

Holistic Science and Human Life

K.L. SESHAGIRI RAO



Stone Poem 4; original art, Liz Gill Nielson

GLOBAL PREDICAMENT

At the beginning of the third millennium, the world is facing a dangerous situation. First, science and technology have multiplied the pleasures of sensate life beyond imagination. For example, television programs and commercials cater to an enormous consumerism on a daily basis; they glamorize sensual indulgence and glorify violence. Under their influence, people live for the satisfaction of bodily desires and the mind acts as a slave of the body. However, sense enjoyment is essentially ephemeral and conspicuous desires for self-gratification lead only to inevitable frustration. Humans do not find lasting fulfilment in sense objects or in material wealth and, consequently, a trend of dissatisfaction with a purely materialist way of life is becoming more widespread.

Dr. K. L. Seshagiri Rao is Professor Emeritus, University of Virginia, USA, Chief Editor of the Encyclopedia of Hinduism, and Co-Editor of Interreligious Insight. He is a long-time advocate of dialogue between religions and engagement for the common good. This article is an edited version of the lecture given at the Inauguration Ceremony of the Vitag Vignan International Research Foundation, Surat, India, in April 2009.

Second, many people suffer from "meaninglessness" in life. They look outwardly to the world, but inwardly feel empty. They do not see any direction or purpose in life and their minds

The sciences deal only with empirical and relative truths, but they do not give attention to the whole truth.

are confused. Despairing in the face of the challenges of life and death, many people we know that life in the world cannot be lived in its fullness without a sense of the Real. Modern technological societies are under great strain. Addictions to drugs are playing havoc. Suicide cases are increasing. Many are surrounded by various kinds of sufferings and tensions. They are groping for remedies.

Third, the soul of modern people cries out for spirituality but truth is not limited to the physical world. A one-sided view of life leads to distortions in the human personality. The sciences deal only with empirical and relative truths, but they do not give attention to the whole truth. Life's highest aim can be realized only when it is understood comprehensively. Kanudadaji says, "If your vision is limited to the relative world, you can never find paramatma."

EMPIRICAL SCIENCE

The word "science" is derived from the Latin *scientia*, which means "to know". Scientists dedicate themselves to

the search for truth in the natural world. Scientific progress in the nineteenth century witnessed a "knowledge explosion". It yielded vast power and higher standards of material life for many countries. Scientists then became persuaded that science had answers to everything; and so they investigated the world and life by analyzing them into fragments. Scientific knowledge is quantitative, analytical and objective; it directs its investigation to the external world.

Material development may lead to a higher standard of life, but it does not necessarily lead to a better of life.

The analytical intellect, however, forgets that senses function with the power of the spirit. Scientific knowledge can be and is misused. Individual and collective egos exploit it for selfish and narrow purposes. Although science has the ability to remove poverty, hunger and sickness in society, those problems have not been remedied; they have gotten worse. And science and technology are also engaged in forging destructive weapons, endangering the whole human race; they have not brought us lasting happiness. Although the contributions of science are valuable, they merit careful study and constructive application.

THE MATERIALIST OUTLOOK

The moral and spiritual aspects of human beings are rejected in the materialistic way of life which forgets human

values and important dimensions of human personality. Materialists forget the harm they cause to others in their greed for wealth and power. The exclusive pursuit of materialistic values makes people aggressive and arrogant and amoral; it undermines the world and depletes natural resources. The problems of lust, greed, anger and attachment, are rooted in “body consciousness”. Material development may lead to a higher standard of life, but it does not necessarily lead to a better of life.

Wealth, position and power do not compensate for the lack of peace within. Materialists may appear happy, but they have “no inner happiness”. They become close minded, rigid and arrogant. They evade conscience through psychological defenses. They suppress the conscience which employs the golden rule of fairness and justice, compassion and kindness in judging what is good. Materialism discourage the healthy use of free will.

LIMITATIONS OF SCIENCE

Many modern scientists now realize the limitations of their fields. They note that experience is not limited to sense knowledge. Empirical sciences do not speak to our inner experiences of love and suffering. They do not teach us how to live and what to live for. Sciences cannot make us virtuous. They do not deal with life and death, sin and evil. The empirical sciences do not have much to say about music, faith, devotion and God, which are all dimensions of Truth; they do not satisfy the spiritual and moral urges of human beings.

The nature of physical reality, according to present day physicists, is vibrating energy rather than inert matter. In recent years, more and more scientists are discovering striking similarities between holistic thought and modern scientific thinking. It is fascinating



Lightning; courtesy, Moonraker.com

to note, for example, that affirmations of Vedic texts are in conformity with modern science in matters of cosmology, astronomy, causality, conceptions of time, the structure of the universe, the theory of evolution, the doctrine of karma, and the medical science of Ayurveda. Some scientists are turning towards the East in order to describe more adequately many macroscopic and microscopic phenomena. Dr. Carl Sagan wrote that the Hindu religion is dedi-

cated to the idea that the “cosmos itself undergoes an immense number of births and rebirths” and its time scales “correspond to those of modern scientific cosmology”.

HOLISTIC SCIENCE

Life’s highest aim can be realized only when it is understood comprehensively. The knowledge of the inner world is as much significant as that of the external world. The world should

We have to look outwards, inwards, and upwards.

be accepted in its totality: not only in its external aspects but also in its inner spiritual life. No aspect of life should be ignored. Scientific and technological development is not to be divorced from moral and spiritual progress. We have to look outwards, inwards, and upwards. Spiritual values and insights can benefit the entire world. They can bring East and West, North and South harmoniously together as a flourishing world community. Holistic Science, aims for both material and spiritual fulfilment.

Truth is sought in two ways: by studying the facts of the external world and by seeking to understand the deeper truths of the inner world. All knowledge in the universe is interconnected. Truth is the source of everything; it is the light that enlightens the mind. Holistic science contributes to the understanding of the world in the context of total reality; it reveals man’s rootedness in the Divine. Truth alone exists, and all else

only “appear to exist”. Truth is both immanent and transcendent. The quest for Truth is the *summum bonum* of life.

Rationality saves mankind from blind faith. Spirituality takes us into deeper levels of Truth

Holistic Science is hospitable to both scientific search and spiritual enquiry; it does not present any opposition to science. It sees scientific knowledge as complementary and supplementary. Rationality saves mankind from blind faith. Spirituality takes us into deeper levels of Truth, from which springs love, compassion, harmony and peace. Truth, though supra-rational, is never irrational. The contributions of the Holistic Science are very valuable for one and all; they deserve careful study and understanding. A holistic approach is comprehensive, inclusive, and integrative; it includes matter and consciousness, object and subject. A lot of study and research can be and must be undertaken on these themes by the Foundation, to spread the holistic science the world over.

DIMENSIONS OF TRUTH

Holistic Science duly acknowledges the importance of the material world. It appreciates the scientific, mathematical, astronomical, medical and other contributions to knowledge. However, it recognizes that empirical knowledge is only one aspect of Truth; awaking consciousness relates to that

level of knowledge.

There are other dimensions of life, such as dream consciousness, sleep consciousness, transcendental consciousness, etc. Psychic and spiritual disciplines reveal these planes of being and subtle ways to contact them. Reality has many facets; science is one of them. Holistic science points out that there is one reality or Truth. Truth is the ground of existence and the goal of life. It includes what is true in knowledge, right in conduct, and what is just and fair in human relations. Application of truth in life makes it integrated, better, nobler and richer. All are connected to one another; individuals are not separate entities; they are unique points of universal spirit. Such an holistic orientation does not ignore the individual; instead, it restores the dignity and the worth of the individual. Given that the main object of human life is the realization of Truth, the one who forgets this primary goal of existence, will realize, sooner or later, that their life has been wasted.

Everything in this world is rooted in

the inexhaustible reality, namely, Truth or God. The whole world, physical as well as metaphysical, is a single universe. Knowledge is universal and truth has no borders. Wholeness is the quality of Reality, comprehending both the subjective and the objective and transcending both. Pure knowledge is *paramatma*, the transcendent spirit that shines as the illuminating principle in the body. Spiritual wisdom gives guidance in the art of life for realizing the highest human goal.



Wholeness; original art, Georgene Wilson

Human values and insights contribute to the richness of life, culture and civilization.

We live in a “universe”, and our knowledge about it must be unified. We cannot isolate ourselves from the universe. Facts of the inner life have to be explored with a scientific outlook and with an appropriate methodology. Spiritual reality or consciousness is the meaningful consolidating principle of all existence. Now, Quantum Physics also points to the basic oneness of the universe. But all this knowledge has to be used constructively. As knowledge is power, the values of human con-

ence of Truth. Parikhji points out, in his Preface to Dada Bhagwan's Satsang Series: "One who has direct experience (*anubhav gnan*) is the best and the most rewarding teacher and guide for the earnest seekers of truth." Such teachers

No religion is the sole repository of Truth in the world, nor is salvation restricted to the members of any one sect or group.

stress our common humanity and universal spiritual values. They have no ego; they are *gnani purushas*, self-realized persons. They are called "Divine Scientists". Only such enlightened persons can guide seekers in the realization of the Self.

Sages and prophets speak from the direct experience of Reality. Their experience is not restricted to sense data; they bear witness to transcendental dimensions of experience. They speak of the glory and majesty of Truth/God. They illumine faith in its various forms and recognize that truth is approachable by various paths. They validate religious pluralism. They follow the attitude of "live and let live". No religion is the sole repository of Truth in the world, nor is salvation restricted to the members of any one sect or group. They invoke the blessings of life on all: "Let all be happy, healthy, and blessed." The term "all" includes human and subhuman worlds as well as the world of nature. Indeed, the holistic approach encourages all peoples to celebrate each other's way of God- realization.

The world has suffered too much because of wars fought in the name of religion. There has been enough of faultfinding in and condemnation of other religions in history. An attitude of intolerance has not and cannot bring peace and happiness to any society or nation or to humanity at large. Religious harmony cannot be brought by worldly competition. The present age requires a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation among the followers of different faiths. The world has become small. In the emerging global culture, the world needs to take into account the diverse currents of world religions and their contributions to the welfare of the human kind as a whole.

There are many branches of Science; no particular branch of science claims a monopoly of wisdom for itself, nor does it quarrel about its superiority over other branches of science. Similarly, each religion must bring its moral and spiritual contributions to the humanity's understanding of the deeper dimensions of Truth, and not quarrel about the supremacy of one religion over the others. Like sciences, religions too can be seen as complementary and supplementary to one another.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Ignorance of the true nature of the self is a basic problem of human beings; it results in bondage to worldliness. Self-knowledge is the solution. Self-realization frees man from ignorance and its binding effects. The desire for liberation is a desire for knowledge and

Truth. It is a process of self-discovery. With this realization, life becomes transformed; tensions and conflicts come to an end. Self-discovery is the unfolding of consciousness; it is the process of end-

Thoughts continuously change, but the thinker witnesses them.

ing one's false identifications. It is the key to supreme fulfilment.

A human being is a finite spirit grounded in the Infinite Spirit. Because of ignorance, a person identifies with what is encountered in the phenomenal world, such as wealth, pleasure, position, prestige, other individuals, etc. But self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom. No one is just an atomized individual; everyone is a part of the whole. If one can be selfless, one can serve the whole. When the whole becomes the focus of consciousness, love and service emerge in life spontaneously. Self-knowledge frees us from wrong notions and makes life radiantly spiritual; it lifts a person from the limitations of empirical existence. The desire for liberation is the desire for Truth. Enlightenment is the goal. The knowledge sought is not information or theoretical knowledge, but illumination.

The path of Truth is inward; it is spiritual. The Vedas say: What is perceived by the senses is only an appearance, the one who perceives is true; anything that is said is secondary, but one who says is primary. Thoughts continuously change, but the thinker witnesses them. One must discriminate between

things eternal and things temporal, between appearance and reality. When wrong identifications with physical and psychological things vanish, one's doubts are dispelled and one realizes oneself as a spiritual being with the nature of consciousness; then tensions come to an end, and there is a thorough transformation of life.



Meditation: photo, Cetta Kenney

APPLICATION IN LIFE

To know how to live one's life is real knowledge. Theoretical knowledge or belief statements are ineffective in solving life's problems or in removing grief. Preaching without practice is useless. The adoption of experimental procedures in the exploration of the truths of life is most important. Actions make truths come alive.

The study of books on swimming will not make us excellent swimmers.

Mere book learning is not enough. We have information technology in abundance; what we need is transformation technology. One has to walk a path and practice the precepts. Knowledge has to be applied in life; only then does life become disciplined, resulting in the transformation of one's personality. Yoga, for example, does not ask us to believe in this or that statement; nor does it prevent us from asking questions. In fact, it encourages the questioning attitude. To experience spiritual truths, one has to follow a course of spiritual discipline. When the experiments begin to yield results, conviction spontaneously follows. It is this experimental dimension that brings authenticity to knowledge.

Holistic explorations of inner life are capable of verification; truths are verified in experience. For example, yogis demonstrate that a certain practice leads to a certain result. It is a matter of knowledge, not a belief or an attitude. To know is to be conscious; knowledge is waking up; the higher and higher one ascends in yoga, newer and newer peaks of knowledge become visible in experience.

PEACE, HAPPINESS AND FULFILLMENT

The supreme goal of human beings is freedom from suffering and attainment of abiding happiness. It is spiritual liberation (moksha). The subsidiary goals are righteousness (dharma), economic security (artha), and aesthetic enjoyment (kama). These goals are not

exclusive. Wealth and sensate pleasure are to be governed by righteousness; they are subsidiary to the supreme good. Righteousness signifies the actions a person has to do to ensure a good life, in relation to oneself and in interpersonal relationships. One's duty to one's fam-

A human being is essentially a spiritual being.

ily, society, nation, humanity and God are all parts of righteousness. It involves self-regulation and social regulation. It lays down certain do's and don'ts. For example, each person is enjoined to respect his/her mother, father, teacher, and guest. Prohibited actions are those for which one may have strong inclinations, but which are not conducive to the fulfilment of one's total personality and to the welfare of society.

KARMA AND REBIRTH

Reincarnation (*punarjanma*) is one of the fundamental insights of life relating to the deeper dimensions of human personality. A human being is essentially a spiritual being. The physical body of a person degenerates and dies, but the soul is imperishable. At death, a soul is disassociated from the gross body. Death closes one chapter in the book of one's life and birth opens another one. The mind and its faculties constitute the subtle body, the essence of individuality. Mind is the carrier of the soul from one body into another; it continues to accompany the soul, until it is released

from bondage. In other words, survival and reincarnation are not the goals of life; they are facts of inner life. Spiritual freedom (*moksha*) is the goal.

The flowering of the human soul sweetens the entire world.

The principles of reincarnation and karma (law of moral cause and effect) are closely related. They have enormous consequences for our daily life. Not only does a person reap what he or she sows, but what one is reaping is the result of what one has already sown. The individual person is the maker of his or her own destiny. Actions in the present determine the future. Every thought, word and deed has, of course, its effect on the outer world; but it also affects the performer's inner character. All actions bring results. If the results are

not enjoyed or suffered in this life, they have to be experienced in the next. They are accumulated in the mind of a person in the form of impressions. Bad karma even regresses one into lower forms of life. Each reincarnation is an opportunity to make a little more spiritual progress. By exercising one's freedom properly, one is able to gradually diminish and finally eliminate the bondage of karma, and attain liberation.

The pursuit of spiritual freedom does not mean disregarding the interests and the joys of the world. The richness of inner life expresses itself in graces of external life. One's effort to free oneself from selfishness and to live a spiritual life has implication for all others. The flowering of the human soul sweetens the entire world. Liberated souls act with utter spontaneity in the world; they work with satisfaction, contentment and enthusiasm and without a trace of self-



Flower photo, Ceitta Kenney

ishness. Transcendence does not mean aloofness. It means involvement without attachment. Many have attained liberation by performing work and service in society.

By drawing on to both spiritual and scientific methods, we can solve individual, social and human problems.

Life here and hereafter are to be harmonized. Spirituality is not the negation of worldly life; it does not consist in turning away from poverty, ignorance and misery in the world, but in fully facing and fighting them. Authentic spiritual life does not reject any aspect of Truth. Spiritual life that neglects worldly duties and responsibilities is callous. Worldly life that neglects spiritual values is blind. Therefore, any one-sided approach to life is the source of sorrow.

Moksha is the recovery of the soul's true nature as eternal conscious being; it is liberation, absolute freedom from sorrow. It is unsurpassed bliss. Living Truth is the source of all happiness. One must open one's mind and heart to the currents of infinite Truth. A closed mind is the cause of bondage. Through the open mind, freedom is obtained and truth is realized. When egoism is transcended, one becomes fulfilled. For all individual spirits, the real fulfilment can be found in the infinite spirit, the total Truth.

To know truth is a joy. The pursuit of Truth is a delight. Truth may be called by any name and worshipped in any form. Infinite truth is also infinite love.

Being ignorant of one's spiritual nature, one suffers but knowledge is medicine for ignorance; it is therapy for the ills of life; it is a fountain of joy. Salvation consists in the experiential knowledge and love of Truth/God, and the final offering of oneself to the eternal service of God. Communion or union with God in the fullness of experience is the highest goal of human life.

By linking the individual soul with the Divine, a human being becomes resourceful and powerful. Once the primacy of the soul is recognized, then virtues like love, self-control, charity, etc., enter the mind and the mind turns towards the Self. Spiritual Wisdom is profound and practical. Human knowledge of the external world then becomes matched by the knowledge of oneself. By drawing on to both spiritual and scientific methods, we can solve individual, social and human problems. One important method is the purification of the mind; this is accomplished by choosing the good instead of the pleasant and by controlling lust, greed, and anger. When a human being discovers oneself, one finds happiness within and without.

Divine truth pervades the whole world in a delightful manner. The world is not a common place; life is not routine. Everything is wonderful and magnificent. This beautiful and delightful world is a perpetual reminder of God/Truth. We are granted the rightful enjoyment of the things of the world; let us all be grateful and celebrate the divine greatness.