

What Science has contributed to Spirituality

The Mind at Present¹

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Science's current approach to the truths expressed by the great spiritual traditions is an expression of the crucial moment for the collective awakening of human consciousness. Until very recently general thought on this was dominated by a rationality centred in the physical field which represented conventional science.

Since the instruments and techniques developed for specific research have gone beyond known limits, this has produced a rejection of what was previously established – the dominant paradigm; and a new stage opens which offers possibilities that transcend or penetrate even further than into the physical or the tangible.

The world and its subtle fields can be experimented on, investigated and can be attempted to be understood. The researcher can recognise that he or she is involved and can participate in what he or she investigates and observes. This reminds us of Krishnamurti when he explained the 'observer' and 'the observed'. In this constant process of negation of what was previously known, to take a step forward means that all that was previously known can be included but with new meaning and with an attempt to include it in the entirety. The true scientific mind is the one which remains open, and without identifying with what has been known, it becomes able to radicalise its potential to access new realities as yet not perceived.

We can cite determining points in the terrain of physics, like in quantum physics or in relativity, in biology, in psychology etc. that have made it possible for the experts of the principles described in the great spiritual traditions of the Orient, like Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, etc., and we find that these are essentially expressed in Theosophy. These same experts find with joy the great resonance of the new postulation of science with those eternal truths.

The Mahachohan, in his letter of 1881, said "The doctrine we promulgate being the only true one, must, supported by such evidence as we are preparing to give, become ultimately triumphant as every other truth. Yet it is absolutely necessary to inculcate it gradually, enforcing its theories, unimpeachable facts for those who know, with direct inferences deduced from and corroborated by the evidence furnished by modern exact science."

The words speak of our present, a present in which each one of us from our own place can participate in this opportunity to collaborate with the expression and realisation of those transcendent truths, in a moment in which science and spirituality begin to speak similar languages.

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Psychology and Consciousness

Currently, meditation techniques for mental health, or better known as contemplation sciences, are at their peak. In this field, a contemporary scientific approach to spiritual practices and values is being achieved, that is to say, a tendency towards integration of the knowledge of man and about man, which can allow a more complete vision. Scientific studies which demonstrate the connections between the different states of consciousness and their effects on brain activity and on the body in general are becoming increasingly common.

The growing collaboration and integration of the teachings of Buddhism, neurosciences and the sciences of the mind has reversed the appearance of new standardised techniques and models to cultivate mental health and wellbeing. Interpersonal Neurobiology is based in the integration of knowledge proceeding from various disciplines.

Integration could be considered as a common underlying mechanism in various ways to arrive to wellbeing. The way in which we pay attention to the present moment can directly improve the functioning of the body and the mind, mental health and interpersonal relations. This form of developed attention develops the brain circuits in such a way that it allows us to establish a syntonetic relationship with our own mind.

Jon Kabat-Zinn believes that “one definition of mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” In the field of psychology, as Jung once said, it is the science of the soul; nowadays the practices of Mindfulness can be studied and investigated. Deep psychology invites us, and has done for some time, to attend to our own inside. In ‘Psychology and Alchemy’ Jung states “your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes”.

We are reminded of the quote by K.H. when he tells us “The moral and spiritual sufferings of the world are more important and need help and cure more than science needs aid from us in any field of discovery.”

The individual, that presents some kind of problem or suffering, both physical and mental as we all do in our lives by the very nature of the existence in which we participate, can have contact during the therapy with a transformative and authentic way to focus on problems. It is possible to show how “the sense of attention as what it is” can be discovered only through each of our own experiences. This deliberate way to take care, without effort, free, without judgement and not reactive, allows the acceptance of that which is even painful. In this process which permits us to see how and what each feels and thinks, the participant is detached from mental phenomena which are the base of their suffering. The measure of the cognitive fusion that dominates the habitual psychological processes can be observed and with it progressively weakened, and we are therefore entering into a state of Metacognition; the individual wins the internal freedom and is then capable to continue to increase its capacity to realise that he or she is not solely thoughts nor emotions... There is an observation that permits us to be free in the moment of here and now, and that it is “the only moment”. The attachments and impediments which are the profound cause that maintains suffering are overcome. The natural practice of this form of attention results in a state of psychological wellbeing, of peace, of serenity and happiness that can reflect itself in the lives of the people – in the form of increased giving, equanimity, sense of beauty and compassion.

The way in which we centre our attention contributes to the modelling of the mind. When we develop a concrete way to attend to the experiences of here and now, and see the true nature of the mind, we are in front of a special form of attention that is Mindfulness. Heart and mind are defined by the same word in the Orient. ‘Mindfulness’ includes an affectionate humane quality to ‘full’ – a feeling of presence and of a generous and friendly interest.

The path away from suffering, in which Buddha showed us his nature and importance, is manifest in the practice of medicine of the mind and body. To be healthy is to accept, to understand, integrate and transcend. The quality of love and its implicit kindness is that which allows the transformation of man.

In analytical psychology the totality of man is considered as a goal which drives the psychological development in the therapeutic process. The therapist or analyst can accompany the individual in these stages relating to the structure of the self, when the psychological contents are opened to integrate the aspects which are not known previously that will amplify them as an individual heir of the totality.

The opening of the door of the unconscious permits a progressive integration that takes the individual to a transcendence of the duality of the mind. The process of individuation that Jung expresses takes body and soul (psyche), and so the individual recognises his internal unity or totality; that unity connects and unites individuals with other human beings, more so than they can perceive, and they feel that they were never separated but always profoundly bound and connected to others.

Jung states in 'Psychology and Alchemy' that "Were it not a fact of experience that supreme values reside in the soul, psychology would not interest me in the least, for the soul would then be nothing but a miserable vapour." Also in 'The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche' he inspires us by saying "life always has to be treated as something new." Krishnamurti said that "to discover something new, one must start with himself, he must set out on a journey, doing it completely naked, especially from knowledge...." And thus we ask ourselves, what is the quality of the mind that permits us to always live what is new?... Can I name it?