

Spirituality, Religion, Contemplative Practices, and Socially Transformative Service in the 21st Century

Special Issue Introduction

Issue Editor: Bahman A. K. Shirazi¹

I welcome you to this issue of *Integral Review*. This is our second special issue from the California Institute of Integral Studies and the Symposium on Integral Consciousness. *Integral Review* is glad to deepen our association with CIIS with the continuation of these special issues. We believe they enrich the range of perspectives and thought available to the growing scholarly community making use of IR. As the value and contribution of integral thought continues to expand into the academic world, we are grateful to be able to continue publishing works like those found in this issue. We are also grateful for and wish to acknowledge the work of Bahman Shirazi in continuing to take on the responsibility for guiding the articles presented here through the editorial process. I will leave you now to take in his introductory remarks, and hope you enjoy reading through this issue.



Jonathan Reams,
Editor-in-Chief
Integral Review

The articles in this special issue of *Integral Review* highlight selected contributions to the 2011 Symposium on Integral Consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) (www.ciis.edu). This annual symposium provides a forum for CIIS community members and friends to exchange and deepen their understanding of integral consciousness, its evolution, and its relationship to the current planetary challenges and transformational processes.

Each year there are several themes covered in a variety of presentation formats: keynote and standard presentations, as well as a number of interactive sessions and workshops. You can find more information on these activities at the Symposium site:
<http://ciislibrary.wordpress.com/2010-symposium/>.

The overarching theme in 2011 was: Spirituality, Religion, Contemplative Practices, and Socially Transformative Service in the 21st Century. The contributions highlighted in this issue

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are connected in multiple ways. If interested, one could simply start at the top of the list, and hopefully find an underlying connection between all of them in the order presented. It is also possible to start with a topic of choice and navigate through the whole collection over time; or simply choose topics of interest. You might find that some key topics briefly covered in one article, are more fully discussed in one or more others. Or perhaps, one might begin to see how these pieces, despite the variations in theme, length or detail, comprise a window to the limitless world of integrality and find resonance with respect to one's unique perspectives and experiential context.

We begin with Higher Education and Interreligious Dialogue by Joseph L. Subbiondo who stresses the need for inclusion of courses on religion and spirituality, as well as interreligious dialogue in higher education, through an examination of three interrelated dimensions: Interreligious dialogue, religious pluralism and religious literacy. Drawing on some recent research such as that of University of California, Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute, as well as other recent publications on religion and spirituality in the United States, he highlights the importance of the place of higher education in overcoming religious illiteracy in a world in which religious tensions have been on the rise, and colleges and universities are predominantly secular in their curricular outlook. The article also mentions some initiatives in this direction at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

In New Religious Movements, Modern Esoteric Movements, and Integral Consciousness, Constance A. Jones who is an expert in this field, provides a brief overview of the new religions and spiritual communities which have emerged in recent decades. These new religious movements are among the many trends that shape today's religious consciousness. This essay argues that eastern thought in the west, fostered in large part through the growth of new religious movements, and western esoteric teachings which have appeared in many guises throughout the history of the West, are reemerging in our time and that understanding these movements and their alignment can deepen our appreciation of the foundations of integral consciousness.

Rethinking the Future of World Religion: Four Scenarios is the summary of a conversation I had with Jorge Ferrer who has been reflecting on the aforementioned religious movements and has presented four scenarios about the future of religion: global religion; mutual transformation of religions; interspiritual wisdom; and spirituality without religion. We also discussed his own participatory vision based on his various publications. He reflects on whether humanity will ultimately converge into one single religion, or continue to diversify into numerous forms of spiritual expression; or perhaps, a middle path reconciling the human longing for spiritual unity, and the developmental and evolutionary gravitation toward spiritual individuation and differentiation will emerge. We explored implications of these scenarios and other related topics such as the importance of embodied and whole person approaches to personal and collective integration.

Next, in Transformative Body Practices and Social Change: The Intersection Between Spirituality and Activism, Don H. Johnson highlights the intersections of embodied spiritual practices and organizing for social change through the seemingly different, but potentially complementary perspectives of two leading revolutionaries, Mahatma Gandhi and Wilhelm

Reich. He focuses on the importance of body cultivation in addressing social issues and how traditional practices might be taught to prepare the practitioner for dealing with grief.

In the next essay, *The New Myth: Frederic Spiegelberg and the Rise of a Whole Earth*, Ahmed M. Kabil provides, through the life and teachings of Frederic Spiegelberg, a novel account of some of the unique historical and intellectual developments that converged in the San Francisco Bay Area in the mid twentieth century and subsequently informed and enabled many of the defining chapters of recent global history. Spiegelberg was instrumental in creating the American Academy of Asian Studies (a predecessor to CIIS) in San Francisco by inviting pioneering east-west scholars such as Haridas Chaudhuri (founder of CIIS) and Allan Watts who are responsible for the early dissemination of Asian spiritual traditions in the west. The conversations and writings by Spiegelberg, Watts, and Chaudhuri lead the way toward cultural movements such as the San Francisco Renaissance, the rise of the counterculture, the environmental awareness, and the information age revolution. This well-researched essay connects some key developments in world consciousness in the last 60 years. Of special importance is the connection between science (and recent technological developments) and spiritual consciousness which may be apparently diametrical, but are actually complementary in an all-embracing integral consciousness.

In *The Future History of Consciousness*, David Hutchinson picks up on the theme of science, spirituality and integral consciousness in an intriguing reflection on the future of integral consciousness. He asserts that ‘consciousness’ is the key fact of life and that the study of it is in its infancy. He maintains that spirituality and science are bound to meet and argues that science is moving rapidly into the hitherto unexplored subjective areas such as dreams, thought processes, and awareness and asserts that we are on the verge of a momentous shift in knowledge and ability with consciousness driven by exponential change in theory and technology.

In the article titled *Sri Aurobindo’s Lila: The Nature of Divine Play According to Integral Advaita*, Matthew W. Morey highlights a key aspect of integral consciousness focusing on the concept of Lila, or Divine Play, in the context of Integral non-dualism as described by Sri Aurobindo and Haridas Chaudhuri. To provide a context for this topic, he first recounts Haridas Chaudhuri’s brilliant exposition of the various schools of Advaita (non-dual) Vedanta and how Integral consciousness is a culmination of several key spiritual philosophical schools of Indian thought known as Advaita Vedanta. The second part of the essay directly addresses Sri Aurobindo’s description of Lila, a play that is at once a dalliance of the Divine and a teleological drama. In the context of Lila, the essay examines evolution, the individual poise of Brahman and the participatory nature of Integral Yoga.

Debashish Banerji’s *Structure and Process: Integral Philosophy and Triple Transformation* takes the reader deeper into the core of integral consciousness, philosophy and yoga. He starts by examining the debate concerning perennialism and pluralism in religious studies and considers the category of the ‘integral’, as described by Sri Aurobindo in the context of this debate. After exploring the case for perennialism vis-à-vis pluralism, he compares the contemporary taxonomy of a perennial core to mystical experience developed by Robert K. C. Forman with the idea of the “triple transformation” developed by Sri Aurobindo.

Finally, in *United Religions Initiative: Global Community Emerging*, Sally Mahé provides an introduction to United Religions Initiative (URI), a global grassroots interfaith network that promotes peace and justice through intercultural and interreligious dialogue using a process known as ‘appreciative inquiry’. URI is a leading example of a global organization which has successfully implemented the participatory and pluralistic vision at the core of a holistic and global approach to interreligious dialogue and interfaith cooperation. While she highlights some of the accomplishments of URI, she stresses that more cooperation, more compassion, and more commitment to good relationships is needed across the world for global unity, justice and peace.

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