

## **Science and Spirituality: Complementary Partners**

Narayan L. Kachhara, Ph.D

Are science and spirituality distinct realms? The answer to this debate rests on two broad questions, our perception of reality and the world view based on this perception. The perception of reality is subjective or objective depending on the individual capacity to perceive the world and the belief system one holds. It is the subjectivity of perception that introduces diversity and doubts about the reality and gives rise to different belief systems.

The cognitions are of two kinds direct and indirect. The indirect cognitions are made through senses and mind and the direct cognitions are made by the consciousness bypassing the mind and senses. Normally individuals make indirect cognitions, the direct cognitions are possible only when the mind has been silenced and noise (by the mind) has been reduced to a level so as to enable one to perceive his intuition. In case of indirect cognitions the perceptions are made with respect to the frame of mind and are subjective. The subjective perceptions, limited by senses and mind, realize the relative truth and the absolute truth is never revealed. The direct perceptions are also subject to purity of consciousness; it is only the pure soul that perceives the absolute truth. For a pure soul there are no options, no decisions to be made, the absolute truth is experienced without application of logic, intellect and scientific theories.

A reality is supposed to have infinite aspects of its existence and the knowledge of all aspects is essential to know the truth. Indirect cognitions suffering the limitations of mind perceive only a few aspects of the reality and therefore such knowledge gained by application of mind may reveal some true aspects of the object but is essentially incomplete. It may so happen that we discover different aspects of the same reality that are contradictory but true in their own ways, for instance the classical and quantum views of matter. Such fragmented views though correct do not describe complete truth and are likely to introduce some kind of conflict regarding the nature of reality.

Our senses suffer the limitations of space and time. The range of perception can be extended through instruments and we can perceive objects at far away distances or of micro sizes. But this kind of perception is limited to the particular object under investigation and the capacity of the instrument. But if we had the extended capacity of perceiving all objects, just like our senses, our perception of the world would be different. For example if we could see the cells of the body all organisms, small and big, would appear to be similar, made up of cells, and the distinction between species and also different members of the species would disappear; you may then not differentiate between your friends and enemies. Your world view would

experience a paradigm shift, everyone looks alike and your feelings of love and hate convert into love for all.

The power of perception depends on the purity of the soul, it increases with purity. In the next stage imagine that you are able to see the atoms. Now all objects animate and inanimate would lose distinction and the body does not have any attraction for you. But still you see the existence of different sub atomic particles. In the ultimate state you attain the capacity of 'seeing' the fundamental constituent of these particles called paramanu in Jain philosophy. The paramanu is the ultimate, eternal and indivisible state of matter and is perceived by the Omniscient who has purified his soul to perfection. The perception is supposed to take place by principle of reflection where all the paramanus, and other substances, in the cosmos are reflected in the soul (mirror) without any desire and volition and the Omniscient just observes them without any particular objective. His perception is purely objective, all elements causing subjectivity have been removed; his knowledge is perfect. He perceives all aspects of any object instantaneously and there is no place for any doubt in his perceptions. He knows all other substances in nature including all souls wherever they are. His perceptions transcend the limits of space and time and he knows all modes of all substances, nothing is unknown to him. All principles in Jainism are based on the teachings of the Omniscient Mahavira.

Mahavira said that both matter and soul (consciousness) are fundamental and distinct substances in nature, one cannot convert into another. Consciousness is the exclusive property of soul; matter in no case can have or produce consciousness. The consciousness of soul manifests chiefly as intelligence and intuition which are responsible for cognition power of the soul. Cognitions are made by the soul and not by the body or brain. No process of brain at any level, micro or macro, can produce consciousness, all processes in the body are the requirement of the body functions. Science has done a commendable job in exploring the body functions but in the absence of insight into the reality the brain processes are sometimes assumed to belong to the realm of consciousness. Many scientists, psychologists and philosophers have rightly questioned this supposition which does not have a sound scientific and logical support. Consciousness can never be explored by scientific means, it can only be experienced. Our experiences are generally subjective, and therefore uncertain, as said before, which prompts the investigators to deny the existence of consciousness as a distinct entity. This is rather an outcome of impatience than sound logic and wisdom on the part of investigators.

All organisms, small and big, possess consciousness; no life is possible without consciousness. The consciousness of organisms is not a part of a universal consciousness; each individual consciousness follows the law of causality, which is not possible if a universal consciousness is assumed. The law of causality is a universal law that applies equally well to all

existences animate or inanimate. The consciousness has existed since the beginning less past and has not been created by any super power. Since consciousness, and also paramanu, is not created it is also not destroyed. The total number of consciousnesses, and paramanus, in the cosmos is a fixed quantity that runs in infinity. The form of consciousness changes according to the law of causality; all organisms are in a different state of development of consciousness. There exists no super power like God the creator, the cosmos is governed by the laws which are applicable to animate and inanimate objects. The universe is governed by laws, known or unknown, and not by any super power. Modern science has been able to discover the laws for the physical order of existence at macro and micro level. But this enquiry by any means is not yet complete and there are many more aspects of nature still unknown to science. For example, matter also exists in subtle form, much smaller than the particles known today, and the laws for this kind of matter are likely to be different from the known laws, such as super luminal speed, anti-gravity property, etc. Study of such matter may need a radically different approach from that employed now.

Our existence is at three levels, consciousness, subtle and gross. The gross body is being studied by science but the subtle body is still unknown to it. The functions of the gross body cannot be understood fully without knowing the subtle body and its interactions with the gross body. The mind is a part of the subtle body and is different from the brain. The subtle mind is not in the reach of present day science and needs a different approach for its study that may involve a mix of scientific methods and conscious experiences (from scriptures?). The subtle body is likely to have the property of coherence that enables storage of vast amount of information and very fast processing of information which is typical of life processes. The mind is intimately linked to the brain and the two are supposed to interact through radiations. It means that the brain must also have the capability to receive and transmit signals from the mind. The mind is also supposed to have limited non-locality in the sense that every part of it possesses the same amount of information at any time. The study of mind-brain connection is likely to reveal many secrets of nature and also lead to the recognition of consciousness as an entity distinct from the body by science. I feel that there is a great scope for scientists, psychologists and philosophers to work together and put up a joint effort to uncover the mysteries of nature, particularly relating to life.

The spiritual leaders like Mahavira, and Buddha, knew the reality, subtle, micro and macro, in all its aspects by their spiritual powers. They did not need any scientific instrument for their knowledge; it was the power of their consciousness that enabled them to perceive all details of nature in its true and objective form. Their teachings and the description of the cosmos available today is qualitative but is sufficient for us to realize the distinct features, the diversity and the qualities of the constituents of nature, particularly at subtle level. The science has explored the micro and macro states of nature and therefore the spiritual science and

modern science together provide us means for knowing the nature to its fullest extent. Spirituality and science are complimentary, and not opposing, partners. Science explores a part of reality experimentally, theoretically and quantitatively and spirituality deals with the whole range of reality intuitively and, perhaps, qualitatively.

#### Endnotes

1. Narayan L. Kachhara, "Philosophy of Mind: A Jain Perspective", *US-China Education Review*, March 2011