

Bridging Science and Spirituality¹

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Dear Friends,

I have been asked to give a short talk here, and I am very grateful for this invitation. As you can see from my profession, I am not a scientist, so I will just give a practical and meditative point of view: a small contribution.

Bridging Science and Spirituality. Many books have been written about science, and just as many about spirituality. What is the bridge between science and spirituality; should there be a connection at all? Where does the inspiration for scientific discoveries come from?

Albert Einstein is a good example of someone who built a bridge between science and spirituality.

It is said that H.P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* was always within reach, lying on his desk...

There are a few book titles referring to the bond between science and spirituality:

The Universe in a Single Atom, The Convergence of Science and Spirituality (The Dalai Lama)

The Science of Yoga (I.K. Taimni)

A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night, A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (The Dalai Lama)

Science and the Sacred (R. Ravindra)

All theosophists know the *Universal Mantra* by Annie Besant which begins: *O, Hidden Life, Vibrant in every Atom, O Hidden Light Shining in Every Creature, O Hidden Love, Embracing All in Oneness...*

The motto which forms part of the emblem of the Theosophical Society (the TS) is *Satyan Nasti Paro Dharmah*. In The Netherlands we use the Sanskrit words, for they mean far more than just *There is No Religion Higher than Truth*. With the emphasis on Freedom of Thought, TS- members are students of Life, together searching for Truth, seeking the Art of Living Correctly. This search is meant to discover the unknown through the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science (the second Object of the TS), through investigating the unexplained laws of Nature and the powers latent in man (the third Object).

We human beings start discovering our world from the moment of birth, first of all for survival. We go on experiencing and learning until the time we close our eyes at the moment of physical death: this discovery is the task of a lifetime. What we take in, understand and remember depends entirely upon our abilities, our educational and cultural backgrounds. In short, we experience the world through our senses, and then add our thoughts and emotions. Our observations can hardly be called unbiased, real and pure. In human research, and in science, there are many pitfalls. Here discernment, ethics, personal integrity and spirituality might be needed. *The Golden Stairs* of H.P.

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Blavatsky mention clearly: *a clean life, an open mind, a pure heart, an eager intellect, an unveiled spiritual perception*. This is evidently life time's work.

At a symposium held together with several other spiritual organizations, in Amsterdam in March 2014, Marco Pasi, Associate Professor in the History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents, talked about *The Challenge of the Academic Soul: ...One of the methodological problems most often debated in our field concerns the position of those who do not wish to adopt a 'neutral' or 'agnostic' stance in the study of esotericism, but rather let their judgment be colored by their own spiritual or religious beliefs...*

The scientific approach: As far as I understand, curiosity, and the will to investigate and to do research in general start from observations of the outside world. Then hypotheses are formulated, which are tested many times under controlled conditions (nowadays with very precise instruments). As a result a new hypothesis, a new theory, a new discovery is launched. Scientists are now able to observe the smallest part of the material world! At that point, however, the miraculous question arises: what is the force behind the material world, what is this energy, what is 'life'? To catch this, more 'ethereal', nearly spiritual levels of understanding, are required: can we see beyond, beyond the material world, can we really understand, and see things as they really are, can we reach pure vision at all? O yes, man can be bright and brilliant intellectually, having studied many books, extracting and reproducing an immense amount of formulae, facts and figures from the brain (this is called 'the doctrine of the eye', of the head), but do we possess inner wisdom, are we intelligent (this is 'the doctrine of the heart')? What is our aim in life: status, pride, profit for a few, or a sharing with all mankind? There are even more difficult issues, as we have such a limited view: what to preserve and maintain, what to release, because change in this physical world is inevitable.

To my opinion right attitude and integrity should of necessity play a large role in scientific research. We might ask ourselves: is a discovery useful and beneficent for the whole planet, or for just one part of the world; only for mankind, or also for the lower kingdoms (for animals and plants)? Is it correct to take the life of animals? Are specific medicines really necessary, or are there motives of influence, of power and commercial money making? The former president of the TS, Mrs. Radha Burnier, once said, when speaking about physical illness: *What is wrong with dying?* This is a quite challenging pronouncement.

Dr. Klaus K. Klostermaier, Professor Emeritus, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, wrote in *The Theosophist*, November 2009: *Aldous Huxley, a twentieth century giant in the Realm of Humanities, whose "Perennial Philosophy" is not only an unsurpassed anthology of world religions, but also an outline for a universal religion, ... suggests that Vedantic 'jnana' (pure knowledge) is the key to unlock the gate to the meaning of human existence.*

...Our entire scientific enterprise- and with it a large part of our public educational effort- is largely dedicated to avoid the great human questions rather than addressing them. The reduction of rationality to the mathematical manipulation of data, which finds its epitome in the computer, not only restricts the scope of science and makes it ignore questions of meaning, it also convinces the average scientists and the masses who believe in science, that questions of meaning, questions relating to the Self, are 'unscientific' and thus not worth pursuing. Research into such questions apparently 'does not pay'. Modern science leaves out, on principle, questions which include the entire range of ethics, of aesthetics, of spirituality.

Is there *A Bridge between Science and Spirituality*? Most certainly there is. There ought to be one, and it can always be improved.

How should we act in order to improve this connection? To my mind, this is related to ethical questions. Here the first step must be taken by every man and woman individually. Everyone is free to take this decision for himself, and each one of us has to walk his or her own Path to reach the great 'know thyself', *gnothi seauton* (the text inscribed in the Temple of Apollo in Delphi). Spiritual and religious movements aim for this goal of discerning, understanding, purifying, and acting ethically. Although in the scientific world this might not be common practice, it would be an idea to consider and discuss ethical issues more often, admitting that one solution is not easily found! Study, Meditation and Service are often called as being pillars of a theosophical life, connected with the Art of Living Correctly mentioned earlier. The ideal situation would be that scientists combine their research with reasoning and reflection (a meditative study), the result of which could lead to a wholehearted service to mankind.