

What is Integral Life Practice?

Since I've recently co-authored a book titled *Integral Life Practice*, I am often asked, "What is ILP?"

Integral Life Practice is best understood not as a new approach to personal growth, but as a clarifying, highly-efficient way of approaching (and understanding) *every and any* approach to personal growth.

At a certain point in the school of life, we spontaneously begin to want to evolve—we want to wake up, to see more clearly, to open up, to love more, to show up more completely in every moment of living. We want to "be all that we can be." We want to grow in *awareness, care, and presence*. In various ways, we begin, sincerely, to cultivate personal *excellence*. Integral Life Practice (often referred to by its acronym, "ILP") is simply smart, up-to-date way to understand and practice that universal matter. It is a way to more quickly and authentically wake up, show up, open up, and live fully.

Although personal growth always involves realizing greater wholeness, it is usually approached in a fragmented way. Implicit messages tell us that peak performance in business (or sports) is entirely distinct from getting a liberal education. And both are entirely separate from the matter of attaining wisdom or spiritual maturity. But they're not.

In fact, a core principle of ILP is "Integral cross-training." It's based on a key insight. New meditators *who take up strength training* grow faster *in meditation* than those who do not. Why? Meditation and strength training have nothing to do with each other, right? Well, yes and no. Each human being is holistic and interconnected. So if you do shadow work, your meditation will not get stuck in ways that it otherwise might. If your mind becomes more flexible and open and clear, your spiritual growth will have smoother sailing.

Another core principle is that of *practice* itself. The founders of Esalen learned an important lesson: no matter how great the workshop, it wears off a short while later. The life-changing insights gained during the weekend seminar become less vivid and usable by the middle of the next week. Even the yearlong retreat wears off by the following spring. Sustained transformation requires sustained practice. So ILP is about a lifestyle — a set of healthy growth-producing behaviors that we take on and keep doing (and refining) for the rest of our lives.

ILP is a new, clear, rational and trans-rational understanding of the “how to” of human development. It’s new “skillful means” for devout (or irreverent) people of any faith (or no faith at all.) It can be the basis for communities of practice of Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, atheists and agnostics—or (uniquely!) for communities of practice that include “all of the above.” It can be a bridge between sincere, intelligent people that can cross our sectarian divisions. It’s the first approach to living that fully integrates ancient, modern and postmodern wisdom. It’s a clarifying context for anyone serious about growing, about becoming more and more good, true, and beautiful, and for anyone serious about contributing to their world.

ILP is not narcissistic. Its four “core modules” (Body, Mind, Spirit, and Shadow) do focus on cultivating individual excellence. But ILP is practiced through an embodied, caring integrated life of service in relationship to others and our whole multidimensional world.

ILP integrates our basic human aspirations. ILP does not view the impulse to grow (to become all that you can be) as if it is *separate from* the impulse to contribute (to make a difference, to be of service to others and our world.) We cannot live a fully self-actualized life without making contributions to others and our world. We cannot make our fullest contributions to others and our world without growing and waking up and actualizing our potentials. ILP appreciates the unity of the being, and helps to heal the false divisions that seem to divide us from ourselves.

ILP has an “open architecture.” Instead of dictating any particular practices, it provides principles for designing a personalized set of practices that are tailored to your needs—and that can work in your busy life. It honors the existing practices you are *already* doing, and helps you notice whatever you might be leaving out. It’s just a more intelligent, clear-eyed, effective way to approach the great matter of self-cultivation.

And, finally, Integral Life Practice makes it possible to have a rich practice, even *in the midst of our busy post-post-modern lives*. ILP is scalable. When necessary, you can do it in as little as 10 minutes a day. Simultaneously, it shines the light of practice on *every moment* of living. And ILP offers a whole host of immensely practical and specific distinctions that help you cut through the confusion and muddling that otherwise can hold back your growth, awakening, and highest excellence.