

BIG QUESTION

# Who is thinking: The soul or the brain?



NEVILLE HODGKINSON

There is a new wave in the world of science, a wave that is pushing forward the frontiers of conventional medical and scientific views of the world. The most exciting aspect of it is that it connects with ancient spiritual understanding about the exact nature of being human and living on this earth.

The basic component of this understanding is that mind or consciousness is primary, and the material world, and physical laws that govern how it operates, are put in place by mind. The science does not tell us exactly whose mind is doing this job. Some of the ancients would have called it the mind of nature. The religious-minded would say it is the mind of God. The scientists who are promoting this new wave of thought refer to a universal consciousness.

But what is clear is that by bring-

ing mind to centre stage, an entirely new way of understanding ourselves and the world is on offer that may resolve some long-standing weaknesses in the materialistic world view.

For example, despite decades of research, neuroscientists have been completely unable to explain how the chemical and electrical activity of the human brain can give rise to the beauty and complexity of experience. The philosopher David Chalmers termed this “the hard problem” of consciousness.

Consider instead that the beauty and complexity of mind comes first, and creates a filtered, individuated mirror or reflection of itself through the brain, and the problem greatly lessens. It is much easier to construct a theory of how consciousness gives rise to matter, than the other way round.

This idea is supported by the discovery that the brain is “plastic” - it changes with every thought and feeling we experience. The phenomenon still astonishes neuroscientists, who cannot understand how the brain can change itself. Again, once we realise that we are not our brains, but units of consciousness - souls - the problem disappears

Similarly, a discovery by the pioneers of quantum physics that matter requires the mind of an



observer to “see it into being” has puzzled physicists for a century. It does not make sense if you consider matter as the primary reality, and mind as a phenomenon emerging from the complexity of the brain.

This problem also disappears when we recognise, as Dr Paul Brunton put it in his 1943 book, *The Wisdom of the Overself*: “Life has planted us in a universe of thoughts which we have mistakenly taken to be a universe of matter. The whole thing is an appearance in consciousness. The world which seems to be presented from the outside to the senses, is actually presented from within, by the mind.” Brunton spent many years in Asia, studying Indian and other ancient texts.

Research into ‘near-death’ experiences has helped to confirm that

when brain and body become uninhabitable, the core of our being does not end. Many accounts describe a blissful expansion of consciousness, as if the soul flies like a bird freed from a cage. The experimenter is often reluctant to return!

Such individual stories are supported by studies of what happens in the brains of volunteers given mind-expanding drugs. Contrary to the belief that parts of the brain would be seen to light up as the subjects went into an altered state of consciousness, experimenters in the UK found the opposite - what they called “decreased activity in the brain’s key connector hubs, enabling a state of unrestrained cognition”.

In the case of most activities, modern scanning techniques usually show activation in multiple

parts of the brain, according to the tasks undertaken and the thoughts and feelings experienced. But that doesn’t mean the brain activity is causing the experience. The brain does not “compose” our thoughts and feelings, just as a radio does not compose the music we hear through it.

The radio metaphor only takes us so far in understanding this new, post-materialist science. The added factor about the brain is that as well as receiving, it records. As we grow mature, and enter adulthood, these recordings are what makes it possible for us to perform so many functions without having to learn them afresh every time.

But this vital function becomes an obstacle to our happiness and health when our brains become stuffed with memories or ideas of a worldly or painful nature, and we leave no room for spiritual experience.

It all adds up to powerful scientific support for the understanding that when we meditate successfully, we bypass tired old patterns of thought recorded in our brains, and enter a realm of unlimited love and wisdom. This then supports, guides and enriches our everyday lives.

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DISCOURSE

## TOLERANCE COMES FROM LOOKING WITHIN



DADI JANKI

Tolerance is based on going beyond the superficial things that divide us. It’s the result of turning within and coming to know the self. If I can deal with my own ego, then my own anger can be resolved. This goes a long way in resolving external issues, too. With my own ego out of the way, I will be able to handle anything! Otherwise, it’s just the same old thing - you versus me, yours versus mine, etc.

- intolerance. If I am unselfish and honest in my heart, and am concerned about others’ needs, then I will be full enough to give. When you know the self in this way, then you can know others. ‘I should be understood’ changes to ‘I should understand’. Not, ‘They should change’, but ‘I will give what’s needed’. Patience, peace and maturity develop. Spiritual tolerance cultivates innate wisdom, the kind you cannot get from books.

Turn within and in silence fill yourself with your Godly inheritance. Always remember, you don’t have to prove anything. Whatever is true is going to be revealed, anyway. Working to win the hearts of others is what will bring happiness to your life.

LIFE MANTRA

# Why success comes easily to some people



B.K. USHA

Everyone wants to succeed in life, but those who achieve success are not all alike. They can be classified into three types: the stars of success, the lucky ones, and the hopeful ones.

The stars shine brighter than the others by virtue of their determination that they will definitely succeed. They do not speculate about their chances of success - not even in their dreams - and have 100 per cent faith that their success is guaranteed. The confidence arising from this faith, which is founded on

their faith in goodness, is visible in their demeanour. At the same time, they are free of arrogance.

The powerful personality and words of such persons inspire faith in weaker souls, and their actions provide guidance to others. They teach others with their deeds.

Such persons are content with themselves, because of which they remain happy. They do not need to make any effort to be happy, but experience happiness naturally, always.

Others also feel content with these stars, who embody success. The cheerfulness of these souls serves other people by relieving their sorrow and confusion and making them happy. Just as someone standing in the sun can feel the light and warmth of its rays, those who know such stars of success receive the rays of happiness that radiate from them, and they are



gradually coloured by their company. What about the lucky ones? Such people like to be good and are sweet and loving. Their thoughts are not powerful, but since they are loving they receive

cooperation, which helps them achieve a lot with little effort.

While those who are the embodiment of success feel that their victory is guaranteed, the lucky ones say, “I understand this, it will definitely happen, God will help”. They are not certain about their success, but believe it will be achieved somehow.

The third category is of the hopeful ones. Because of not being successful all the time, such souls only have the hope that they will do something, reach their destination, or become something. But damaging habits or traits hamper souls who lack full determination from achieving their goals.

They are distracted from their aim by their attachments, desires and conflicts, because of which they stop making progress or get trapped in something and even be-

come disheartened. Facing many kinds of obstacles, they are sometimes courageous and at other times afraid. They are neither constantly happy nor content all the time, but they never lose hope.

The way to become an embodiment of success is to have good wishes for everyone. Even when someone deliberately troubles you, if you have good wishes and pure feelings in your thoughts, words and deeds, you will avoid conflict and all the wasteful and negative thinking it causes. Saved from damaging thoughts that drain the soul’s energy, you will remain powerful, and your good feelings will invite the cooperation and blessings of others. All this will bring easy success.

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INNER PEACE

# THE PERFECT WAY TO LIVE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE



B.K. MOHAN SINGHAL

Inner discord is the root of all disharmony. It disturbs harmony in the family, in society, and the harmony in our relationship with nature.

Harmony exists at four levels. The first is harmony within the self - between our intellect, conscience, and our actions. When

these are not aligned with one another, there is conflict within, which leads to stress and friction in relationships.

The human body is composed of the five elements - earth, water, fire, air and ether. When harmony between these elements is upset, disease develops. About 80 per cent of all diseases are psychosomatic - they are caused or aggravated by a mental factor such as stress.

Our disharmony affects nature too. Nature is a manifestation of human nature, so growing violence in humans is reflected in the increasingly frequent extreme weather events and natural disasters.

The first step to achieving harmony within the self is to know



one’s true identity. When we realise that we are spiritual beings or souls expressing ourselves through the physical body, our perspective changes. The imperishable soul, a sentient point of light, is the master of the sense organs, but we can exercise this mastery only when we are aware of who we are. This awareness is developed by reminding oneself again and again, ‘I am a soul’, and experiencing the self as a spiritual light, separate from the body.

To gain supremacy over the body and mind, the soul needs to draw power from the Supreme, the ultimate source of spiritual power, by remembering that being. Just as a battery is charged by connecting it to a power source, the soul

needs a link with that Source to fill itself with power. This power, which is discernible in the form of one’s judgment, tolerance and fortitude, enables one to achieve inner harmony by aligning one’s thoughts, speech and actions.

For harmony with nature, we need to have the qualities of the five elements. Water is fluid and takes the shape of any container; we need to be flexible likewise. The earth provides food and many other things, similarly, we should sustain others by offering love and cooperation. The air teaches us to be light at all times. Fire transforms anything that is put in it, and our state of mind and personality should be so powerful that whoever comes to us goes back a changed person.

When we live like nature, it will exist in harmony with us.

Interconnections between the elements and life forms make us all a part of one family. Plants and trees can be called the youngest members of this family, as they are always connected to earth, like babies who cling to their mother. A little ‘elder’ to them are the animals, which move on all fours, like slightly older babies. Humans, who walk upright, are the eldest members of this family, and it is our responsibility to take care of our younger ‘siblings’.

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