

## A REFLECTION ON THE EASTERN CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN PERSON – HIGHLIGHTING SOME ELEMENTS OF HINDU AND TAOIST WORLDVIEWS

MINA M. RAMIREZ

Some elements of the spiritual and cultural heritages from the East may enrich our self-understanding. These elements are being incorporated in different disciplines by several scientists who lead us to a shift of consciousness from a materialistic and mechanistic worldview to an organic and spiritual worldview.

### 1. THE DIVINE DIGNITY OF THE PERSON

The Indian when greeting another person devoutly bows to the other with joined hands and says 'Namaste' meaning, 'The God/Deity in me greets the God/Deity in you'. In 1996, the Ramon Magsaysay Awards Foundation (RMAF) granted a prize to an Indian guru, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, for community leadership in villages of Bombay. His community development was premised on the social behavioral imperatives of 'Namaste'. This greeting summarizes a whole ethical or organizing principle of life. It is a greeting that can be reconciled with our basic belief as a Christian that every person is called to live as a child of God.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, *We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. (Sadhana, 1972 p. 30)*. To be conscious of the divine spark, of this divine energy in us, is to be able to relate well with others and with the world. *By understanding the Self, this entire universe is known. (McLaughlin, p. 18)* The Self here is capitalized because it underscores as it were the 'God-self' that should determine human behavior. To be conscious of the spirit-in-us according to Tagore is to win *mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that world-*

ly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and greatness of our soul (*op. cit.*, p. 30). For the Hindu, the path to virtue is to be 'soul conscious', to be attentive to the inner reality as embodied spirit.

There is no mention of God or Deity as such in the Taoist worldview. And yet there is an allusion to the spirit in nature that needs to be understood by intuition and contemplation. It is the understanding of the workings of the spirit in nature that will lead us to the right path of action. The world-view of the Tao has been articulated by Lao Tzu (6th century BC). His classic wisdom is contained in his book, *Tao Tè Ching*, where *Tao* means *The Way* (the way the universe works, the way nature is). If we respect the way of nature, we shall become a person of wisdom, knowing the right path in different spheres, especially in the realm of politics, governance and leadership.

Evolved individuals hold to the Tao

And regard the world as their Pattern. (Wing, R.L., 1986, no. 86)

Joseph Petulla has attempted to convey the powerful conjunction of Christian and Taoist themes in his book titled, *The Tao Tè Ching and the Christian Way*. (1998)

The Taoist worldview like other wisdom writings is replete with paradoxes analogous to the workings in nature and alluded to by contemporary writers when speaking about social transformative processes from the inside out.

## 2. THE HARMONY BETWEEN PERSON, NATURE AND GOD

Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk who had immersed himself in the religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism, observed that in Western science there is a sharp distinction between the material, the psychological, and the spiritual. Not so is the thinking in the Vedas, the most ancient form of Hindu poetry in the world. Bede Griffiths explains, that for instance, 'both the physical and psychological were understood as manifestations of the one supreme Spirit'. (Griffiths 1989, p. 59)

He cites a beautiful verse in the Vedas which illustrates these three aspects of reality. *The fire which is the sun, the fire which is the earth, that fire is in my heart.* (*ibid.*, p. 60) In terms of images, heaven is the spiritual world, earth is the material world, and the human being is the psychological world which stands between the two. Thus the fire used for sacrifice brings the material goods to its source back to heaven. In the Vedic view if we live constantly returning things to their source, then we are living in the harmony, the rhythm, the *rita*, of the universe. (*ibid.*, 61)

That every reality is sacred is the foundation of the moral principle of respect for every human being and all of creation. The principle of respect for life and all life-forms will allow us and the earth to develop organically and spiritually. It will guarantee the sustainability of our planet earth, which is threatened by a too materialistic and mechanical world-view.

Tagore writes of the man-in-the-universe:

India having been in contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realize, to enlarge his consciousness, that there is no such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects. (Tagore, 1972, p. 7)

Then again,

This fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India... With meditation and service, with a regulation of her life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything has a spiritual meaning to her... India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realizing it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace. (*ibid.*)

In the Hindu wisdom there appears no duality between oneself and the world, no division between animate and inanimate.

This view of harmony between the person, nature and God may be gleaned from the following passage from Lao Tzu in *Tao Te Ching*.

Attain the highest openness;  
Maintain the deepest harmony.  
Become a part of All things;  
In this way, I perceive the cycles.  
Indeed, things are numerous;  
But each cycle merges with the source  
Merging with the source is called harmonizing;

This is known as the cycle of destiny. (Tao Te Ching, no. 16 in Wing, R.L.)

The person is a body-mind-spirit unity. A consciousness of this unity in thought and in deed will bring about a sense of wholeness and holiness. This microcosm of the person reflects the interpenetration in the macrocosm of person, the world and God Who is immanent and transcendent.

The world in this context does not stand outside the person, not something that can be considered as just object to be manipulated and exploited; but is forming with the person an integral whole because it, too, is spiritual, sacred and has integrity.

### 3. LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ASCENT TO THE GODHEAD

According to Griffiths, the breakthrough in consciousness to the transcendent Reality called *Brahman* involves the search for the Self, called *Atman*, the inner reality of the human person.

Through the practice of the discipline of the senses and the mind through meditation, a person may reach consciousness in the more subtle realm, into the transpersonal realm. The level of consciousness is the person's ascent to the Godhead. (Griffiths, 1986, pp. 178-203) From the *intellect (buddhi)* to the *great self (mahat)* one reaches cosmic consciousness. Keeping this state in the self, when the still point is reached, is to be at peace. (*ibid.*, p. 176)

#### *A Final Consideration*

These elements of Hindu and Taoist worldviews that have been explored now by scientists like Fritzjof Capra (*The Turning Point*, 1982; *Uncommon Wisdom*, 1988) Ken Wilber (*The Eye of the Spirit*, 1998), Deepak Chopra (*The Seven Spiritual Laws of Leadership*, 1994), Braud, William and Rosemarie Anderson (*Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 1998); Clive Hamilton (*The Mystic Economist*, 1994) and others. It seems that a new cosmic consciousness is leading to a science that is inclusive of the spiritual dimension of the person. Today, there is recognition not just of I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient), not just of E.Q. (Emotional Quotient) but also of S.Q. (Spiritual Quotient). (Wolman, 2001) In his theory of individuation, Jungian psychology was influenced by elements of the Hindu worldview. (Singer 1972, p. xx) Bio-spiritual exercises like Tai-Chi in China, Yoga in India, and Aikido in Japan are moving meditations which tend to integrate body, mind and spirit as well as make the person highly conscious of his/her interconnectivity with the environment and the whole cosmos. The way one breathes is the way to one's life, health and being.

Reflections on human and social development based on the philosophy of the East have come up with interdisciplinary discourses among scientists

– physicists, economists, transpersonal psychologists, theologians who are Hindu scholars, Buddhists and artists with regard to a holistic world-view in the context of the world that needs a new paradigm, a new consciousness of the development process that takes seriously the spiritual dimension of the person.

In 1994 Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson published their book, *Spiritual Politics, Changing the World from the Inside Out* which underscores the role of ageless wisdom in politics and government. While being open to the richness of the Asian religious traditions including Hinduism and Taoism, the reflection on ‘The Human Person in Southeast Asian Politics’ (Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta) may also have to be assessed from the perspective of his rootedness in this ‘inside-out’ organic and spiritual world-view, thus realizing the importance of the inner reality of the person of the politician.

Amidst the darkness of a materialistic and mechanical world-view that we are experiencing at the moment, we are given hope and light that there is the dawn of a mystical and spiritual age (Tuoti, 1997) that will make whole and holy what we have collectively fragmented in the past.

We hope that in and through our Christian Faith, we shall move even more so with trust in the Power of the God-Within-us and among us. I believe that the Infinite within our finite selves is the secret of our effectiveness for bringing about total well-being to humanity and our world.

## REFERENCES

### *Books:*

- Braud, William and Rosemarie Anderson. *Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Honoring Human Experience*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1998, 321 pp.
- Capra. Fritzjof. *Uncommon Wisdom. Conversations with Remarkable People*. New York: Bantam Books. 1988.
- Capra, Fritzjof: *The Turning Point. Science, Society and the Rising Culture*. New York: Bantam Books 1982, 464 pp.
- Chopak, Deepak *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Leadership. A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams*, Amber Allen Publishing. 1994.
- Griffiths, Bede. *A New Vision of Reality. Western Science, Eastern Mysticism and Christian Faith*. London: Harper & Collins. 1989, 304 pp.

- Griffiths, Bede. *Essential Writings*. New York, Orbis Books. 2004, 128 pp.
- Hamilton, Clive. *The Mystic Economist*. Australia. Willow Pack Press. 1994, 203 pp.
- McLaughlin, Gordon and Gordon Davidson. *Spiritual Politics. Changing the World from the Inside Out*. New York: Balantine Books. 1994, 475 pp.
- Luzbetak, Louis. *The Church and Cultures. New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*. 1988, 464 pp.
- Joseph Petulla. *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998, 132 pp.
- Prabhu, Joseph (ed.) *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. Maryknoll, New York: 307 pp.
- Singer, June. *Boundaries of the Soul. The Practice of Jung's Psychology*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday. 1972, 469 pp.
- Siu, R.G. H. *The Tao of Science*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press. 1957, 179 pp.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Selected Essays*. New Delhi: Rupa and Co. 2004. 459 pp.
- Tagore, Rabindranath. *Sadhana. The Realization of Life*. Tucson, Arizona: The Omen Press. 1972, 164, pp.
- Tuoti, Frank, S.J. *The Dawn of a Mystical Age. An Invitation of the Enlightenment*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company. 1997.
- Wilber, Ken. *The Eye of the Spirit, An Integral View for a World Gone Slightly Mad*. Boston and London: Shambala. 1998, 448 pp.
- Wing, R.I. *The Tao of Power. Lao Tzu's Guide to Leadership and Power*. New York: Doubleday. 1986. 23 pp. and 81 passages of *Tao Te Ching*.
- Wolman, Richard. *Thinking with the Soul. Spiritual Intelligence and Why It Matters*. New York. Harmony Books. 2001, 285 pp.
- The Epoch Times, *On How the Chinese Communist Party Destroyed Traditional Culture*, The Jiuping, Part 6, pp. 12-17, November 19, 2004.

*Articles:*

- Johnston, William. *We Need a Revolution*. The Tablet: June 2, 2002, p. 12.
- Ramirez, Mina, *The Moral and Spiritual Renaissance in Asia*, Makatao: Vol. XV:1, 1997, pp. 5-19.

*General Reference:*

- Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993 on Hinduism, pp. 1-17.