

# The Union of Science and Spirituality

Science and spirituality need one another to flourish—one alone is never enough.

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In order to embody the philosophy of elegant simplicity, we need to address the relationship between science and spirituality. Some people think that science and spirituality are polar opposites, but are they? Science is about things which can be measured, and spirituality is about things which cannot be measured. In life, both of these are integrated together. Look at our bodies. We can measure the weight, length, width, structure, and anatomy of the body. But we also have intelligence. How do we measure intelligence? We can do some IQ tests, but we can never really measure how much intelligence we have. Then we have feelings, like love for our friends and family. Can we measure love? So spirituality is about what cannot be measured.

We need to measure what can be measured, but we also need to accept the truth that there are dimensions of life which cannot be measured.

There are scientific theories such as complexity, chaos, Gaia and evolution which come close to spirituality. Quantum physics in particular bridges the gap between meaning and measurement. When you put meaning into quantity, quantity becomes quantum. At quantum level, all separations end. We are all related and connected at the energy level. Thus the meaning of existence is unmanifest and invisible and therefore spiritual. Some of my scientist friends believe that consciousness is close to quantum physics because at the level of quantum mechanics all manifestation is potential. The meaning of consciousness is also the same; there is an unmanifest potential before reality manifests. In the spiritual terminology, we call it consciousness, in scientific terminology, we call it quantum mechanics.

We can measure matter, but we cannot measure meaning. When I write an article, I can say it is eight hundred words and will fit on one page. I can count the number of words, and I can measure how much space it will take, but the meaning of the words and the quality of the writing cannot be measured. I can feel the meaning and sense it, but I cannot measure it. Words have a physical reality, but their meaning

is metaphysical. The law has two aspects: the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Everything has a physical reality and a metaphysical reality. We have the human body and the human spirit. We need matter and we need spirit. They form one unified reality. One cannot exist without the other. There is no separation or dualism between the physical and the metaphysical or between the material and the spiritual.

Science gives us rational, logical, empirical, measurable, and replicable tools and technologies which we need to function well in life. Spirituality gives us love, compassion, generosity, and a sense of mutuality. We need these too.

Without the spiritual dimension of values, vision, ethics, and aesthetics, science can lead us astray. When there are no values to guide it, science ends up producing nuclear weapons. If spirituality guided the actions of scientists, then they would think ten times before inventing weapons of war and other tools of destruction. Why do we have global warming? Because scientists have been working in the interests of the commercial and industrial establishments, without the guidance of spiritual values; that is why their scientific and technological innovations have led to planetary crises such as climate change.

Modern agriculture, for example, is scientific, yet it produces something like 18 percent of greenhouse gases. If agriculture was informed by spiritual values, it would be a very different situation.

Spiritual agriculture such as biodynamic farming, agroecology, and permaculture emphasize the value of the living soil and biodiversity. Whereas industrial “scientific” agriculture values nothing other than the quantity of food produced with the minimum input of labor. Modern agriculture uses combine harvesters, huge tractors, fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides, and genetically engineered seeds because it lacks the spiritual values of reverence for soil and animals. In scientific farming, food is no longer sacred. It is simply a commodity for profit. No wonder that millions of cows, pigs, and chickens are kept in the cruel conditions of factory farms where they never see the light of day in their whole lives. This is just one example of science and technology deprived of a spiritual ethos producing harmful results. We certainly need spiritual values in our agriculture!

Although there are scientists who embrace spirituality and work for the good of all, much of science has been in the service of greed, war, waste, pollution, exploitation, and injustice. This must change if science is to serve the interest and needs of humanity and planet Earth.

Einstein, one of the greatest scientists of the twentieth century, said, “Science without religion is blind, religion without science is lame.” If we have no science, then we limp. We can see what is good, but we cannot implement our vision. Therefore the people of spirit and religion need to embrace science.

People who have developed deep spirituality have often been reluctant to address the problems of the material world. Things are now slowly changing, but for a long time, some societies were good at meditation and yoga, philosophy and poetry, but without scientific research and methodology, they suffered hunger, deprivation, and material poverty. So spirituality without science is truly lame.

Spirituality and religion without science often give rise to fundamentalism. Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or Islamic fundamentalism is born whenever they reject scientific, rational, measured, and logical thinking. Spirituality without empiricism suffers from blind faith. People of blind faith don't see or believe in anything other than what is in their holy book. They take every word in the Bible or the Koran, the Torah or the Gita as the word of God. They think that there is only one truth and that they have that truth. Everybody must follow their truth. They deny the multiplicity and diversity of truths. They become missionaries and work hard to convert people of other religions to

their religion. Of course, there are big-hearted and generous religious people, who embrace a scientific outlook, but they are in a small minority. Institutionalized religions largely suffer from dogmatism, fundamentalism, and exclusivism because they are unwilling to accept and respect the diversity of truths and the diversity of religions.

So science needs spirituality and spirituality needs science. They need each other. And there is no contradiction. There is no conflict between science and spirituality. Science complements spirituality and spirituality complements science. Spirituality give us vision and values. Science gives us tools and technologies. We need both. This is a holistic and inclusive way of thinking in which everything has a place, as long as they are in the right proportion and balance. For example, day and night have the right balance. Even though in summer there are long days and in winter there are long nights, overall there is a balance. The same kind of balance is needed between science and spirituality. In order to achieve this balance, people of faith and scientists all need a shot of humility and generosity.

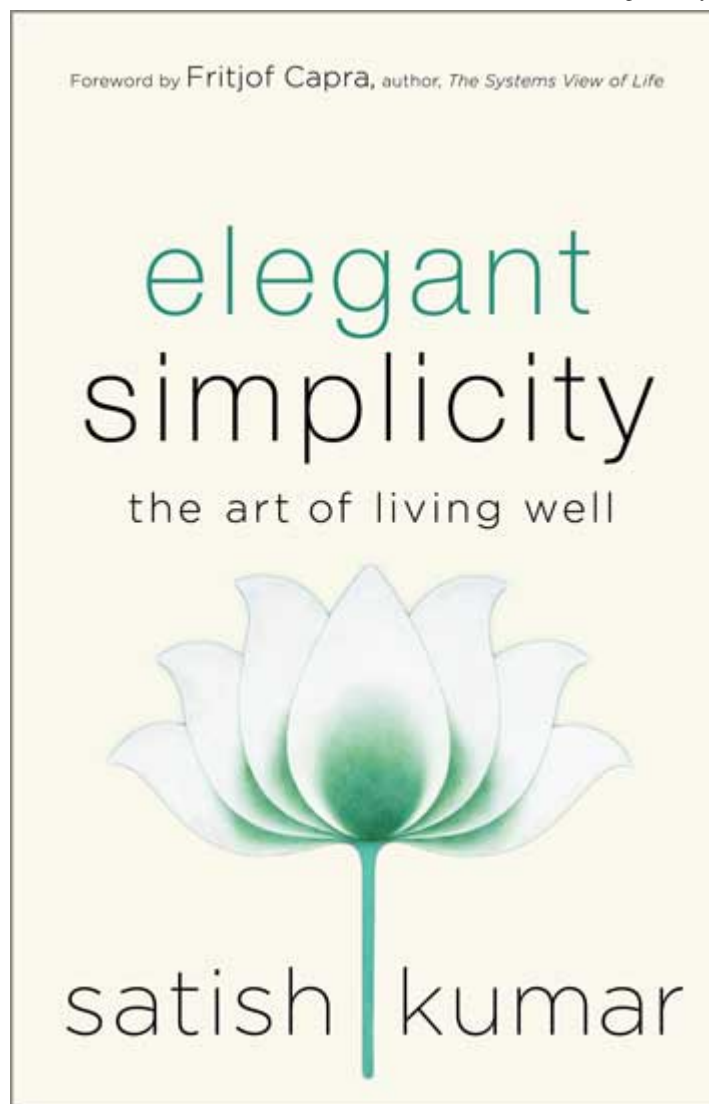
Spirituality and religious experiences have nothing to do with any particular belief system. Believing means closing the mind. The moment I say “I believe in God;” or “I believe in reincarnation;” or “I believe in the

Resurrection;" or "I believe in the virgin birth;" or this, that, or the other, I have closed my mind.

Spirituality is about love, not beliefs. Spiritual seekers are always on a journey, on a pilgrimage, seeking truth and enlightenment. There is no place where they can say "I have found the answer." Spirituality is a process, an exploration, not a destination. The same is true of science, it is an ever-evolving quest.

Scientists search for the truth. They don't say "This is the end, we have arrived at our destination, there is no more research needed." Unfortunately, some scientists do say "Darwin was the last word." They close their minds and become believers. If you become a believer, you stop using your intelligence and your perceptions to learn from the world around you and from the experiences that you have. Then you have left the path of science and the path of spirituality.

Through science, as well as through spirituality, we are always looking for new insights and new wisdom, which can free us from dogmas, rigidities, and fixed beliefs. Science and spirituality, physics and metaphysics, chemistry and compassion, mind and matter can and must dance together.



Excerpted from [\*Elegant Simplicity: The Art of Living Well\*](#) by Satish Kumar, New Society Press, 2019.