

## **M.Alan Kazlev**



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M. Alan Kazlev is a self-taught esotericist and metaphysician, science fiction writer and fan, amateur biologist and palaeontologist, and student of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's teachings and yoga. His website is at [www.kheper.net](http://www.kheper.net) and he can be contacted at [akazlev@bigpond.com](mailto:akazlev@bigpond.com). For Integral World he has written two series of essays on integral philosophy: Towards a Larger View of Integral (4 Parts) and Integral Esotericism (8 Parts). In the following essay he gives an overview of the integral landscape.

## INTERVIEW

***Q: Can you please tell me Aurobindo's views on charging for spiritual teachings? Did he have anything to say about this subject matter?***

Alan Kazlev: No, or maybe he did but I haven't read every word of his; I tend to focus only on those aspects of his (and other) teachings that are meaningful to me.

I know that the ashram was often short of money, but there was never any requirement or request for sadhaks there to donate or pay their way, never.

***Q: Did Sri Aurobindo charge for his teachings for example or did his disciples give back in some form? What I'm trying to establish is the historical background for why westerners or certain Indian traditions charge for various kinds of non dual teachings. Where this business model came from?***

Alan Kazlev: Neither Sri Aurobindo nor the Mother never ever once asked payment in exchange for their teachings. Indeed, in the Integral Yoga "tradition" (probably not the right word, as tradition implies a fixed teaching) the whole idea is unheard of.

The only requirement, as such, i.e. what the sadhak is expected to give back, is complete aspiration for and dedication to sadhana.

Like you, I am puzzled as to where this business model came from. It would have been alien to Vivekananda; Ramakrishna always warned of the

danger of twin temptations of "woman and gold". Doesn't seem to fit with Yogananda either. Nor with Prabhupad (ok dualistic, but still seminal).

Perhaps Maharishi and the TM movement? (Although I don't know when they started the practice of charging large sums for mantra initiation - the mantras themselves apparently all being selected from a simple predetermined list). Or was it Rajneesh's line about being the "guru to the rich"?

Not knowing the details, I'm guessing it wasn't just one figure, but a whole process in the late 60s onwards. The result of a traditional spirituality being transplanted into an alien society it had no way of handling, and eastern gurus, themselves far from Realization (if they were otherwise, they would never try to make a name for themselves or seek followers). And, free from the usual checks and balances of their traditional societies, suddenly finding crowds of westerners wealthy beyond anything possible in their own impoverished homelands, women openly sexual, and so on, throwing themselves at their feet in mindless adoration. The lure and temptation would have been incredible.

***Q: So what are your thoughts on some well known western teachers that seemed to have been heavily influenced by Sri Aurobindo and “evolutionary enlightenment”, but appear to charge for their own versions of this?***

Alan Kazlev: Well the term “evolutionary enlightenment” was coined by Andrew Cohen, Sri Aurobindo never used it. Cohen as we know was into nonduality until he met Ken Wilber and became an evolutionist. Cohen (unlike Wilber) really doesn't seem to be interested in Sri Aurobindo, his whole "evolutionaries" thing seems to be (from what I gather) based more

on popular neo-teilharian ideas such as the evolutionary cosmology of Brian Swimme, with a bit of Wilberian stuff thrown in.

I've mentioned elsewhere (on my Kheper net website and on Frank Visser's Integral World) that Wilber doesn't seem to have a very good understanding of Sri Aurobindo. It seems to me that Wilber is coming more from a German Idealism and pop evolutionism perspective, tied in with his (former?) guru Da Free John (Adi Da)'s theme of seven stages of life (a single series of stages of physical, psychological, and spiritual development); although in his later work he moves more to postmodernism and Kantian phenomenology.

Wilber's idea is of evolution as progressive, you go from stage A to stage B to stage C (I'm ignoring here all his details about waves, lines, states and stages etc.). It's very like Theosophy, and both come from similar roots (East-West synthesis, evolutionism, etc.) and have a similar intellectual-metaphysical approach. Sri Aurobindo also incorporated these ideas but then applied them to the radical theme of the Divinization of the world. So for Sri Aurobindo, once you get to the mental, there's the possibility of a huge leap to the Supramental, a concept not found in these other teachings.

As for these gentlemen (Wilber, Cohen, etc.) asking money for teachings, in Wilber's case it is more a marketing thing, I get that it is more the organization around him that is into this, and as an expression of American capitalism rather than an abusive cult. From what I gather they're no different to any other business, they offer a product (in this case Wilber's philosophy, attractively packaged) which people buy. Wilber himself doesn't seem to be someone who is into the trip about demands for money; I guess he's well off financially and not insecure or greedy about things like that. With Cohen - from what I've read - it's very much the abusive guru out of

control sort of thing. I'm just going here on what I've read; I haven't met Cohen myself, maybe he's a great guy in person, I dunno, but going equally by the accounts of both devotees and ex-devotees, his whole movement is very much a typical ambiguous and polarizing "intermediate zone guru" type, in which some people are inspired and helped on their spiritual journey, others are deeply traumatized and have their lives destroyed. But Andrew Cohen himself seems to have none of the tremendous charisma of the classic ambiguous gurus like Rajneesh, Muktananda, or Adi Da. Perhaps his whole movement is just going on the momentum of something he picked up at some time from his nonduality guru Papaji, who seems to have had the power to give shaktipat to the Westerners who came to see him.

***Q: In the west, a new business spiritual model seems to be in the making that is replacing the old tradition of dana. For example some teachers with a Buddhist background are breaking away from dana and asking upfront at the door for "contributions" or a "fee" for meditation and the dharma. What are your thoughts on this and do you think this spiritual/business model can work in a country like the US, which has some predominant Christian values about "the love of money being the root of all evil"?***

Alan Kazlev: Well American Christianity comes through the filter of Protestant puritanism and the founding fathers, which itself is based on biblical literalism; the Bible itself being a theological reinterpretation and distortion (or collection of several such, due to different authors, editors etc) of the teachings of the historical Jesus (whatever they may have been, since all we have are the second and third hand accounts).

In any case, living a very simple, ascetic and renunciate life and not interacting with things of the material world is the quietist approach. But

then there is the more active, shakti, warrior approach. The Mother once said something to the effect that money is currently under the control of the adverse forces, and has to be wrestled free so it can be applied in the service of the Divine plan. She wasn't talking here about asking for money (because as mentioned earlier there were never demands for money), this was meant as an occult statement.

My understanding is that spirituality is always about Surrender to the Supreme (however one defines the Supreme). For me personally, someone like Ramana Maharshi is the ideal saintly figure for the quietist approach; the Christian equivalent would be Francis of Assisi. And Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as the paragons of dynamic spirituality (the historical Jesus also has a dynamic feel about him, but there is so much mythology around him it is hard to get to the real personality), but doubtless others could be mentioned as well. But what both quietist and dynamic have in common the principle of absolute selflessness (also obviously the quietist Realizer can be dynamic, and vice versa, just as Shiva and Shakti are two sides of the same reality).

As for the spiritual business model in the US, well that's the country that seems the most receptive environment for it! And here it's important to distinguish between sadhana, or yoga, or whatever one wishes to term it, and meditation or outer knowledge. So the Wilberians have a business approach, they have a product and they sell that. Likewise if these Buddhist teachers are saying, well this is my product (teaching meditation) and I'm selling it, it's no different to any other therapy or service or whatever. So I don't have a problem with this. But if they are saying "I am an enlightened being and you need to give me your money because how else can you get rid of your attachment to it, and besides what I give you in return is of far greater value" well, that's just the standard abusive guru manipulation trip.

END OF INTERVIEW