

Excerpt from The Practical Visionary

The Age of Synthesis: How Everything Is Blending, Fusing and Transcending Duality

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Today many disparate things are blending, fusing and synthesizing. Nothing seems as separate as it did in past times—races, religions, cultures, nations, genders, styles. The walls between opposites are beginning to dissolve, and dualities are transforming into a higher synthesis.

The cutting edge in every field is fusion and synthesis: holistic, hybrid, integral, multiracial, multicultural, multinational, interfaith, trans-partisan, creative “mash-ups.” These reflect many aspects of the Age of Synthesis, described by scientists such as Dr. Carl W. Hall, which we’re now entering.

Synthesis is a dynamic dance that transforms separateness and brings diverse parts into right relationships with one another and with the whole, resulting in something creative and enriching. It sounds a whole tone that tunes and harmonizes all other frequencies within its range of influence. Synthesis is a method or process for reconciling apparent diversity.

Your intuition can help you transcend polarity and binary thinking, such as either/or and us vs. them, and focus instead on both/and thinking. Your inner light reveals a higher synthesis of seeming opposites, such as mind and body, subject and object, form and emptiness, wave and particle, spirituality and science, rational and intuitive, Eastern and Western, traditional and innovative, personal and political, liberal and conservative, masculine and feminine, practical and visionary, and spirit and matter.

The ageless wisdom teaches about the importance of resolving duality: If your eye is single, all is light, as the Bible says. You see how everything has a purpose and goodness to it. You walk “the razor’s edge” between the two great lines of force.

Synthesis dictates the trend of all the evolutionary processes today. Everything is working toward larger unified blocs, toward amalgamations, international relationships, global planning, economic fusion, interdependence, interfaith movements and ideological concepts that deal with wholes rather than isolated parts. Now humanity is gradually building a synthesis in time and space through our modern, interconnected civilization and technology such as the Internet and jet travel.

An immensely popular holistic health industry, for example, unites mind and body. Hybrid cars blend gasoline and electric energy. Fusion music blends diverse styles and cultures. Social-benefit corporations fuse entrepreneurship and philanthropy. “Third way” politics synthesize the best of the left and right. New religions teach that Spirit and matter are no longer separate, as Spirit infuses matter. Spirituality is becoming more practical and applied to everyday life, which is attested by the new movements that bring together seeming opposites: Spirit in Business, Spirituality and Science, the Soul of Education and Spiritual Politics. The signs are everywhere.

The ageless wisdom teaches that Spirit and matter aren’t separate but are merely different frequencies along the same spectrum of energy. Spirit is matter at its highest

frequency; matter is Spirit at its lowest frequency. You could say that matter is Spirit moving slowly enough to be seen.

Integral philosopher Ken Wilber notes that “Spirit is unfolding in this world and as this world.” He goes on to note that in the nondual spiritual traditions, the absolute (Spirit) and the relative (form) are not two but one: “[I]n order to have a full realization of Spirit, you have to realize formlessness, this pure unmanifest presence, and you have to realize Spirit in action in the manifest world of form.”² Spirit is present (immanent) everywhere in the world. It’s about recognizing what already is present—seeing reality more clearly.

In the Spirit-matter polarity, many spiritual people like to only hang out in Spirit, but you need to move back and forth between Spirit and matter to grow and to generate energy, just as energy is generated in a battery or an electrical system. True synthesis is a state of being that you can learn to recognize and identify with.

The secret is aligning your personal will with a higher spiritual purpose. Psychologist Roberto Assagioli noted that “Synthesis is brought about by a higher element or principle which transforms, sublimates and reabsorbs the two poles into a higher reality The method of synthesis, which is analogous in a certain sense to a chemical combination, includes and absorbs the two elements into higher unity endowed with qualities differing from those of either of them.”

There is a tremendous movement today toward fusion, convergence and synthesis in all fields. It’s like individual musical instruments playing together to create the wonderful harmonies of a symphony—without a conductor to orchestrate it.

The new integral approaches to life, in which both the inner and outer and the personal and collective aspects of every issue are addressed, are key methods for creating unity. The “integral revolution” spearheaded by author Ken Wilber is an important example, as is the *Spiral Dynamics* work by Don Beck and Chris Cowan.

Van Jones, a practical visionary and the former director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, says today is the age of hybridity, when things are coming together in new ways. He says that the new generation doesn’t want to be limited by binary thinking—either/or—that they want both/and. They want whole systems change—transforming the world at multiple levels simultaneously.

In this new age of synthesis, it’s notable that the United States elected a president, Barack Obama, who embodies synthesis in his multiracial makeup, multicountry residences, multifocus career and transpartisan politics.

Disruptive, breakthrough innovations usually come about when you mash together different disciplines, says Salim Ismail, a former executive with Yahoo!, who directs the new Singularity University on the NASA Ames base in California. Their self-described mission is to solve the world’s biggest problems by synthesizing academic disciplines.

The spirit of synthesis is emerging in every field today, as interdisciplinary approaches by practical visionaries become the leading edge in academia, government and business. Following are some examples.

In Politics

- the creation of “third way” and transpartisan approaches beyond left and right.
- the resolving of polarizing conflicts through mediation techniques.
- the building of regional unions among nations.

- the explosion of multi-sector partnerships—government, business, nonprofits.
- the intergenerational collaborative movement among young and old.
- the blending and intermarriage between races, cultures and sexes.

In Religion

- the dialogue among different religions in the interfaith movement.
- the renewed emphasis on both contemplation and social action.
- the trend toward adopting beliefs and practices of several religions at once.
- the blending of religion with social activities and entertainment in modern mega churches.

In Psychology

- the integration of the conscious, subconscious and superconscious.
- the fusing of Eastern and Western approaches.
- the emergence of somatic education, integrating mind and body.
- the integration of the whole field of the psyche in integral psychology.
- the blending of psychology and ecology in behavioral ecology.
- the popularity of cross-cultural studies, trainings, tours.

In Business

- the new concern for doing well by doing good—profit and values.
- the harmonizing of environmental and economic concerns.
- the merging of for-profit with nonprofit mission in social benefit corporations and social entrepreneurship.
- the trend to support work/life balance in the workplace.
- the merging of economics with psychology in a new field called therapeutic economics.

In Science

- the discovery of nuclear fusion which unifies atoms, rather than splitting them, as in nuclear fission.
- the massive hybridization of crops.
- the blending of physical science and social science;
- the merging of biology and ecology to create the new field of epigenetics.
- the teaming of science with religion in neurotheology to study the effects of prayer and meditation and prove the existence of the soul.

In Technology

- the creation of hybrid cars, using gas and electricity.
- the open-source, free software collaboration among self-organizing communities such as Wikipedia.
- the hyperlinking and networking among diverse groups.

- the “mash-ups” that remake videos or music by splicing in diverse sequences from unusual sources.
- the blending of traditional journalism with citizen media, such as cell phone videos, Twitter feeds, video pods and use-news sites.
- the fusing of education and technology through “educasting” and online courses.
- the merging of real life and virtual life through online avatar games.

In the Arts

- the trend toward fusion music and world music, blending styles and cultures, such as hip hop with Indian sitar.
- the widespread use of mixed media in works of art.
- the interactive, cross-platform entertainments.
- the profusion of political statements in art, music, film, literature.
- the transforming of two-dimensional figures into multidimensional scenes called “diorama.”

In Medicine

- the holistic approaches, which include body, emotions, mind, spirit.
- the complementary approaches of alternative and allopathic medicine.
- the integrative medicine of indigenous and contemporary modalities.
- the new “energy medicine” that relates the physical and etheric bodies.

The change in how the mainstream refers to holistic approaches of health care is indicative of the movement toward fusion and synthesis. At first, it was called alternative medicine because it was an alternative to mainstream, allopathic medicine. As it became more popular, it was called “complementary medicine,” and now that it’s accepted by many people in the mainstream medical profession, it’s referred to as “integrative medicine.”

Embodying synthesis ultimately results in the ability to perceive the highest, the light in everything. Synthesis takes the best from the past and what is relevant and useful from the future, and applies it in the present. Life is loving synthesis in action.

On a practical level, how can you work on transforming duality and bringing this energy of synthesis into your daily life? You learn to embody synthesis by looking for the right relationship between separated parts and gathering the parts into right relationship with the living whole. You can begin exploring the larger pattern or whole that includes the opposites.

For example, you can look for the grain of truth on each side of an argument to see how each contributes to the bigger picture. You can practice listening to someone who holds a different philosophical or political view from your own, and then look for points of agreement or common ground. You can also work on walking in someone else’s shoes and seeing the world from his or her perspective. This seems simple, but it is incredibly profound and revealing. You can psychologically role-play someone who is different from you to develop empathy. Seeking out different cultural, racial and religious experiences can expand your perspective as you learn to harmonize with them. Another good technique is reading the

literature of people with opposing views and trying to keep an open mind, looking for the grain of truth.

The questions for today are: How much can each of us synthesize in our consciousness—how many seemingly different realities and opposing views can we hold at once? To what degree can we identify with the whole? A good time to practice synthesizing is when we hear competing views from different political spokespeople. I highly recommend it—and it certainly makes the evening news more interesting and challenging!

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