SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

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Anyone who has read widely, who is familiar with the writings of men living in past centuries as well as contemporaries, knows that accurate knowledge regarding the workings of both physical and psychological nature has increased rather than declined over the centuries, and many an assumption from centuries ago is now regarded as obsolete and inapplicable to our present understanding of things. Indeed, much of what was once common opinion among philosophers and holy men of an earlier period, is now viewed as archaic.

How unfortunate, therefore, that intelligent men who ponder the things of the Spirit tend to place such unquestioning faith in the authoritarian utterings of those seers who lived in very ancient times, or in a permanent literary legacy containing the purported utterances of such men! In every lasting religious tradition, there is a faithful reliance on the absolute verity of writings that originated in the minds of men whose experience and learning was excellent in the time that they wrote several millennia ago, but who can no longer be regarded as well-informed by our present standards.

Spiritual understanding is frequently exempted from this kind of critical thinking because, it is argued, spiritual realities, being eternal, are not affected by changing views concerning the psychological or physical world. Yet we must recognize that the written texts handed down as religious documents contain not only the personal perspectives of their authors, but also reference events that modern empirical scrutiny shows to have been sorely misapprehended, or simply erroneously reported.

It would be appropriate therefore for sincere researchers in each of the religious traditions to carefully re-examine even their most revered ancient books, with the understanding and realization that these holy books were written in a time when the world, let alone the distant galaxies, was little understood, when the notions firmly held regarding creation, cosmology, human history, and the laws of nature were yet simplistic, primitive, and often false. I am not suggesting, as extreme elements among the secular materialists of today do, that we should throw out all of what is good and true along with the bad and false in the various religious texts; I am only suggesting that we re-evaluate our spiritual teachings in a way that better satisfies our modern intellectual integrity, and better represents our present
understandings. Much of our religious past is profoundly valuable; and sadly, much of it is valuable only as an historical record chronicling the many speculative and imaginative accounts left by men of past ages.

Real spiritual experience can profoundly challenge one’s earlier perspective, and in the search for a perspective that makes rational sense of our experience, we may be introduced to various spiritual traditions whose roots date from a distant and obscure past, and whose tenets, though absurd on their face, are well fortified by the ardor and certainty of generations of the faithful. But antiquity doesn’t guarantee accuracy. And doctrines long reverenced are not necessarily true. In the final analysis, it is not scripture that forms the foundation of our spiritual knowledge, but the experience of our own direct inner vision. And it is upon that spiritual vision we must rely. Every one of us is capable, with the right amount of deliberate effort, study, and contemplation, of experiencing the wisdom, love, and joy of the one divine Spirit, and of knowing it as the sole foundation of our being.

*Spiritual vision* is not obtained by means of the physical eyes, or any of the other senses, nor through the imaginative or psychic faculty referred to as “the mind’s eye”; but rather through a yet subtler faculty arising only in the higher reaches of contemplative concentration, which is usually referred to as “the spiritual eye” or “the eye of contemplation”. The spiritual eye “sees”, but without the physical sense of eyesight or the deliberate projection of mindsight. The individual’s interior awareness is lifted beyond his/her mental field of awareness, as well as beyond the awareness of worldly perceptions, as that awareness is transformed into a timeless, spaceless awareness of identity with the limitless and eternal Consciousness from which the universe emanates. That awareness transcends, not only the senses and the imaginative faculty, but the sense of self, or egocentric identity, as well, relieving the individual of the sense of a separate identity, so that his awareness is of the all-inclusive One. The individual knows this eternal Consciousness as his own, since there is no separate perceiver by which to see this Consciousness as other.

It is this unitive experience that we must consider the only valid knowledge, proof and confirmation of the divine Self, God, or Spirit. No other kind of vision is appropriate to this kind of knowledge. It has long been accepted as axiomatic that reason, in the form of philosophy or metaphysics, is powerless to provide a credible proof (knowledge) of the existence of God, or the divine Self, since it is limited to mental conceptions only; but God has been “seen” by many in the unitive vision by the eye of Spirit.
This unitive ‘vision’ bears with it a unique kind of clarity, possessing an unmistakable and indelible stamp of truth, that does not accompany the mere physical or psychic kinds of vision. If it fails of the established standard for “knowing”, then it must itself replace that standard, for it is the very essence of knowing. However, insofar as I know, it is a knowledge that is non-transmittable, and therefore undemonstrable. It may be verbally described, but that scarcely constitutes the actual ‘knowledge’ itself. It is a knowledge obtainable only via the eye of Spirit. It should be added that the unitive vision must never be regarded by its recipient as a matter of pride, for it is not a deed to which the individual may lay claim. Such experience is brought about entirely by the One and only in the absence of the individual ego.

The individual person is not meritorious in experiencing the unitive vision; rather, it is only when he disappears that illumination occurs. Just as a dream-character in a dream is dissolved in the waking consciousness of the dreamer, the sense of separate selfhood (ego) is likewise dissolved in the wakeful Consciousness of the One in whom that illusory ego arises. The One alone has absolute being, and alone has the power of self-revelation. It is that One who is seen, and it is that One who sees Himself in that unitive vision. Ultimately, no other may truly be said to exist but that One who exists absolutely and forever.

Many have experienced that unitive vision who never sought it. It comes, at times, when least expected, during moments of introspective reflection, or when viewing a restful scene, or while feeling especially content or joyful. If the individual so illumined is fortunate, that unitive vision will take up perhaps twenty minutes of his life. But, for the rest of his life, his mind will hover about that vision, as a moth about a flame, in search of a continual clarification of the illuminative understanding obtained in that fleeting vision. It is in this way that he revisits the unitive vision, basking in the contemplation of the One who illumined his heart.

It is there he finds the adoration, the bliss, and the sweet wisdom which that Self revealed to him, ever living and ever new. It is not just a memory, but it is a lasting presence in his life, benefiting him every moment, and shedding as well some little benefit to others whom he touches with his words. That vision is a lifelong treasure, filling his mind with a never-failing fountain of love and happiness and the brightest consolations of wisdom. Though to the world he appears empty and alone, he possesses within himself the fullness of the universe, and his solitude is the blissful aloneness of the only One.

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