

THE SPIRITUAL SCIENTIST

An Ezine for Those Who Think

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When Science Points To Spirituality

Imagine a village farmer who gets a Mercedes Benz as a gift. The only vehicle he has seen till then is a tractor and the only purpose that he knows of any vehicle is plowing. So he attaches a yoke to his new Mercedes and starts driving it over his field. To his disappointment, he finds that the field, far from being ploughed, is being spoiled. And after sometime, he finds his car also starts malfunctioning. And he becomes totally frustrated – with himself, his car and his field.





Ridiculous, we might say, that somebody uses a Mercedes for plowing. But could this be the story of our life? The Vedic scriptures – and, in principle, the scriptures of all the great religions of the world – state that human life is meant for achieving, not material enjoyment, but spiritual fulfillment. The Vedic scriptures further explain that the human body is a precious vehicle that the soul gets after transmigrating through 8.4 million species. In all subhuman bodies, the soul has access only to material pleasure - through the fulfillment of the bodily demands of eating, sleeping, mating and defending. All material pleasure is troublesome to acquire. Even when acquired, it is unfulfilling because of the body's limited capacity to enjoy. And even this paltry pleasure is also inevitably curtailed by disease and old age, and terminated by death. The human body alone offers the soul consciousness evolved enough to access a superior source of pleasure - love of God. The Vedic scriptures explain that love of God enables the soul to attain eternal happiness in the spiritual world, his original home. And so they assert that achieving this love of God is the specific and exclusive purpose for which the soul should utilize the human body.

Returning to our starting analogy, the subhuman bodies, which offer flickering bodily pleasures, can be compared to tractors meant for plowing a field. On the other hand, the human body, which can offer the soul everlasting happiness, can be compared to a posh Mercedes meant for a smooth ride. So from the scriptural viewpoint, to use the human body for sensual pleasures is not much different from using a car for plowing. Because we moderns see almost everyone around us pursuing material goals – sex, wealth, luxuries, prestige, power and fame, we assume that to be the natural purpose of life. But, as the saying goes, "Do not think that you are on the right road just because it is a well-beaten path." And, intriguingly enough, not only scriptures, but even modern science seems to be indicating that human life is not meant for material pursuits.



LET THE FACTS SPEAK

When a Mercedes is used for plowing, three things happen: the field gets spoiled, the vehicle gets wrecked and the driver gets frustrated. We modern humans have been diligently using our human bodies for seeking material enjoyment. Let us examine scientifically what has been the result of this on the environment (the field), the human body (the car) and ourselves (the driver).

Biologist E O Wilson among many other scientists has studied the complex interdependence among various species in the biosphere. He found that every species makes some constructive contribution – small or great – to the ecology of the planet. For example, if the vegetation – grasses and shrubs – decrease, the herbivores suffer. And if the herbivores decrease, the carnivores are affected. But he found that one species does not contribute to the ecology – the human species. If the human species became extinct, there would hardly be any problems for any other species or for the ecology. In fact, most ecological problems would be solved if humans became or were made extinct. The human species is arguably the most intelligent species on the planet. And yet science indicates that human existence is nothing but a burden for the planet! Wilson concludes his study by suggesting that the existence of the human species must be “for some other purpose”.



As far as the human body is concerned, how is it affected by the various activities that moderns consider to be enjoyable? Smoking causes lung disorders, drinking leads to liver diseases, eating non-veg and junk food and drinks ruins digestion and illicit sex – that perpetually over-hyped carnal pleasure– brings AIDS, an epidemic for which there is no aid. Modern society, education and media indoctrinate – almost brainwash – us into believing that material enjoyment is the goal of life. But this “enjoyment” is the cause of our worst suffering! Could it be that we are being tragically misled into abusing the human body for activities, which it is not designed for?

And what about the effect on ourselves? Scientists are still groping in the dark about who or what the self – the source of consciousness and life in the body – is. But one thing is for sure – the more modern society has neglected or rejected spiritual growth, the more trouble the self has got into. This is evident from the spiraling mental health problems in modern times. WHO has declared that mental diseases - stress, depression, addiction and psychosomatic problems- will be the greatest health hazard of the current century. Worse still, WHO statistics show that over one million people commit suicide every year. This is more than the total annual deaths due to wars and crimes combined. And this figure is only the reported number of suicides. Mental disease in general and suicide in particular has many causes. But the common origin is frustration in achieving one’s goals, whatever they may be. When this frustration rises to an acute and hopeless degree, one feels one’s very existence to be an agony. And the ending of one’s existence appears to be the only solution to that agony. It is then that the person commits suicide. Why is it that we modern humans – the most “intelligent” among all species – are the only species whose members commit suicide – and that too in such alarmingly high numbers? WHO calls suicide as “a tragic social health problem” and states that there is no proven cure for it. Could it be that the goals which society sets for us are themselves intrinsically incompatible with our selves and so they invite the frustration that leads to mental health problems and ultimately suicide?



SEE AND BELIEVE

And conversely what does science say about the effects on the ecology, human health and the self of channelizing human energy for spiritual elevation?

Most environmental problems have arisen from the materialism and consumerism that has accompanied the decline of spirituality and its inherent self-restraint. Therefore the following quote of Alan Durning of the World Watch Institute represents what many scientists consider to be the only hope for saving the environment, “In a fragile biosphere, the ultimate fate of humanity may depend on whether we can cultivate a deeper sense of self-restraint, founded on a widespread ethic of limiting consumption and finding non-material enrichment.” And all the known forms of non-material enrichment – prayer, meditation, yoga and chanting of holy names – clearly point to a spiritual dimension to life. And this spiritual dimension is most comprehensively explained in the Vedic scriptures. So, it is not surprising that the conclusion of E O Wilson’s study – human life is meant “for some other purpose” – is the beginning of the Vedic teachings: athato brahma jijnasa “Therefore (now that you have a human body), devote yourself to spiritual enquiry” (Vedanta-sutra 1)

The current epidemic of indulgence-born diseases shows that universal scriptural injunctions for self-restraint - sobriety (no intoxication) and continence (no illicit sex), for example - are sound health advice too. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School, based on extensive research about the physical and mental benefits of spiritual living, states that the human body and mind are “wired for God”. Not only that, a survey published in the Readers Digest, Jan 2001 issue, stated that, on an average, believers in God live eleven years more than nonbelievers.



And what about the self? Science has come up with a precious finding: spirituality is a sure solace for the self. Survey after survey has shown that spiritual practices protect people from self-destructive behavior and habits. Patrick Glynn in his book God: The Evidence states that surveys show that those who don’t attend spiritual prayer meetings are four times more prone to suicide than those who do so. And further the stopping of attending such meetings has been found to be the best predictor of suicide, better even than unemployment.

These findings indicate that spirituality provides inner joy, which frees people from the uncontrollable and insatiable craving for external pleasures that leads to addictions and suicides. Such findings have inspired some modern thinkers to echo the Vedic conclusion that spirituality is not just a part of our life, but the essence of our life,

Stephen Covey aptly remarks, “We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. We are spiritual beings on a human journey.”



WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

Thus science is clearly showing that human life spent for material enjoyment is ecologically, physically and spiritually disharmonious and disastrous. And it is also strongly indicating that when we strive for spiritual happiness, then we benefit our planet and our body too. The Vedic scriptures offer us a balanced program of material regulation and spiritual growth for achieving the highest potential of human life. The Bhagavad-gita (6.17) states, “Regulation in eating, sleeping, work and recreation, coupled with spiritual practices, paves the way to freedom from all material miseries.” And the most potent and practical spiritual practice for the modern age is the chanting of the Hare Krishna maha mantra. And by this yoga practice, the Bhagavad-gita (6.22) declares that we will achieve a state of happiness which will fully satisfy us and which will never be disturbed by any material upheaval. So, for those of us who were till now unaware of the wisdom of the scriptures and the value of spirituality, maybe its time to stop using the Mercedes for plowing? And, for those of us who can now see the truth of the scriptural teachings being discovered by science, its time to put our human vehicle into gear by chanting Hare Krishna and to race on the highway of devotional service back to our long-lost home with Krishna.

