similarities and differences in other areas.

To do justice to the complexities and depth of either figure's cosmology would require at least a book-length treatise, so the reader must be content with a vastly reduced summary that cannot properly convey the overall sense of the ambiguities, mysteries, interrelationships, and profundity that permeate their views. There are a number of subtle and important features that must be passed over in favor of brevity, but an appreciation of their major aspects will allow us to undertake a beginning comparison, with the understanding that interested readers will take up the original works for a more complete picture. Because my familiarity is much greater with Steiner's work, I will present it first.

### **Steiner's Cosmology**

For Steiner, the cosmos<sup>2</sup> is continually evolving; conditions in its past are unlike those in the present, and unlike those that will pertain to the future. Broadly speaking this change occurs in phases, of which there are seven, forming a fractal (self-similar) pattern of involution and evolution around a central turning point. The involutory movement, as a whole, begins in the highest spiritual planes which successively manifest themselves (through the activity of the various beings that occupy each plane) into lower planes, until at a low point the spiritual

element is so self-isolated from its origins that it appears as matter. Thus matter itself is seen as a condensation of the spirit (Steiner, 2005, p. 120),<sup>3</sup> and there is no part of the cosmos that is completely without consciousness: “to supersensible perception, there is no such thing as ‘unconsciousness’, only various degrees of consciousness. Everything in the world is conscious” (Steiner, 2005, p. 153).

This involution proceeds not in a single coherent glide from spirit to matter, but rather occurs in successive waves of involution/evolution (Steiner, 2005, especially chapter four) (the largest of which are formed by the seven phases mentioned previously), so that periods of ‘outward’ activity are followed by periods of inactivity. After each period of inactivity, a quickened, condensed, and refined recapitulation of the fruits of the previous phases takes place, serving to set the stage for a new activity. Thus on the most general level we can speak of the movement from spirit to matter as an involution, and of matter to spirit as an evolution, terms which simply indicate a directionality away from or towards the source and ground of all existence, which is the unspeakable Ultimate, the Divine, the Godhead.

More accurately, however, we would need to speak of *simultaneous* movements of involution and evolution.<sup>4</sup> Just as we human beings find ourselves surrounded not only by other humans, but also by a vast array of differentiated non-human beings (tigers, insects, lilies, lichens, and so forth), so too we find the spiritual world equally differentiated with a variety of non-human beings. These non-human beings involve themselves in various activities that have consequences not only for themselves but also for many other beings, including past and present humanity, just as the decisions of human beings affect many other non-human beings on the planet in both long and short terms.

Taken broadly, the spiritual exchanges between the various beings lend themselves either to a particular being's involution (towards involvement with matter/singularity/separation) or to its evolution (towards involvement with the spiritual/united/less 'dense'). The picture is one of complex interrelationships between various spiritual beings whose activities are at least as difficult to comprehend as, for example, the interrelationships between diverse economic interests and the local and global politics in which they are inevitably embroiled, whether by design, or simply by virtue of being involved in mutual contexts. Thus, while some being are evolving, others may be involving.

Steiner follows the activities of various beings through the previous three large waves of evolution/involution, identifying the present form of the Earth and the beings upon it as a part of the second half of the fourth wave, somewhat after the middle point of the whole scheme<sup>5</sup> (at least in regards to present humanity). It is almost always the case that Steiner speaks about non-human beings only inasmuch as their activity is pertinent to the history, present, or future of humanity. His worldview is thus appropriately called anthroposophy (the wisdom of humanity), because the wisdom that it attempts to embody is quite specifically oriented around and towards the human being—but the human being as an inextricably embedded part of the larger contexts of the evolving cosmos.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Human Being**

Upon this cosmologically-oriented basis, Steiner examines the structure of the evolving human being, pointing out that during the first great wave (which he calls the *Saturn* phase, for reasons too lengthy to relate here), higher spiritual beings were working in such a way that the seeds of the human being's physical form (and its sense organs) were brought out of the spiritual worlds, as the barest kind of densification. Despite the word *physical*, Steiner is clear that this

was not yet a time when mineral substance—matter as we know it today—was yet in existence, which was only possible within the fourth (present) major phase.

Just as a sculptor must begin with an undifferentiated lump of clay and slowly and successively shape and mold the material in accordance with its inner nature until a precise form is accomplished, so too the spiritual beings responsible for the creation of the human's present physical form took the spiritual substance available at that time (which Steiner refers to as *warmth*)<sup>7</sup> only as a beginning basis for what would lead to the human being's present form. This past, embryonic, humanity was completely different than what appears to us today, just like an unformed lump of clay has almost no resemblance to a finished work of sculpture.<sup>8</sup> And just as the very substance of the clay undergoes a modification and solidification through the firing process in the kiln, so too do the spiritual substances out of which humans (and other beings) are formed experience significant transformations, changing their very nature as a consequence of the environment created by surrounding spiritual beings. Thus the environment for embryonic humanity was likewise in a process of transformation, and indeed the evolution of the human being is completely bound up with the very evolution of the Earth itself, which also went through various phases before reaching its present state.<sup>9</sup>

During the next great phase of the evolution of the human being, called the *Sun* phase, the seeds of the ability to grow and decay, to organize and disorganize, were provided by the spiritual activity of the beings along with the further densification of the 'substance' of the spiritual world into what Steiner refers to as *air*<sup>10</sup>. Now the beings operating during this phase could work simultaneously through the warmth substance and the airy substance. The addition of these capacities to nascent humanity became the seeds of what can be called our *life body*, or our *etheric body*. In the forming of the etheric body, it was necessary that the physical form

undergo its own refinement, so that it became capable of joining with the etheric. We could say that during the Saturn phase, the physical body was refined until it reached a point beyond which it could change no further without the addition of a new active principle. The forming of the etheric body during the Sun phase provided this principle, allowing for further work to be done on the physical body, by virtue of its interconnection with the etheric body.

Now one begins to sense the harmonious order of the developing cosmos. During the third major phase, called the *Moon* phase, further refinements to the physical were accomplished, along with refinements of the etheric body. This occurred by virtue of the addition of a new principle, in conjunction with the properties of the further densification (into *water*) of the spiritual substance of the beings at work in this phase. This added principle provided the human being with the ability to take in the spiritual activities which surrounded it and reflect them upward into a form of consciousness that is akin to our present day dreaming. Previously to this, during the Sun phase, the highest type of consciousness available to humanity was like dreamless sleep, a state of consciousness Steiner identifies occurring within the present day plant kingdom, which, “although it does not convey perceptions of an outer world in the human sense, does regulate the life processes and bring them into harmony with the processes of the outer cosmos” (Steiner, 2005, p. 147). During the Saturn phase, the highest level of human consciousness was akin to what is now experienced by the mineral realm, which is “the simplest, dullest form of consciousness, [which is] even duller than that of dreamless sleep” (Steiner, 2005, p. 147).

After the Moon phase comes the most recent of the large phases, called *Earth*, in which humanity finds itself at present. During the beginning of this phase the physical, etheric, and astral bodies of the human being were refined to the point of being capable of housing the youngest (and least perfected) part of the human being, the *Ego*,<sup>11</sup> or *I-being*, which is a tiny

‘piece’ of the Divine.<sup>12</sup> This principle, in conjunction with the other three members of the human’s cosmic constitution, allows for the experience of a higher form of consciousness in which one’s being experiences itself as a separate and unique individuality that has the capacity for self-awareness.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the average<sup>14</sup> human being at present can be said to have four major components, all of which are united within the physical (now also mineral/material) form of the human body: the physical body itself, the etheric body, the astral body, and the I-being. At this point a chart might be helpful to summarize the basic scheme (the subscript numbers indicate that the structural principle in question goes through phases of refinement—think of them as *versions*):

Phase	Saturn	Cosmic Rest	Sun	Cosmic Rest	Moon	Cosmic Rest	Earth
Level of Densification	Warmth-substance		Airy-substance		Watery-substance		Earthy-substance
Type of Consciousness (of developing humanity)	“Dullest” consciousness (Consciousness of today’s minerals)	Dreamless Sleep (Consciousness of today’s plants)	Dreaming (Consciousness of today’s animals)	Waking (Consciousness of today’s humans)			
Structural Incorporation (i.e. “body”)	Physical <sub>1</sub>	Physical <sub>2</sub>	Physical <sub>3</sub>	Physical <sub>4</sub>			
		Etheric <sub>1</sub>	Etheric <sub>2</sub>	Etheric <sub>3</sub>			
			Astral <sub>1</sub>	Astral <sub>2</sub>			
				Ego <sub>1</sub>			

The whole series of phases occurs on the basis of alternating manifestation and dissolution. The same pattern, which we could also identify geometrically as centric and peripheral, is operative at all levels of creation (this is the same type of principle expressed in Chinese philosophy by the yin-yang). Thus, Steiner indicates that during the periods of rest,<sup>15</sup> the cosmic manifestation is re-spiritualized. This is very much like what humans experience as the rhythm of waking and sleeping, whereby our consciousness goes through a period whereby it returns to the realms from which it came, receiving experiences that allow it to re-enter the waking realm with renewed forces.

These periods of “cosmic sleep” allow for the transformation of experiences into capacities (Steiner, 2005, p. 164). But at the beginning of the next period of activity, everything does not just appear automatically and fully formed. A plant reaches its highest expression in its flowering, and then undergoes an involution of itself into the form of a seed. This seed lies dormant through its winter sleep, and finds new expression when surrounding conditions support its growth. So too after a period of cosmic sleep the cosmos must grow again out of the potentialities which were laid to rest at the end of the last period of activity.<sup>16</sup> Thus the cosmos evolves through stages of recapitulation, new development, potentization, and dissolution.

The same is true for the individual human being, who expresses at a lower octave the activity of the higher beings which are responsible for the pictures given above. Indeed, humanity was only partly instrumental in the creation of its own bodies in the previous phases of evolution, relying primarily upon what was developed for it by higher beings. A point was reached during the Earth phase where the divine spark, the I-being, in uniting with the three lower bodies, put itself in a position where it could not stay indefinitely; the lower bodies are not perfect enough for this to occur. We could say that death, the higher octave of sleep, entered into the evolutionary picture at this time. But the I-being does not itself die, but rather is presented with certain experiences through and after the dissolution of its lower members. If the I-being has not developed sufficiently, these experiences remain unconscious. Nevertheless, the I-being takes these experiences into itself during its own resting period in the spiritual world, where they are refined and potentized.<sup>17</sup> But this, phase, too passes, and the I-being descends once again into a new set of sheaths with its new impulses for development.

Therefore at the present time the human being is constituted in such a way as to successively incarnate and exarnate through a series of earthly lives. The correlate to this

reincarnation is provided by the consequences of the experiences the I-being has between incarnations, which provide the specific circumstances that lead the I-being back towards physical incarnation. The patterns by which these consequences unfold is called *the law of destiny* by Steiner, or (borrowing from Eastern traditions), *karma* (Steiner, 2005, p. 98).

Essentially, we experience the pain we caused others as if it were done to ourselves, and “the image of the pain inflicted on another becomes the force that motivates the I, on re-entering life, to make up for this pain” (Steiner, 2005, p. 98).

This is only the briefest overview of the major phases up to the present time; the future holds the completion of the fourth phase and a further evolution through three more, called *Venus*, *Jupiter*, and *Vulcan*, for a total of seven major phases. Additionally, each major phase can be divided up into seven smaller phases, and again and again and again (recall that the cosmos has a fractal organization), although Steiner generally only speaks about the phases most relevant to present day humanity. To summarize key points so far:

- 1) The cosmos, thoroughly spiritual, evolves through phases, separated by periods of rest. The largest division of phases relevant to humanity is sevenfold, and our present time is located just after the middle of the fourth phase.
- 2) The general movement is one of involution from the spiritual to the material, and ultimately back again to the spiritual (occurring in fractally-embedded waves).
- 3) The structural organization of present beings links coherently to the activity of various beings in previous phases.
- 4) The different members of the human organization (the physical, etheric, astral, and I-being) went through a process of development in the previous phases, with the physical being the earliest and the I-being the most recent.

- 5) Present humanity experiences multiple earthly lives (reincarnation) on the basis of the experiences had after death (karma).

### **Present and Future Human Development**

Transformation is ceaseless. The human being has not yet reached its potential, and is capable of still further evolution. Humanity has been given (literally, by both higher and lower beings) its present form and structure, and has refined it to the point at which the spiritual individuality of human beings could find a suitable home. Human beings, because of the complete involvement of the I-being with the three lower members, are in a unique cosmic position at the present time. The I-being, the Divine principle within us, has the capacity to further transform the three lower bodies. Just as in previous phases of evolution, when the addition of a new principle caused a correspondingly new refinement in the lower bodies, so too the connection of the I-being with the lower bodies provides the basis upon which those bodies can be transformed.

Previous transformations of this sort occurred by virtue of the work of higher beings. The I-being is not like the lower bodies, however, and carries with it the capacity to actively and consciously take up its own further evolution. This evolution will not, therefore, proceed by virtue of the work of other beings, but requires *our own effort* to succeed. Thus the future evolution of humanity is increasingly in our own hands. What does this future evolution entail?

Not all human beings exist at the same level of evolution; some lag behind while others race ahead (this is true for *all* types of beings, not just humans; the consequences of this are immense, and unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay). Therefore we can take cues from those humans that have developed themselves further to get a picture of what lies in store if we are to actively take up this development for ourselves. Steiner indicates that the I-being is not

the highest member possible for human beings, but that even higher principles are capable of being reached. Indeed, the I-being stands, as it were, midway between the depths of the physical world and the heights of the spiritual world. When it looks downward, it sees an already existing astral body, etheric body, and physical body; when it looks upward, it sees the potential for higher principles, called the *spirit self*, *life spirit*, and *spirit body*.

Just as perception of the physical world is possible only by means of the development of organs which are themselves physical, so too perception of the spiritual world is possible only by means of the development of spiritual organs of perception. The forming of such spiritual organs of perception takes place through the transformation of the lower bodies by virtue of their permeation by the activity of the I-being as it brings its developed consciousness directly into these lower realms. At first, when the I-being, through activities that lead towards its self-perfection, turns its gaze towards the spiritual realms, it finds itself being shaped by the spiritual world through the activity of the spirit self. Steiner indicates that “the spirit self is a revelation of the spiritual world within the ‘I,’ just as a sense perception, coming from the other side, is a revelation of the physical world within the ‘I’ (Steiner, 1994b, p. 51). In taking this higher principle within itself, the I-being recognizes its independence from all the activity streaming into it from lower realms through the astral body. The I-being becomes freed from the unconscious influences of the astral body, allowing the I-being to enter the astral body with its higher consciousness. Thus, astral impulses that gave rise to sympathies and antipathies in the I-being are transformed and mastered through the permeation of the spirit self into the astral body through the I-being. This permeation serves to transform the astral body, so that it is possible to say that within an individual human being the spirit self is comprised of the part of the astral body that has been transformed in this way.

In this way spiritual organs of perception begin to blossom through the activity of the I-being as it transforms itself according to higher and higher principles. Therefore, as the spirit self develops, a corresponding capacity awakens in the human, which Steiner calls *Imagination* (to be distinguished from imagination with a lower case “i”). Whereas our normal “object” mode of cognition is tied to primarily to sensory perception (Steiner, 2005, p. 297), Imaginative cognition is a type of consciousness formed in conjunction with the lower spiritual realms; it allows us to perceive the activity of spiritual beings in a limited way. This primarily presents itself as a familiarity with certain processes of transformation that lie behind the sensations that tend to occupy our normal (object) mode of consciousness.

Further self-development of the I-being leads it to an even higher mode of cognition, called *Inspiration* (capital “I”). Inspiration is a soul faculty that is brought about as a result of the transformation of the etheric body by the I-being. The part of the etheric body that is transformed is done so according to the principle called life spirit, and the transformed etheric body is known by the same name, because it *is* the activity that forms it. Inspirational cognition allows an even closer connection with the spiritual world, letting the activity of spiritual beings work into the I-being in such a way that the resulting type of consciousness is even less dependent upon what the I-being brings forth out of its own inner world, but is rather begins to be filled from within by the activity of the beings which it focuses upon (hence the term for this state of consciousness). Whereas through Imaginative cognition we gain some access to the (outer spiritual) processes by which spiritual beings transform, Inspirative cognition presents to us aspects of the spiritual being’s inner nature, and we begin to have the capacity to understand and interpret our Imaginative cognitions (Steiner, 2005, pp. 332-333). This is very similar to the process of getting to know someone: first you notice their outer characteristics, the way they go

about accomplishing certain tasks, their habitual gestures, and so forth. After you become friends, you begin to understand something of the inner soul state that underlies such behavior; resulting in a greater understanding of their actual motivations and an enhanced capacity for empathy. A major characteristic of Inspirative cognition is that it brings to light the *connections* between one being and another, revealing a complex network of influences and counterinfluences—not considered purely outwardly as in the case of how physical science deals with connections,<sup>18</sup> but in a way that reveals what beings are to each other *inwardly*.<sup>19</sup>

Lastly, when the I-being strengthens itself (through balanced exercises) to the point of being capable of *giving itself completely* over to the spiritual worlds, a further capacity is manifested, which corresponds to the I-being's ability to work all the way into the physical body.<sup>20</sup> This capacity, called *Intuition*, is formed in conjunction with the permeation of the physical body by the I-being, resulting in an actual transformation of the physical body into what Steiner calls the spirit body. This is an extremely advanced state, requiring the utmost on the part of the I-being. When the I-being looks inward with this new capacity, it can see clearly all the way into its physical body, and the physical body comes under the direct influence of the I-being; when it looks outward into the spiritual world, it opens itself so thoroughly that the innermost activities of the spiritual beings it encounters can find a home directly within itself. We can say that the capacity for Intuitive cognition allows the I-being of other spirits to live within one's own I-being; we perceive the other as ourselves.

Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition are higher transformations of the normal day-waking consciousness that is the dominant mode of human consciousness at present. Their development occurs not in any de-facto way, but only through self-willed activities which harmoniously strengthen the I-being, so that it prepares for itself spiritual organs of perception

that open the spiritual worlds to the I-being and the I-being to the spiritual worlds. These capacities make certain experiences possible, which naturally present themselves to spiritual practitioners when their development allows it. Steiner summarizes the various stages of this spiritual development as follows, noting that they do not proceed strictly hierarchically, but have various amounts of overlap and simultaneous occurrence:

1. Studying spiritual science by initially making use of the power of judgment, which we have acquired in the physical world of the senses.
2. Acquiring imaginative cognition.
3. Reading the hidden script (this corresponds to *Inspiration*).
4. Living one's way into the spiritual surroundings (this corresponds to *Intuition*).
5. Recognizing the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm.
6. Becoming one with the macrocosm.
7. Experiencing all of these previous experiences as a totality, as a fundamental mood of soul. (Steiner, 2005, p. 373)

### **Practical Steps On The Path**

Only the barest outlines of the *results* of spiritual development, according to Steiner's complex cosmologically-based system, are presented above, and it is necessary to briefly mention something in regards to the *path* by which such spiritual development can be undertaken. Steiner gives countless exercises, some very specifically to work on one aspect or another of the soul-life of the spiritual student, others to be taken up more generally. The most central aspect of any spiritual practice, however, is meditation (of which there are many types and many phases). His indications are specifically meant to be of the kind which can be

practiced by people in a way that leads them safely into higher realms, noting that there is always a danger of one-sidedness or overdevelopment, and that it is better to proceed cautiously and with deliberateness than with reckless speed.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he mentions a “golden rule” for those aspiring to the spiritual path: “For every one step that you take in the pursuit of higher knowledge, take three steps in the perfection of your own character” (Steiner, 1970, p. 69).

We see that Steiner is no mystic. His method is meant to be completely compatible with the activities of daily life, and repeatedly emphasizes that spiritual work should lead one to a more deeply enlivened contact with one’s daily activities, not take one away from them (Steiner, 1970, pp. 23-24). Therefore he emphasizes, as basic requirements, development of one’s capacity for reverence and awe (Steiner, 1970, p. 13, 1994b, p. 179), a vivid inner life (Steiner, 1970, p. 14), perseverance (Steiner, 1970, pp. 58-59) and a number of “basic exercises”:

1. Control of thinking
2. Control of will / Initiative in one’s actions
3. Equanimity / Mastering joy and sorrow
4. Positivity
5. Open-mindedness / Lack of prejudice
6. Equilibrium / Habitual, rhythmic incorporation of the above exercises into daily life  
(Steiner, 1994a, pp. 13-19, 99-103).

Esoteric development is therefore also a path of *moral* development. Steiner points out that because thinking is the human being’s highest naturally developed capacity, it is through the continued transformation of this capacity that a healthy spiritual opening can be made. An approach to the spiritual world that does rest upon the foundation of a strong thinking capacity is prone to many sorts of errors and detours. For this reason he enjoins the spiritual seeker not only

to undertake earnest inner self-examination, but to pay careful attention to the following injunctions in regards to one's thinking life:

1. No idea which has not first been examined shall be allowed to enter my consciousness.
2. My soul should be vividly aware of the obligation to increase constantly the sum of my concepts and ideas.
3. I will only gain knowledge about those things to which I am not attached in sympathy or antipathy.
4. I am obliged to overcome my reservations towards what seems 'abstract' (Steiner, 1994a, pp. 20-23).

Despite this emphasis on the path of knowledge, Steiner is very clear that a complete development of the personality is what makes the strongest basis for advancement towards higher spiritual perception and understanding. Therefore he calls for seekers to exercise their feeling lives through artistic work and appreciation of the natural world, and for the nurturing of love, respect, and selflessness. In fact, Steiner links the core reason for the whole cosmic development of humanity, the whole divine play of being upon being that involved themselves in the cosmic history of the earth, to the complementary development in humanity of *freedom* and *love*. "But what human beings will really give to the Earth is love, a love that will evolve from the most sensuous to the most spiritualized form. This is the mission of Earth evolution. Earth is the cosmos of love" (Steiner, 1998, pp. 68-69).<sup>22</sup> This highest form of love goes hand-in-hand with the realization of human freedom, because it is only through full self-awareness and independence that one's love is dissolved of all unconscious elements and becomes a free gift from within. But this love—as a true love—is not a possession of the human being, but is rather

an expression of its true source, which a human being becomes capable of fully receiving and freely giving back through spiritual development. Steiner says it this way: “Human beings exist so that they may take into themselves the warm love of the Divine, develop it, and return it to the Divine. But they can only do this by becoming self-aware I-beings. Only then will they be able to render back this love” (Steiner, 1998, p. 72). This capacity is one that is uniquely possible—amongst all the cosmic spiritual hierarchies—for human beings. The love given by higher beings is not free in the same sense as that made possible in the human being, precisely because higher beings have not experienced the painful separation from the Divine by incarnating fully into matter as a separate being. Love streams *through* higher beings from the Divine, but is not taken inwardly and developed *anew*; higher beings *express* Divine love, human beings *transform* Divine love. In this sense the *whole point* of the drama of Earthly evolution is the development of a being capable of accomplishing just this very fact. For this reason, Steiner places this potential humanity into the cosmic scheme of higher and lower beings into its own hierarchy, the hierarchy of freedom and love.<sup>23</sup>

So much for a brief introduction to Steiner’s cosmological view; now we turn to Sri Aurobindo.

### **Sri Aurobindo’s Cosmology**

The primary beginning point of the cosmology of the integral yoga, the name Aurobindo gave to his synthesis of the different yogic streams, which also stands as its ending point and ultimate consummation, is the Divine, the Absolute, the Non-dual. Science must necessarily concern itself with the manifest world – its particulars, but the Divine is beyond all particularity and imagination, beyond all comparison or verbalization, the ultimate Ground of Being and source of all. Thus, for Aurobindo, the Absolute is the only possible beginning. Yet how can

something ineffable, timeless, spaceless, and formless give rise to the effable universe of manifest time, space, and form? Aurobindo identifies a somewhat complicated series of related movements of the Absolute, which can be understood as the process of Divine involution, a necessary complement to the process of evolution. As Aurobindo states:

The word evolution carries with it in its intrinsic sense, in the idea at its root the necessity of a previous involution. We must, if a hidden spiritual being is the secret of all the action of Nature, give its full power to that latent value of the idea. We are bound then to suppose that all that evolves already existed involved, passive or otherwise active, but in either case concealed from us in the shell of material Nature. (Ghose, 1971b, p. 235)

Aurobindo's words are meant to be precise; all that evolves can only do so because in some way the evolution has been preceded by an involution, an inward involving of the Divine with itself. Additionally present in this passage is the subtle hint of a hierarchical structure in which matter forms the basis for the evolutionary process. In other words, the Absolute has concealed itself in material Nature in order to evolve through it. Thus matter itself is like a shell, an outer, sensible covering within which the Divine itself is active, but in a hidden, esoteric way. Aurobindo, with his customary complementary balancing of seemingly opposing movements, indicates that “The two are one: Spirit is the soul and reality of that which we sense as Matter; Matter is a form and body of that which we realize as Spirit” (Ghose, 1990, p. 256).<sup>24</sup>

The cosmic involutory span between the unitary, singular Absolute to the manifest, plural material world of the universe is not taken in a single step, but has proceeded through a series of stages, by which successively involved layers of the Divine are prepared for future activity.<sup>25</sup> The overall picture is of the creation of *planes* of qualitative potentiality increasingly removed

from the Divine. These are planes of being, of existence, and of consciousness. They are qualitatively nearer or farther from the Divine, which is another way of saying that they are stages through which the Divine forgets itself through a process of self-absorption. Yet these planes are established first as potentialities and contain no actual substance, no explicit form, acting instead as the creation of the various realms through which separated parts of the Divine will later evolve – for example in the form of humanity.

Although Aurobindo does not go into explicit details, he does indicate that the evolutionary process occurs in phases of alternating manifestation and spiritualization, in accord with traditional Hindu wisdom:

Once manifested in matter the world proceeds by laws which do not change, from age to age, by a regular succession, until it is all withdrawn back again into the source from which it came. The material goes back into the psychical and the psychical is involved in its cause or seed. It is again put out when the period of expansion recurs and runs its course on similar lines but with different details till the period of contraction is due. (Ghose, 1998, p. 18)

The involution begins with Being-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda), which then establishes itself as the plane of Supermind, which then becomes the successively involved planes of Mind, Life, and Matter. In a certain sense, it can be said that the creation of these planes occurs because the Divine, having bliss in the awareness of its own existence, wished to conceal itself so that it could experience the joy of rediscovering itself through actual manifestation. In order for the discovery to be complete, the Divine had to make a complete self-forgetting possible. Thus the Divine's highest aspects – Being, Consciousness, Bliss, and the Supermind (or Truth-Consciousness, which is unitive) – had to go through a reversal via the

involutionary process into their opposites: Non-Being, Inconscience, Insensibility, and Mind (separative, divisive Mind).<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of the various planes of potential existence leads the Divine away from itself, until finally it forgets itself so completely that it no longer even recognizes that anything is lost – its descent into inconscience is complete. It is at this moment that the descent through involution ends; the Divine cannot objectify itself from itself any further. This marks the transition from the involutory movement to that of an ascending evolution. Now it is possible to speak of the Divine working through actual manifestation – i.e. specific, individual forms arise to fill in, as it were, the potential planes of existence with various beings, beginning with the lowest: inconscient matter itself. In matter, the one unitive Divine has lost itself in a world populated entirely by mutually separating objects. This is as divisive as the Divine can become, where every bit of matter is necessarily separate from every other, alone.

At this point of supreme self-involvement, evolution begins, proceeding now in the only possible direction open to it: back towards the Divine. Thus Matter evolves into Life, which evolves into Mind. Ultimately, Mind must evolve beyond itself into the Supermind, (Ghose, 1990, p. 51) from which a reunification with the Being, Consciousness, and Bliss of the universe can occur; more about this in a moment.

What is important to consider is that this view provides an entirely different context for the principle of evolution than is normally the case in scientific circles, where evolution is generally understood as a solely material process. As Aurobindo indicates:

If we push the materialist conclusion far enough, we arrive at an insignificance and unreality in the life of the individual and the race which leaves us, logically, the option between either a feverish effort of the individual to snatch what he may

from a transient existence, to “live his life”, as it is said, or a dispassionate and objectless service of the race and the individual, knowing well that the latter is a transient fiction of the nervous mentality and the former only a little more long-lived collective form of the same regular nervous spasm of Matter. (Ghose, 1990, p. 25)

It is precisely these pitfalls that the Integral Yoga avoids by tracing the processes of material evolution to the preceding stages of involution. Matter, then, is not by itself either entirely responsible for, or even capable of, evolving into Life. Life can only arise out of Matter because the possibility of Life was established through the creation, via involution, of the unmanifest plane of Life. But the plane of life required the higher plane of Mind, which is preceded by higher planes, and so forth to the Divine itself, which is responsible for the whole thing in the first place. Matter then, although inconscient, dead, and by itself inert, owes its existence to higher planes of potentiality which are literally involved within Matter itself. All the higher planes are thus present as potentials within Matter, all the way to the Divine itself. This, in a fundamental sense, is what makes evolution possible, and is a key tenet of the Integral Yoga. It also provides a cosmological foundation within which the evolving human being can find itself as an integral component.

### **The Human Being**

Matter, then, evolves as the fully involuted Absolute into the very planes of existence laid out beforehand by the Absolute’s self-forgetting. As each plane of existence becomes filled with actual evolving forms, complexity, diversity, and consciousness increase. The progress of evolution is one that takes the completely self-involved separateness of the material world upward through higher and higher forms of consciousness. This is the vertical scale of

evolution. What makes human beings human is the fact that we have parts which are evolving through and within the planes of Matter, Life, and Mind, simultaneously. But although humans today have relatively easy access to the planes of Mind, this is not the end of the evolutionary process, which has the potential to proceed beyond the Mind into higher states, which Aurobindo identifies as Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Overmind, before finally reaching the Supermental plane of Truth-Consciousness. Despite the inclusion of the word “Mind”, these higher planes are at first characterized by the silencing of the normal levels of Mind experienced in everyday logical thinking. Aurobindo is actually describing states through which the human surrenders more and more to the influence of the higher spiritual planes, in which “man the mental being is sublimated by the endeavour of the evolutionary Energy to develop out of him the spiritual man, the fully conscious being, man exceeding his first material self and discoverer of his true self and highest nature.” (Ghose, 2003, p. 8)

The three planes of Matter, Life (also called the Vital), and Mind, are not monolithic, but themselves admit something of the nature of each of the other planes, resulting in a somewhat fractal-like nine-fold division. The physical plane has a purely physical part (inconscient matter), but also a vital part and a mental part. Similarly, the vital plane is not purely vital but also has a lower physical part and a higher mental part, and the mental plane has also lower vital and physical parts. These nine levels, in conjunction with the higher evolutionary potential of the human being through the higher mental planes, can best be shown in a table:

<b>Planes of Infinite Existence</b>	Purely Spiritual Planes	Sat
		Cit
		Ananda
		Supermind
<b>Planes of Finite Existence</b>	Mental Planes (higher)	Overmind
		Intuitive Mind
		Illumined Mind
		Higher Mind
	Mental Planes (lower)	Pure Mental
		Vital Mental
		Physical Mental
	Vital Planes	Mental Vital
		Pure Vital
		Physical Vital
	Material Planes	Mental Physical
		Vital Physical
		Pure Physical

Not capable of being represented in this scheme is the Absolute itself, which is simultaneously beyond all these levels while constituting them in their completeness. The Divine is thus both *fully* transcendent and *fully* immanent. This means that even matter partakes of the Divine, and has some form of consciousness. As Aurobindo states,

As we progress and awaken to the soul in us and things, we shall realize that there is a consciousness also in the plant, in the metal, in the atom, in electricity, in everything that belongs to physical nature; we shall find even that it is not really in all respects a lower or more limited mode than the mental, on the contrary it is

in many “inanimate” forms more intense, rapid, poignant, though less evolved towards the surface. (Ghose, 1999, p. 387)

It is only because the highest potentials are already involved in the very lowest that it is possible for evolution to occur; there is no part whatsoever that does not have the potential to reunite with its source.

In addition to this vertical evolution, a corresponding horizontal evolution is possible, where consciousness becomes more and more able to penetrate the inner nature of each of its parts (physical, vital, mental), until ultimately it comes into contact with what is known as the *psychic being* (Ghose, 1990, p. 234), the “spiritual personality put forward by the soul in its evolution” (Ghose, 1971a, p. 281) which evolves over many lifetimes. This psychic being is an expression within an individual lifetime of the spark of the Divine, the soul, which is itself a mediator between the individual psychic being and the *Jivatman*, the “individual Self or Atman; the eternal true being of the individual” (Ghose, 1971a), which is already one with the Divine. The two evolutionary movements – inward and upward – are simultaneously possible for the human being (although not for lower forms, which need to evolve upward in order to gain the type of consciousness that can then move inward). Connecting with the psychic being makes the upward evolution proceed much more smoothly.

It is important to note, however, that unlike some prominent streams of Eastern thinking, the vertical progression is continuously inclusive of the lower levels. The goal is thus not a reunification with the Divine through a *merely* transcendent surpassing of the material form of the body (say, via asceticism), but a complete realization of the Divine *within* the material. Thus, once the psychic being is contacted, it becomes possible for the human being to open up to higher realms and effect a descent of the Supermental into the lower realms, all the way into

matter itself. As Satprem, an important follower of the Mother, who herself was the one most active in experimenting with this descent in her “yoga of the cells” indicates:

On the other hand, Sri Aurobindo’s goal, as we have seen, is not only to ascend, but to descend, not only to dart up into eternal Peace, but to transform Life and Matter, beginning with this little life and the little bit of matter that we are.

(Satprem, 2000, p. 51)

The human being is the first being that is capable of *consciously* connecting the Absolute with the Material. In a way, the human being thus marks a cosmically significant evolutionary turning point, precisely because in the human a consciousness that is completely involved with all the lower mental, vital, and physical planes has the potential to open itself to the Divine above.

This completes our very brief survey of the major elements of the cosmology of the Integral Yoga. The universe is an evolving expression of the Divine, which purposefully loses itself so that it can experience joy in finding itself anew. The Absolute is both immanent and transcendent; matter includes elements of the Divine, and evolves higher forms of self-consciousness on its way back to itself, successively traversing and incorporating elements of Life, Mind, and upwards into the Supermind. Finally, the human being is presently the evolutionary form which has the most potential to connect the lower planes with the higher planes, through conscious transformative acts, fulfilling the evolutionary cycle and realizing the “Life Divine”.

### **A Beginning Comparison**

Obvious parallels between these two systems present themselves. The greatest commonality is in the recognition of an involuting/evolving Divine, the cosmic movement of the

highest spiritual principle into the depths of matter and back again. For both Steiner and Aurobindo the evolutionary movement to the Divine is one that *takes the lower realms with it*. Haridas Chaudhuri, one of the foremost interpreters of Aurobindo's integral yoga, notes that "emancipation has to be given a positive content. It is the beginning of a new life of action. ... It is not enough to gain liberation from unconscious Nature; there is a much sublimer goal of human endeavour, and that is to liberate Nature herself in the growing fulfillment of the creative urge concealed in her breast" (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 41). Thus, "freedom is not emancipation *from* Nature, but emancipation *in* Nature" (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 79). Steiner indicates likewise: "Our task as messengers of the spiritual world is to incorporate the spirit into the material world" (Steiner, 1994b, p. 131). This reverence for Nature and the cosmological background for its complete transformation through an evolved humanity marks a profound departure from many traditional religions and philosophies, both East and West, although it has formed an important part of Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism in the East and alchemy in the West; Nature is not to be shunned, dominated, or ignored, but rather is part of the key of our very own ascent.

Steiner and Aurobindo, in recognizing the spiritual foundations of the cosmos, indicate that no part of what takes place on the earth remains unconnected to cosmic evolution. Thus, "both nature and history, which are different aspects of cosmic process, are modes of manifestation of the same world-spirit, the creative power of Transcendence" (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 47). With regards to the human being, the nature of the higher principles indicated in both systems also have remarkable similarity. We can point out the correspondences between Steiner's higher capacities of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition and Aurobindo's Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, and Intuitive Mind, although a deeper comparison would require its own essay. Similarly, the parts and planes of existence as identified by Aurobindo are quite

compatible with Steiner's scheme, although it is not possible to make a simple one-to-one correspondence, as shown in the following table:<sup>27</sup>

<b>Planes of Infinite Existence</b>	Purely Spiritual Planes	Sat	Father
		Cit	Son
		Ananda	Holy Spirit
		Supermind	?
<b>Planes of Finite Existence</b>	Mental Planes (higher)	Overmind	Higher Hierarchies
		Intuitive Mind	Spirit Body
		Illumined Mind	Life Spirit
		Higher Mind	Spirit Self
	Mental Planes (lower)	Pure Mental	Consciousness Soul
		Vital Mental	Mind Soul
		Physical Mental	
	Vital Planes	Mental Vital	Sentient Soul
		Pure Vital	
		Physical Vital	
	Material Planes	Mental Physical	Soul Body
		Vital Physical	Etheric Body
		Pure Physical	Physical Body

Although previously we have only mentioned the physical, etheric, astral, and their transformations through the I-being, Steiner actually begins with a nine-fold division of the human being, in which the astral body is shown to have a lower part connected more closely to the physical body (this is the *soul body*, which can also be thought of as the finest part of the etheric body) (Steiner, 1994b, p. 40), as well as a higher part which is what allows sensations to be represented internally as an experience (known as the *sentient soul*) (Steiner, 1994b, p. 38). The sentient soul is what we have in common with the animal realm, and is, as it were, our inner animal self. Beyond this, human beings have the capacity for thinking, and to make objects of their own sensations; this is the *mind soul* (Steiner, 1994b, p. 42). Finally we come the

innermost part of the soul, in which the first connections with the higher realms become possible for consciousness. This part of the soul is called the *consciousness soul* (Steiner, 1994b, p. 45).

It is more difficult to speculate (which is all that someone in my position can accomplish in regards to such high realms) concerning Steiner's triune Godhead and Aurobindo's triune Absolute, but there may be some basis to the correspondences noted above. What is most apparent is the lack of a cognate to Aurobindo's Supermind in Steiner's cosmology. The Supermental, which is arguably the most central and pivotal concept newly brought forth by Aurobindo (the Supermental is not something that was garnered from traditional Vedic wisdom, although Aurobindo indicates that "concealed" references to it exist in the Vedas (Ghose, 1990, p. 134)), may be a unique contribution to a complete spiritual-cosmological picture. Steiner, as has been indicated, spoke much more often about realms which directly concerned the immediate transformations of the human being, giving, for example, amazingly explicit and coherent accounts of delicate and complex relations between the various lower realms (astral, etheric, physical), and their manifestations in specific outer forms. He spends less time speaking about the highest realms, excepting some of his most intimate and beautiful lectures, which are, if such a characterization may be permitted, overflowing with a hushed reverence. It is as if he were reserving speech for those topics which are most amenable to its necessarily limited formulation, in an attempt to avoid attempts at reification in thinking of that which admits of no such thing.

But for Aurobindo it was important to show how the transition can be made from the infinite world of the Absolute to the finite world of manifest existence, and the principle by which this occurs is through the Supermind, a completely unitive Truth-Consciousness "everywhere present in the universe as an ordering self-knowledge by which the One manifests the harmonies of its infinite potential multiplicity" (Ghose, 1990, p. 143). Much of Aurobindo's

*magnum opus*, “The Life Divine”, is concerned in one way or another with exploring various aspects of the Supermental.

It seems clear, however, that Aurobindo’s Overmental plane corresponds with the various higher hierarchies that Steiner indicates (see endnote #23):

If we regard the Powers of the Reality as so many Godheads, we can say that the Overmind releases a million Godheads into action, each empowered to create its own world, each world capable of relation, communication and interplay with the others. ... Overmind thus gives to the One Existence-Consciousness-Bliss the character of a teeming of infinite possibilities which can be developed into a multitude of worlds or thrown together into one world in which the endlessly variable outcome of their play is the determinant of its creation, of its process, its course and its consequence. (Ghose, 1990, pp. 295-296)

The Overmental plane is the region of transition between the unitive Supermind and the multiplicity of the manifest world, a further veiling in particularity and Ignorance of the Divine itself. It is, simply, the realm of the various “gods”.

In reference to correspondences in the lower portions of the table, it should be pointed out that Aurobindo uses the term *vital* in a way that is slightly confusing,<sup>28</sup> because it is not simply referring to what makes a physical body alive, but also to inner sensations and reactions to this life. Thus Aurobindo’s vital plane corresponds more closely with the soul-activities of the sentient soul, which is likewise bound up with impulses from the lower bodies. The sentient soul has a connection both with the physical body (Aurobindo’s physical vital), but also with the lower mental realm (Aurobindo’s mental vital). Steiner’s etheric body is therefore more akin to Aurobindo’s vital physical, which is the vital part of the physical plane; precisely that which

endows the otherwise purely dead and inert matter of the physical with capacities for growth, regeneration, decay, and so forth. Steiner's mind soul links strongly to the physical part of the mental plane, because its contents are still largely determined by outer sensory means in its reliance upon the physical body. At the same time, mind soul consciousness is capable of inwardly digesting its experiences in a way that brings forth novelty; it brings forth a higher octave of what is expressed in a lower level as life. Steiner even calls this level the *heart-mind soul*, indicating that it is no mere logician, but an expression of mentality that is deeply connected with the inner workings of life itself. It is in the consciousness soul, as in Aurobindo's pure mental, that the transition is made from the lower realms that are primarily dominated (ultimately) by the intransience of matter to an experience of the higher spiritual realms. For Steiner, the mind soul and consciousness soul together form "the two garments of the 'I'" (Steiner, 1994b, p. 59), providing the basis upon and through which the I-being is first able to consciously discover itself. Steiner's I-being is thus strikingly similar to Aurobindo's psychic being. Each is the spark of the Divine manifested consciously in the human being, and while this principle is not the ultimate transformation of the human being, nor its highest principle, it forms a bridge between the lower and higher worlds. It grows out of the lower realms while acting like an emissary that works in the individual on behalf of the Divine, taking the fruits of experience from life to life. Thus the I-being or psychic being can be at different stages of development, either an unconscious slave through its connection to the lower bodies, or a dynamic force of transformation through its opening towards higher spiritual realms. A quote from Aurobindo will sum up for both he and Steiner the purpose of this I-being:

On the contrary, where the psychic personality is weak, crude or ill-developed, the finer parts and movements in us are lacking or poor in character and power,

even though the mind may be forceful and brilliant, the heart of vital emotions hard and strong and masterful, the life-force dominant and successful, the bodily existence rich and fortunate and an apparent lord and victor. It is then the outer desire-soul, the pseudo-psychic entity, that reigns and we mistake its misinterpretations of psychic suggestion and aspiration, its ideas and ideals, its desires and yearnings for true soul-stuff and wealth of spiritual experience.<sup>29</sup> If the secret psychic Person can come forward into the front and, replacing the desire-soul, govern overtly and entirely and not only partially and from behind the veil this outer nature of mind, life and body, then these can be cast into soul images of what is true, right and beautiful and in the end the whole nature can be turned towards the real aim of life, the supreme victory, the ascent into spiritual existence. (Ghose, 1990, pp. 240-241)

Both Steiner and Aurobindo emphasize that higher principles are ‘brought down’ into the lower through the activity of the I-being/psychic being, resulting in a corresponding transformation of the lower principle, even within the very physical body. Chaudhuri states that the physical body “is capable of being thoroughly penetrated by the light of the spirit. It is capable of being transformed into what has been called the ‘Diamond Body.’ As a result of such transformation, the body does not appear any more to be a burden upon the liberated self. On the contrary, it becomes a perfect image of the self. It shines as the Spirit made flesh” (Chaudhuri, 1974a, p. 143). This is precisely in accord with Steiner’s view. He indicates that it was just such a transformation that was first historically accomplished by the incarnation of the Christ being into the person of Jesus of Nazareth upon his death and resurrection; this is Christ’s “resurrection body”, which is literally a body of light (Steiner, 1998, pp. 76-78).<sup>30</sup>

Steiner indicates that the transformation of the lower bodies is accomplished through the I-being's unfolding of higher realms within the bodies that comprise its lower nature. Thus, these lower realms, at first are not penetrated in full by the I-being, who is, rather, somewhat at their mercy. It is only with the bringing down of the higher principles of the spirit self, life spirit, and spirit body that consciousness becomes resilient enough to wake up within these lower realms. This permeation of the lower bodies by the enhanced power of the I-being brings them out from under the thumb of their various levels of unconsciousness and bathes them in a higher light. Aurobindo, in his own language, concurs:

We are aware indeed of the life-plane and mind-plane of the physical being, but not of the life-plane and mind-plane proper or of the superior and larger vital and mental being which we are behind the veil of our ordinary consciousness. It is only at a high stage of development that we become aware of them and even then, ordinarily, only at the back of the action of our mentalised physical nature; we do not actually live on those planes, for if we did we could very soon arrive at the conscious control of the body by the life-power and of both by the sovereign mind; we should then be able to determine our physical and mental life to a very large extent by our will and knowledge as masters of our being and with a direct action of the mind on the life and body. By Yoga this power of transcending the physical self and taking possession of the higher selves may to a greater or less degree be acquired through a heightened and widened self-consciousness and self-mastery. (Ghose, 1999, p. 462)

There are many other similarities that can be mentioned. For example both Steiner and Aurobindo recognize that after death humans do not simply disappear but remain involved in the

evolutionary press. The following quote applies to both systems: “After their physical death they continue to function on subtler and higher planes of consciousness, rendering help in various ways to the struggling and suffering members of the living creation. Or, it is believed, the liberated souls may also freely choose to be reborn on earth in order to serve society in the best interests of [humanity’s] spiritual progress” (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 44). Steiner, in various works, explicates in great detail the nature of these ‘subtler and higher planes’ and how, depending upon the level of advancement of the individual, one’s capacities for conscious help unfolds in these higher realms.

Both recognize that immersion into higher spiritual planes does not mean complete self-annihilation, but rather the simultaneous growth and discovery of the higher being within us. Chaudhuri puts it well, distinguishing between egocentric and cosmocentric individualities: “What is liquidated on the attainment of spiritual liberation is the ego-centric individuality of an individual. Out of the ashes of the ego is reborn a new individual. [One’s] deepest potentiality as an active center of Being is dynamized” (Chaudhuri, 1974a, p. 121). Steiner, likewise, speaks of a cosmic consciousness, or Christ-consciousness, that permeates the I-being, bringing it into dynamic harmony with the evolutionary impulse of cosmic creation.

Just as Steiner recognizes that part of the essential mission of the human being in this stage of its evolution is to become conscious of itself as a free being, so too in the integral yoga ‘it is important to note that the perfect realization of the self as freedom is essentially a dynamic and creative act. The self in its essence is creative freedom’ (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 138). For Steiner the realization of the freedom of the Self goes hand-in-hand with its freely chosen turn towards its Divine purpose, where Chaudhuri likewise indicates that “Yoga is essentially an act of dedication to the cosmic purpose of existence, the spiritual destiny of life” (Chaudhuri, 1974b,

p. 37). We see that despite different emphases placed on one concept or another, the overall source, unfolding, and purpose identified in each system works quite harmoniously together in a complementary way.

### **The Path**

In regards to the path of realizing spiritual transformation, little mention has been made of the approach of integral yoga. This is in part because

a basic idea in yoga is that of freedom in spiritual self-expression. Yoga does not believe in any standardized path, for all to follow. It does not stand for any rigidly fixed rule, to which all should conform. It does not offer any patent remedy for human salvation. It affirms the oneness of truth, but rejects the uniformity of living. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 21)

Nevertheless, this does not mean just anything will serve the difficult work of transformation:

Yoga implies faith in definite and systematic procedures by following which mystic experience of pure existence can be achieved. It shows a scientific spirit of investigation in the domain of the spirit or in the realm of the unconscious. It also believes in the need for a rational understanding of the interrelations that exist between mystic realization and other provinces of human experience. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 31)

To this Steiner would readily agree. His own path of anthroposophy he likewise called *spiritual science* precisely because it takes the scientific impulse seriously: “It is the intent of spiritual science to free the methods and attitudes of scientific research from their particular application to the relationships and processes of sensory facts while preserving their way of

thinking and other attributes” (Steiner, 2005, p. 14). What is important is that sincere effort is made, and it is recognized by both Aurobindo and Steiner that such effort must involve the seeing through of whatever practice is chosen. They agree that not every path ‘works’ for every individuality, and that what is essential is to take up the path that is most directly suitable for the advancement of the individual in question. Chaudhuri puts this eloquently:

The important thing is that every individual should have the opportunity of growing from the roots of [one’s] own being, following the bent of [one’s] own nature, along the lines indicated by [one’s] own psychical make-up, towards the full flowering of [one’s] individuality as a unique creative center of the cosmic whole. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 22)

The psychic being and I-being respectively, once they have reached a certain point of development, become the guiding light behind this choice, and it was this, and no outer principle or guru, that stood as the inspiring force in the lives of both Aurobindo and Steiner.

Despite the freedom of the individual to choose one’s path, some basic commonalities to spiritual development remain, because not every path leads to the Divine in the same fashion, and adherence to some fundamental principles ensures a solid foundation that keeps the personality from having aspects that are either overdeveloped or underdeveloped. Therefore Chaudhuri points out that “the basic requirement of yoga practice is the sincerity of purpose and a resolute will to carry on open-minded investigation in the realm of the spirit” (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 22), and that “ethical discipline is believed to be the first indispensable phase of yoga practice” (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 23). Just as Steiner shows the necessity of training the Will, Chaudhuri holds that “the practice of yoga in the strict sense of the term is a resolute will to

allow the power of Being to work more and more freely within us. It is a commitment to higher spiritual values” (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 38).

This commitment to higher spiritual values, as is the case with Steiner, is not meant to take one away from life. This is why the integral yoga

stresses the need for the balanced growth of personality; for constructive development of the latent possibilities of one’s nature; and for their employment in the service of mankind and such higher values as truth, justice, freedom, peace and progress. Integral yoga warns against extreme tendencies which mislead people into lopsided development. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 37)

The integral yoga accomplishes this transformation through three basic phases: psychic integration, cosmic integration, and existential integration. The psychic integration involves a complete harmonization of the different aspects of the personality (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 83). This effort required for this corresponds strongly to the basic exercises of Steiner, which aim at the same goal. Cosmic integration seems very much like Steiner’s indication of the phase in which the spiritual seeker directly experiences the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm:

The psyche cannot be fully integrated without realization of its relationship to nature and society, i.e. to the cosmos. Psyche and cosmos are inseparable aspects of one concrete reality. The fundamental reality is neither the psyche nor the cosmos but the psyche-cosmos continuum. It is neither the isolated self nor the independent universe, but the self-in-the-universe or the universe-for-the-self. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 86).

Lastly, existential integration seems to correspond with the phase in which, for Steiner, the student becomes one with the macrocosm, which means a complete unification with the principles which underlie the student's very existence:

The secret of complete psychic harmony lies in the realization of the eternal in man—of the timeless dimension of existence. It is there that the ultimate unity of the psyche is to be found. That is why the full integration of the psyche can be accomplished only in the light of existential experience, i.e. a direct insight into the ultimate ground of existence which is timeless. (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 88)

And just as Steiner points out the foundational importance of maintaining one's capacity for reverence and awe, so in the integral yoga "A feeling of oneness with the realm of nature, a sense of life's sacredness, a reverence for all life, is indeed vital for the holistic growth of human personality" (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 87). Similarly, the "four fundamental principles of creative existence: aspiration, action, meditation, and love" (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 89) in integral yoga can be found in anthroposophy; both systems seek a dynamic, well-rounded development and integration of the various aspects that make up the human being. And of course both systems place much reliance upon techniques of meditation in general as a way of achieving spiritual advancement, and both do so in a way that stresses the need for keeping a harmonious balance.

### **Inspired Works**

The techniques of integral yoga are meant to find their fruits not only in the advancement of the individual human being, but in the expression of higher principles through action in the world, for it is, as Steiner mentions, *in* the world that the greatest transformation can take place (and this provides a central reason for repeated Earth lives). Chaudhuri brings this to light by stating that "It is of vital importance today that the ontological insights embodied in the highest

spiritual experiences of mankind should be given a practical and dynamic form” (Chaudhuri, 1974b, p. 39).

For his part, Steiner was very active outwardly, travelling across Europe to give lecture and meet with various groups, often giving many lectures in one day. Steiner was able to realize practical results in a very diverse array of realms, both through his own work and through those inspired by anthroposophy, for example in education with the founding of the Waldorf Schools,<sup>31</sup> in social renewal with various Threefolding initiatives,<sup>32</sup> in dance with the new art of visible speech called Eurythmy, in art with veil painting and drawing techniques, in sculpture with his various productions (most notably “The Group”<sup>33</sup>), in architecture with his design and construction of the first and second Goetheanums,<sup>34</sup> in theater with his four ‘mystery plays’ about karma and reincarnation, in medicine with the development of anthroposophically extended medicine,<sup>35</sup> in agriculture with the biodynamic growing methods,<sup>36</sup> in Christian renewal with the help he provided the founders of the Christian Community,<sup>37</sup> in economics with socially responsible investing,<sup>38</sup> in rehabilitation with anthroposophical prison outreach,<sup>39</sup> as well as providing impulses for new discoveries in astronomy, climatology,<sup>40</sup> the relation of geometry to living forms,<sup>41</sup> new ways of thinking about Darwinian evolution,<sup>42</sup> water research,<sup>43</sup> and the relation between sound and form,<sup>44</sup> among many others, not to mention his many scholarly and intellectual works, which also stand as ‘deeds’ in the outer world. The fruits of anthroposophy are many, and (as the various links to current initiatives inspired by people taking up the work attest) have taken root in all the domains of life.

Aurobindo, on his side, was very active primarily in the political realm, at least until his discovery of yoga, working as one of the most central figures in the Indian independence movement. Indeed Aurobindo was a tireless advocate for independence from Britain, publishing

constant essays, which ultimately landed him in jail (where he subsequently had one of his most important spiritual experiences inspired by reading the Bhagavad Gita). It is not too much of a stretch to say that Aurobindo successfully accomplished the vast work of preparing the foundation that was necessary for the realization of India's independence, which finally came to fruition with Ghandi. Yet the discovery of yoga drew him more and more, and he realized that his efforts were better spent elsewhere, in developing something that would be of use not only to India, but to the world (Purani, 1978).

Once he established himself in Pondicherry, Aurobindo rarely left whichever house he was staying in, ultimately coming out almost not at all (Purani, 1978, pp. 221-222). Despite this seeming reclusiveness, he still kept in contact with the outside world, primarily through letters and the welcoming of visitors, of which there were many. Yet in the case of such figures as Steiner and Aurobindo, it is not possible to judge their efforts merely from the outside. Indeed, this would be a major mistake. Some of Aurobindo's most important accomplishments may have no obviously visible outer component, but which nevertheless, as spiritual deeds, reverberate in the spiritual world in a way that echoes down through time, changing the very nature of what is possible for later humanity.<sup>45</sup> About this, Aurobindo says

I have no intention of achieving the Supermind for myself only—I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth-consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth-consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile. (Purani, 1978, p. 271)

Steiner himself is very cognizant of this type of deed, speaking in many places about the contributions of specific individualities to the advancement of the human project in ways that can only be perceived with the development of spiritual sight.

In terms of outer initiatives inspired by Aurobindo (and the Mother), the most important seems to be Auroville,<sup>46</sup> an experimental community meant for the realization of human unity. This “universal city” is meant to belong to the whole of humanity as a place for the bringing to fruition the insights of Aurobindo and the Mother.

### **Differences**

It should not be assumed that the many strong links between the two systems presented means that no important differences exist. In fact, there are many, ranging from the inconsequential to the very profound. It has already been noted that Steiner spends relatively less time discussing the highest principles, choosing to focus much more on realms immediately relevant to the stage of modern evolving humanity. He even makes this clear in one of his most amazing and difficult books, “Anthroposophy: A Fragment,” in which he likens anthroposophy to the view from the middle of a mountain, whereas theosophy deals with the view from the top and anthropology from the bottom of the valley (Steiner, 1996a, pp. 80-81). Aurobindo seems, on the other hand, to delight in conceptualizing these very same principles in a variety of ways, and through different logical formulations.

Once one becomes somewhat familiar with the style of each figure’s writing, it becomes possible to make at least some tentative observations. In particular, it can be mentioned that something of the personal histories of each man is found in the mode and quality of their written expressions. Most particularly, this shows up in the different paths by which each figure came to their spiritual understanding. Steiner’s clairvoyance manifested naturally in him at a very young

age (between 5 and 7), and which first became apparent to him consciously when a dead relative who had just committed suicide appeared to his spiritual sight (Steiner, 2000, pp. 313-314). After that first event his clairvoyance developed rapidly. Aurobindo indicates no such inclination for such experiences until he reached India in 1893, at the age of 21 (Purani, 1978, p. 37).<sup>47,48,49</sup> Whereas Steiner was continually steeped in the spiritual influences behind the physical world through natural inclination (we would here have to point out the role played here of reincarnation), Aurobindo seems to have approached the realms of the spirit much more through the continual development of his mental self. Because of this, Steiner's writings throughout maintain a definite, almost intimate personal flavor in regards to spiritual insights that can perhaps be accounted for by his deep familiarity from a young age with spiritual clairvoyance. His expression takes the tone of someone long-accustomed to the nature of certain inner experiences, but who only later discovers a language and phrasing that does their subtle nature justice. On the other hand, Aurobindo's writings retain a qualitatively different flavor. In this case, his tone is more crisply intellectual, more clearly structured and formulated, in a way that one could easily imagine was an expression of someone who came first to an educated intellectuality and only somewhat later to direct spiritual experiences. In Steiner's case, it is as if language comes in after the experience in an attempt to pull out its central aspects. In Aurobindo's case, it is more as if the spiritual experiences are had with a consciousness that is already habituated to language, which thus becomes a more willing servant to the expression of the experience. For Aurobindo, language seems to provide the primary frame through which his spiritual experiences are inwardly formulated, as if the language surrounds and penetrates into the experience from the outside,<sup>50</sup> while for Steiner it is more as if the experience is struggling to find expression through the veil of language in an attempt to break free from it. Yet these are

only speculations, and the reader is left to make such distinctions on the basis of one's own experience.

One major difference between the two systems is found in the sources of their development. Steiner was adamant that he only communicated insights on the basis of his own supersensible research. He was clearly not in support of supersensible knowledge revealed through methods such as channeling or through any other method in which the I-being of the individual requires suppression instead of development. Despite his (initial) use of many terms derived from Theosophical language, Steiner indicates that this was done primarily because his own experiences were most clearly received within the Theosophical community, and he thus adopted a language that they could understand. In other words, what Steiner brought, he brought out of his own developed spiritual capacities as an individual.

For Aurobindo the situation is somewhat different, indeed, perhaps unique in terms of the genesis of such a system. Aurobindo's system was developed in tandem with the efforts of Mirra Alfassa, known as the Mother. Both Aurobindo and the Mother agree that the integral yoga could only have come about through their mutual cooperation; neither could have done it alone. Aurobindo states that

The Mother's consciousness and mine are the same, the one Divine consciousness in two, because that is necessary for the play. Nothing can be done without her knowledge and force, without her consciousness—if anybody really feels her consciousness, he should know that I am there behind it and if he feels me it is the same with hers. (Purani, 1978, p. 268)

The consequences of this difference in the genesis of the two systems are not immediately apparent, but it is certainly something worthy of note. Despite the unity of Sri

Aurobindo and the Mother, credit for the integral yoga is often given solely to Aurobindo, at least in a default sense (for example, up to this point in this very essay), perhaps because of the voluminous exposition by Aurobindo in countless written documents, while the Mother's primary contribution was in her direct experiences of the spiritual worlds<sup>51</sup> and her daily running of the ashram.

Another major difference between the two systems is the importance that Steiner places on a unique historical event, that of the incarnation of an element of the Trinity into the physical body of Jesus of Nazareth; the event at Golgotha. For Steiner this event occupies a very special place in cosmic history, because it signifies the "turning point of time", the point around which the whole of creation revolves. The significance of this event cannot be overstated, and its unique explication by Steiner, from an esoteric standpoint, is perhaps one of his greatest contributions. In terms of the previous correspondence table, where a question mark was placed in the space of the Supermental, it may be possible to link this event with the oft-talked about descent of the Supermental by Aurobindo. If this is the case, then Aurobindo's statement that the Supermind had not yet completely descended<sup>52</sup> would require reinterpretation.<sup>53</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Both Steiner and Aurobindo had Western educations, and both men were capable of expressing themselves with a very intellectual language and subtlety of thought, and both were extremely voluminous producers of words. Both were likewise poets; Steiner wrote hundreds of inspiring verses, while Aurobindo accomplished the longest epic poem written in English, his *Savitri*. Despite such similarities, Steiner was a man of the West, Aurobindo a man of the East. Even though Steiner was quite familiar with Eastern wisdom, and validated many of its insights through his own spiritual research, he explicitly situated his work within the culture of the

modern West, citing countless figures of his day to bring his work into cultural communication with the times. Aurobindo, even though he was originally educated in the West, found his spiritual home in the works of India. Thus his integral yoga is explicitly a new synthesis of the different limbs of yoga that had evolved according to their individual historical paths. Just as much as Steiner chose to formulate his wisdom in a way commensurate with the Western culture in which he worked, so Aurobindo chose to express his wisdom in ways commensurate with the Eastern culture in which he worked; yet both worked in this way for realization of something Universal.

Ultimately, it seems that the two systems have many more commonalities than differences, not just in terms of a general overview, but even into very specific points. Steiner's explication of the particularities of the cosmic evolution of this specific solar system are quite extensive, and linked in a harmonious and logically coherent way with an equally specific picture of the nature of the human being and the future destiny of the Earth. Aurobindo brings to light the nature and functioning of the Supermental realm, showing how it links upward to the Absolute and downward into the realm of manifest plurality. Both unequivocally maintain the spiritual foundations of the entirety of the cosmos, including its basic direction of evolution and the role of the human being within it; both present practical methods for spiritual realization and advancement which are meant to work harmoniously and holistically within the life of modern humans; both indicate that the very matter of the Earth is to be spiritualized, and that the human being stands uniquely in a position to help accomplish this cosmic task.

Steiner and Aurobindo never met in the flesh, but it is likely that if they did, they would call each other "brother".

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Steiner was well-known to have assimilated vast amounts of exoteric knowledge, including keeping abreast of world events and leading personalities. It is possible that he had heard of Sri Aurobindo, as his name was not unknown to the West (as, after all, Aurobindo spent a great deal of his youth in England). It is known that Aurobindo was aware of Theosophy (primarily through his close contact with the Mother, who studied Theosophy in her time in Algeria). For example, A. B. Purani recounts in “The Life of Sri Aurobindo” that at least on two occasions during Aurobindo’s informal evening ‘sittings’ with his disciples, Theosophy was the topic of discussion (Purani, 1978, pp, 185, 206). A tantalizing suggestion that concepts specific to Rudolf Steiner, and which distinguished him from Theosophical terminology, were discussed exists in his note on a “conversation about suggestion, intuition, and inspiration: the difference between the three functions” (Purani, 1978, p. 185). That this occurred on April 14, 1923, and the talk on Theosophy followed only just over a month later on May 20<sup>th</sup>, perhaps indicates (as was the case in general in Europe, and even still today), that the separation between Steiner’s work and that of Theosophy was not well understood. More research would be needed to uncover whether or not Aurobindo knew of Steiner or his work directly, or was only familiar with Theosophy.

<sup>2</sup> The word *cosmos* here may be misleading. For the most part, Steiner’s view of the path of human evolution deals with ‘local’ phenomena, which more or less correlates to what we would call the Solar System with its various planets. Most of the activity that pertains to human evolution takes place within this very (according to the modern understanding) limited range. Although he speaks in many places of the influence of the starry realms (particularly the zodiac), he speaks very little about the cosmos qua *universe*. In this sense the word *cosmos* is meant according to its older meaning, in which it refers to the quality of being harmoniously ordered.

<sup>3</sup> Steiner is very clear on this point: “We must not imagine that the spiritual element is ever totally transformed into matter; matter is always only a transformed portion of the original spiritual element, which remains the actual guiding principle even while matter is evolving” (Steiner, 2005, p. 120).

<sup>4</sup> “But every such densification is accompanied by a counter-process of refinement” (Steiner, 1982, p. 24). See also (Steiner, 1982, p. 151).

<sup>5</sup> Interested readers might find Edward Reaugh Smith's significant compendium of anthroposophical wisdom collated in the last section of his book *The Burning Bush* (Smith, 1997, pp. 545-677), under the heading "Charts and Tabulations", which weighs in at over 130 pages!

<sup>6</sup> It should be kept in mind that although the following pictures of cosmic evolution are centered around the human being, this is simply because it is primarily human evolution that concerns us the most; we are, after all, human beings ourselves. Steiner does not afford a 'special' place for humanity outside of what is warranted by the cosmology itself. Thus he pictures humanity very much in context with both higher and lower beings who are themselves undergoing their own evolution, which is just as important as our evolution. It is both implicit and explicit that all of these beings *evolve together*, mutually influencing each other in countless ways.

<sup>7</sup> "The physical corporeality that existed on Saturn was governed by physical laws, but these laws expressed themselves only in the effects of warmth, so the physical body was a delicate ethereal body of heat" (Steiner, 2005, p. 138). See also the next footnote.

<sup>8</sup> Everything that has come before in the development of the human being retains a sort of signature within present humanity. "However, humankind's earlier states are supersensibly perceptible *within* earthly human beings. ... Just as the little child is present along with the fifty-year old, the corpse, the sleeper, and the dreamer are also present along with the living, waking, earthly human being". We could also point out that this principle is even true in physical evolution, in that the physical form goes through stages that recapitulate in a quickened and refined way essential features of its far-distant ancestry ("ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny").

<sup>9</sup> "We can say that during the time between death and a new birth, we transform the Earth in a way that aligns its conditions with what is developing within us. If we observe some spot on Earth at a certain point in time and again after a long time has elapsed, we find it in a totally different condition. The forces that have brought about this change are present among human beings who have died" (Steiner, 2005, p. 99).

<sup>10</sup> Please note that this is not air as in the combination of mineral substances of nitrogen, oxygen, and so forth, but rather a condition of densification that is analogous to what (once the stage of minerality was later reached) we experience as the gaseous state of matter. The same analogy holds for the watery substance during the Sun phase, until at a certain point of the Earth phase a level of densification was reached that allowed for the manifestation of separate mineral substances. At this time, the spiritual substances of warmth, air, water, and earth

found expressions in mineral forms, which correspond to the different phases of matter: plasma, gas, liquid, and solid. “Our present bodies developed when the gaseous, liquid, and solid states of matter that later came into existence were incorporated into these warmth bodies [of the Saturn phase]” (Steiner, 2005, p. 138).

<sup>11</sup> The Ego (capital “E”) is not to be confused with the ego (lowercase “e”) of modern psychology. The Ego, or I-being, is a spiritual center of individuality that evolves through many lives, while the ego is a consequential construction that arises, changes, and dissolves within an individual life.

<sup>12</sup> “It is easy to misunderstand this view as a declaration that the I and God are one and the same. However, it does not state that the I is God, but only that it is of the same character and essence as the divine. If we took a drop of water out of the sea, would we be claiming that it *is* the sea if we said that the drop is of the same essence or substance as the sea? If we absolutely want to use a comparison, we can say that the drop is to the sea as the I is to the divine” (Steiner, 2005, p. 46). He elaborates this metaphor elsewhere: “Think of a vessel of water with 1000 drops, which pass over without separation into each other, thus forming a unity. Take 1000 tiny sponges, each one of which can absorb one drop, and immerse them. Then each will be filled with one drop. You must think similarly that the human sheaths absorb the divine germ; thereby they first become individual and independent” (Steiner, 1907).

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that, despite the appearance given by this necessarily clipped presentation, there are infinite gradations between these various levels, so that some animal beings (cetaceans, chimpanzees, probably elephants) have capacities which begin to approach what is otherwise only developed in the consciousness of present humanity, but in a nascent way. Steiner indicates that “there is no fixed dividing line between the activities and effects of the different groups of beings” (Steiner, 2005, p. 151).

<sup>14</sup> We will see in a moment how further development impacts this situation.

<sup>15</sup> Steiner, particularly earlier in his life, borrowed terminology from Theosophical literature, and thus uses the Hindu term *pralaya* for these rests.

<sup>16</sup> “The Saturn phase of evolution died away and disappeared as such, and a period of rest set in. It was as if the incipient human beings entered a state of dissolution—not one in which they disappeared, but one similar to what happens to the seed of a plant, which rests in the earth as it prepares to mature into a new plant. Similarly, germinal human beings rested in the bosom of the cosmos and awaited a new awakening” (Steiner, 2005, p. 152).

<sup>17</sup> “We return to Earth again and again, whenever the fruit of one physical lifetime has ripened in the land of spirits. Yet this repetition does not go on without beginning or end. At one point we left different forms of existence for ones that run their course as described here, and in future we will leave these and move on to others” (Steiner, 2005, p. 101).

<sup>18</sup> This is in agreement with Ken Wilber’s critique of general systems theory (Wilber, 2000, pp. 71-72).

<sup>19</sup> Further: “In the sensory world, we receive perceptions through our senses and then form mental images and concepts about them. This is not the case when we know about something through Inspiration. What we know there is immediately present in a single action; there is no such thing as thinking about a perception after it occurs. In Inspiration, what we acquire in the form of a concept after the fact in sensory, physical cognition is presented simultaneously with the perception” (Steiner, 2005, p. 351).

<sup>20</sup> “When we do the exercises that lead to Intuition, they not only affect the ether body but also work into the supersensible forces of the physical body. We must not imagine, however, that the effects within the physical body are accessible to our ordinary sense perception. They can only be assessed by means of supersensible cognition and have nothing to do with external cognition” (Steiner, 2005, p. 351).

<sup>21</sup> “It is of no importance how far anyone can go in a given time; the point is that he should earnestly seek” (Steiner, 1970, p. 27).

<sup>22</sup> Also: “As we shall see more and more, a very special mission was reserved for the Earth, which had, during its evolution, passed through three earlier stages, Saturn, Sun and Moon. Do not imagine that the different planetary life-conditions can be considered as existing alongside of one another, one planet exactly equivalent to the other. Divine creation is not simply a repetition of something already existing. Each planetary existence had a very definite mission. The mission of our Earth is the cultivation of the principle of love to its highest degree by those being who are evolving upon it. When the Earth has reached the end of its evolution, love should permeate it through and through. Let us understand clearly what is meant by the expression: The Earth is the planetary life-condition for the evolution of love” (Steiner, 1984, p. 46).

<sup>23</sup> The summary nature of this essay does not allow a deeper presentation of the nature of these beings, but at least a list can be given. The reasons for the esoteric Christian names (as opposed to, say, corresponding Vedic or Buddhist names) is not possible to briefly summarize. However it should be noted that Steiner is not advocating a

specifically religious point of view, while at the same time the path of spiritual development he recommends is not exclusive of religions, whether Christianity or any other.

	<b>Name given by Steiner</b>	<b>Christian Esoteric Name</b>	<b>Biblical Greek Name</b>
1	Spirits of Love	Seraphim	Seraphime
2	Spirits of Harmony	Cherubim	Cherubime
3	Spirits of Will	Thrones	Thronos
4	Spirits of Wisdom	Dominions	Kyriotetes
5	Spirits of Motion	Mights	Dynamis
6	Spirits of Form	Powers (Authorities)	Exousiai (Heb: Elohim)
7	Spirits of Personality	Principalities (Primal Beginnings)	Archai
8	Spirits of Fire (Folk)	Archangels	Archangeloi
9	Sons of Life (or of Twilight)	Angels (Messengers)	Angeloi
10	Spirits of Freedom and Love	Human Beings	Anthropos

Additionally, above the first hierarchy (lying outside any hierarchical scheme) is the Godhead, (Christian esoteric Trinity of Father/Son/Holy Spirit, Vedic Absolute/Non-dual), while below the human being are animals, plants, minerals, and even lower elemental beings (Steiner, 1994b, pp. 147-155). Interested readers are referred to, of many possible works, Steiner's "Spiritual Beings" (Steiner, 1992), and "The Spiritual Hierarchies and the Physical World" (Steiner, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> Chaudhuri puts it this way: matter "is no other than spirit in a state of involution in its apparent opposite, to wit, inconscience, so that inconscient Nature by her evolutionary endeavor may progressively realize the riches of spirit in the realm of externality. Matter is indeed, in ultimate analysis, the lowest limit of self-alienation of the self-luminous spirit" (Chaudhuri, 1994a, p. 160).

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that this particular area of Aurobindo's cosmology is perhaps the most difficult to understand, both for its technicality and its subtlety of origin, and it will be necessary to simplify for the purposes of this paper.

<sup>26</sup> Aurobindo indicates that if there is "an ascending series in the scale of substance from Matter to Spirit, it must be marked by a progressive diminution of these capacities most characteristic of the physical principle and a progressive increase of the opposite characteristics which will lead us to the formula of pure spiritual self-extension.

This is to say that they must be marked by less and less bondage to the form, more and more subtlety and flexibility of substance and force, more and more interfusion, interpenetration, power of assimilation, power of interchange, power of variation, transmutation, unification” (Ghose, 1990, p. 268).

<sup>27</sup> Wilber has attempted a similar comparison in his “Integral Psychology” (Wilber, 2000, pp. 200, 204). I am in disagreement with the way he correlates the two systems, which does not seem to be based on a close reading of Steiner’s works.

<sup>28</sup> This is likely due to the influence on Aurobindo of terminologies used by the Jewish Kabbalist and Western occultist Max Theon. The brother of Mirra Alfassa (who later became known simply as The Mother), was a friend of Theon’s, and eventually Mirra studied with Theon directly. Thus, when she later found her way to Pondicherry and the company of Sri Aurobindo, much of her Western occult knowledge found its way into Aurobindo’s system. Like Steiner, Aurobindo had to find terms that would appropriately express the subtle nature of his various spiritual experiences, and rather than simply invent completely new terms from scratch, it was sometimes more expedient to use terms from other systems, whether Theosophical or Vedic, to name two of the most obvious.

<sup>29</sup> Aurobindo’s own textual note at this point is worth repeating in full, because it indicates a position that Steiner also strongly takes: “The word ‘psychic’ in our ordinary parlance is more often used in reference to this desire-soul than to the true psychic. It is used still more loosely of psychological and other phenomena of an abnormal or supernormal character which are really connected with the inner mind, inner vital, subtle physical being subliminal in us and are not at all direct operations of the psyche. Even such phenomena as materialisation and dematerialisation are included, though, if established, they evidently are not soul-action and would not shed any light upon the nature or existence of the psychic entity, but would rather be an abnormal action of an occult subtle physical energy intervening in the ordinary status of the gross body of things, reducing it to its own subtle condition and again reconstituting it in the terms of pass matter” (Ghose, 1990, p. 241).

<sup>30</sup> Although much too detailed to pursue here, Steiner’s account of what went into this event is both complex and beautiful, weaving together many of the world’s exoteric traditions into a comprehensive esoteric picture of the evolution of humanity in the context of various personalities and higher beings.

<sup>31</sup> See <http://www.whywaldorfworks.org/>. Waldorf education is the fastest-growing private education worldwide, having approximately a thousand schools across the six major continents.

<sup>32</sup> See <http://www.threefolding.net/>.

<sup>33</sup> See <http://www.m-schnur-verlag.de/eng-representative-of-humanity.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goetheanum>.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.paam.net/>.

<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.biodynamics.com/>.

<sup>37</sup> See <http://www.thechristiancommunity.org/>.

<sup>38</sup> See <http://rsfsocialfinance.org/>.

<sup>39</sup> See <http://www.anthroposophyforprisoners.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> See Dennis Klocek's extensive work in this area at <http://dennisklocek.com/> and <http://www.docweather.com/>.

<sup>41</sup> See especially Frank Chester's continuing work on the relationship of geometry and sculpture specifically inspired by a study of Steiner's work (and more importantly, its alchemically-based understanding of process) that relates to the human heart as well as the interior of the Earth and more at <http://www.frankchester.com/>. Also see Nick Thomas' work with projective geometry and forms between space and 'counter-space' at <http://www.nct.anth.org.uk/>. Thomas, who trained as an electrical engineer, has been able to derive some well-known rules for optics and the movement of gases on the basis of following through some of Steiner's indications, found in his highly technical book "Science Between Space and Counterspace".

<sup>42</sup> For example in the work of Brian Goodwin ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_Goodwin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_Goodwin)) and Craig Holdrege (<http://www.natureinstitute.org/about/staff/choldrege.htm>).

<sup>43</sup> See Jennifer Greene's excellent work with water quality and the German-developed Drop-Picture Method (<http://www.waterresearch.org/about/director.html>) as well as the works of Theodor Schwenk ("Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air"), and Viktor Schauberg.

<sup>44</sup> Especially Dr. Hans Jenny's amazing work in Cymatics (<http://www.cymaticsource.com/>).

<sup>45</sup> I am here referring to, for example, the descent of the Overmind on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1926 (Purani, 1978, pp. 212-217).

<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.auroville.org/>.

<sup>47</sup> This corresponds with the natural time at which the I-being, according to Steiner, finally reaches into and fully unites with the lower sheaths. In the case of personalities such as Aurobindo, it is not too much to speculate that this type of event might naturally be accompanied by an awakening to spiritual realities.

<sup>48</sup> In countering an apparent picture of an Aurobindo who was involved from birth with the supramental, the following note by Aurobindo may be illuminating: “But what strange ideas again! – that I was born with a supramental temperament and that I know nothing of hard realities! Good God! My whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardships, starvation in England and constant dangers and fierce difficulties to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, external and internal” (Purani, 1978, p. 279).

<sup>49</sup> About himself, Aurobindo states: “I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe” (Purani, 1978, p.263).

<sup>50</sup> The following note by Aurobindo is perhaps revealing in this context: “To the mystic there is no such thing as an abstraction. Everything which to the intellectual mind is abstract has a concreteness, substantiality which is more real than the sensible form of an object or of a physical event. To men, for instance, consciousness is the very stuff of existence and I can feel it everywhere enveloping and penetrating the stone as much as man or the animal. A movement, a flow of consciousness is not to me an image but a fact. If I wrote ‘His anger climbed against me in a stream’, it would be to the general reader a mere image, not something that was felt by me in a sensible experience; yet I would only be describing in exact terms what actually happened once, a stream of anger, a sensible and violent current of it rising up from downstairs and rushing upon me as I sat in the veranda of the Guest-House, the truth of it being confirmed afterwards by the confession of the person who had the movement. This is only one instance, but all that is spiritual or psychological in *Savitri* is of that character” (Purani, 1978, p. 265).

<sup>51</sup> Because of the close spiritual relationship between the Mother and Aurobindo, it is unknown which elements of the integral yoga come from each, but such a question may be spurious in any account. Yet it seems that the character of the Mother’s spiritual experiences were different than those of Aurobindo. Perhaps the following note by Aurobindo is suggestive in this regard: “...Mother knows all these things by other means and any information given to her only adds certain physical precisions to what she knows already.... The Mother besides

sees things in vision and receives the thoughts of the Sadhaks at Pranam and other times... Only the Mother never acts on these supraphysical intimations unless there is physical confirmation like the letter itself in this case..."

(Purani, 1978, p. 287).

<sup>52</sup> "The supramental Force is descending, but it has not yet taken possession of the body or of matter—there is still much resistance to that. It is supramentalised Overmind Force that has already touched, and this may at any time change into or give place to the supramental in its own native power" (Purani, 1978, p. 272).

<sup>53</sup> Steiner is very clear concerning the spiritual significance surrounding the event at Golgotha, indicating that the Christ being penetrated into the very body of the Earth itself, literally uniting with it in order to help further its transformation from the inside-out. He speaks further about how the Christ being would successively stream outward, from the physical Earth into the Earth's own surrounding etheric body. This event is only mentioned because of the very interesting, although admittedly tenuous, connection between this picture (called by Steiner the reappearance of the Christ in the etheric), with the address given by the Mother three days after the death of Aurobindo, which addresses the "Lord" who is apparently hovering above the Earth in order to help its very transformation:

"Lord, this morning Thou has given me the assurance that Thou wouldst stay with us until Thy work is achieved, not only as a consciousness which guides and illumines but also as a dynamic Presence in action. In unmistakable terms Thou hast promised that all of Thyself would remain here and not leave the earth atmosphere until earth is transformed. Grant that we may be worthy of this marvelous Presence and that henceforth everything in us be concentrated on the one will to be more and more perfectly consecrated to the fulfillment of Thy sublime work." (Purani, 1978, p. 240).

This line of thinking presents a fascinating area for further study.