

HUMAN PURPOSE AND DESTINY

*'There is a divinity that shapes our ends,
rough-hew them how we will.'*

Shakespeare

The Cosmic Plan and Humanity

Since the dawn of recorded history, human beings have pondered the most fundamental questions of life: Who am I?, Why am I here?, What is life all about? Throughout the ages, philosophers, scientists, mystics and ordinary people have contemplated these great questions and wondered about the origin and nature of the universe, the meaning and purpose of human life on earth, and the place of humanity in the great scheme of things. Professor of philosophy Jacob Needleman explores these timeless questions and their relevance to our own individual lives:

The universe? From where did it come? How? When? By what energies did what we see only in tiny glimpses come into being? – the universe containing infinities of organized, living worlds, earths, suns, galaxies – cells, organic life, atmosphere – purpose, directions, and lawful order, fundamental forces at work everywhere and in everything – all of which emerged out of what? By what greater mind? By what intelligence did it all appear, an intelligence that embraces even the automatisms of Darwinian evolution on the ground of which everything from a mosquito to a Buddha appears on this earth? In such a case, self-knowledge and experience would not be a passive recording for manipulation of impressions from without, but a seminal generation of realities within realities – just as in any organism the *telos* or purpose of the whole generates the elements and organs and instrumentalities that maintain the inner world of the organism. And man? Of all creatures we know of on Earth, the intelligent self-regulating and self-creating force would have the added attribute that completes the structure of the universe we know – and that added attribute is conscious intelligence, consciousness as a force of nature, a universal energy. Who, looking at “the starry sky above and the moral law within” can really maintain that it all “just happened”? (1)

Traditional spiritual teachings assert that the purpose of humanity is evolutionary – to create a “bridge” along with the rest of creation and to understand the origin and purpose of the human race. Spiritual development creates the capacity to *know* directly (and not through the senses or intellect) both the meaning of human life and the inner significance of ordinary events. Psychiatrist Arthur Deikman: “Only with the knowledge that perceptual development brings can human beings know the meaning of human existence, both in terms of the particular events of a person’s life and the destiny of the human race.”

Innovative thinkers such as Ervin Laszlo have also speculated on the existential meaning of humanity in the cosmic drama: "The ultimate purpose of human existence is to consciously foster and further the transmission of the underlying and all-encompassing intelligence of the cosmos into the universe." And, scientific researcher Christopher Hills opines: "The purpose of life is to evolve consciousness until it becomes one with the light which created it."

The search for our true identity as human beings and the nature of ultimate reality is at the heart of the discovery of our purpose and destiny on earth. "As a plant grows toward the light, so does humanity yearn for Spirit and greater awareness, because, like a plant's inherent capacity to receive and respond to light, there is a teleological design at work in us from the start."

There *is* a core truth to which we can penetrate – an Ultimate Answer which alone gives purpose, meaning, and direction to our lives and our search. That truth is accessible to each of us on the basis of direct experience, without need for intermediaries. In order to attain that truth, we must ascend in consciousness; we must personally evolve through our own efforts. And, finally, if many individuals evolve, the result could well be a collective change of society, a transformation of the species, a radical change in human nature. (2)

In *The Meeting of Science and Spirit*, educator and author John White describes a two-way cosmic process in which Spirit manifests the physical universe and humanity reaches for Spirit in order to actualize its divine birthright through self-realization or enlightenment:

Humanity is involved in a mighty evolutionary drama of awakening to God, to the Creator, to the Great Mystery. A two-way process is at work/play behind that self-discovery in which the lower world reaches upward while the higher world reaches downward to encourage the lower to keep reaching. On the one hand, we recognize something beyond ourselves, something mysterious which gestures to us, calls us to attain deeper understanding, a greater scope of action, the possibility of becoming more than we are . . . On the other hand, that mysterious something reaches to us from what has traditionally been perceived as "on high." It descends in its majesty and power to beckon us toward it by revealing itself in ever-greater degrees through visions, dreams, imagination, and inspired moments of discovery and creativity. Its traditional name is Spirit. That involuntary evolutionary process is the mystery at the heart of creation. (3)

The meaning and purpose of human life on Earth has also been placed in an evolutionary perspective in which the sense of a personal ego is transcended for a higher state of being. Human history, both individually and collectively, is a process of ascent to a higher level of consciousness and being: "Humanity is proceeding from a pre-personal state of simple animal consciousness through the personalized state of self-reflective, egoic consciousness to the transpersonal state of self-transcendence or consciousness beyond ego." John White:

The long evolutionary ascent of the human species can be described thus far as a journey from a state of unconscious ignorance to conscious knowing. At this point in our history humanity is characterized by a state of consciousness called ego. But if evolution is still going on, what might come next in our journey? From a spiritual perspective the answer is clear: The purpose of the human journey is to regain heaven, our lost estate. Heaven is union with God. Its opposite is the illusion of separateness. The self to be transcended is ego. What is ego? It is essentially *bound* consciousness. It is the notion of separate selfhood, personal autonomy, independence from the nurturing matrix of society and environment which supports individualized life. It is limited identity. It is self-conceived as being apart from God or ultimate Reality or Cosmic Wholeness. (4)

Gurdjieff taught that human beings, through self-study and conscious inner work, could develop to a level where they were a complete reflection of the spiritual dimensions of the greater cosmos: "Man is an image of the world. He was created by the same laws which created the whole of the world. By knowing and understanding himself, he will know and understand the whole world, all the laws that create and govern the world. And at the same time by studying the world and the laws that govern the world he will learn and understand the laws that govern him."

By simultaneously studying the fundamental laws that govern both the universe and human physiological and psychological functioning, a comprehensive understanding of the different planes of reality and our relationship to them, can be developed: "The laws are the same everywhere and on all planes. But the very same laws manifesting themselves in different worlds, that is, under different conditions, produce different phenomena." A fully developed human being reflects the structure of the universe in both a material and metaphysical sense:

All the matter of the world that surrounds us, the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, our own bodies – everything is permeated by all the matters that exist in the universe. There is no need to study and investigate the Sun in order to discover the matter of the solar world: this matter exists in ourselves and is the result of the division of our atoms. In the same way we have in us the matter of all other worlds. Man is, in the full sense of the term, a 'miniature universe'; in him are all the matters of which the universe consists; the same forces, the same laws that govern the life of the universe, operate in him; therefore, in studying man we can study the whole world, just as in studying the world we can study man. But a complete parallel between man and the world can only be drawn if we take 'man' in the full sense of the word, that is, a man whose inherent powers are developed. An undeveloped man, a man who has not completed the course of his evolution, cannot be taken as a complete picture or plan of the universe – he is an unfinished world. (5)

In his thought-provoking book *The People of the Secret*, Ernest Scott proposes that human evolution and history are directed by the efforts of an Intelligence which is in harmony with and responsible for the implementation of a 'cosmic plan.' The mandate of this Cosmic Intelligence is to raise the level of consciousness of humanity in general, and of suitable individuals specifically. Far from being random, the evolution of life on earth represents the unfolding of a vast, panoramic plan for humanity and the natural world, with cosmic goals stretching across millions of years. These evolutionary gains are in harmony with corresponding growth on a planetary and galactic scale beyond the earth.

Conscious 'interventions' designed to inject a developmental impulse into the historical process are discontinuous. "These 'occasions' relate to the fortuitous presence of energies on a much vaster scale and perhaps from outside the planet. It is as if a solar wind blows on the earth at intervals." Scott further elaborates:

History is not the equilibrant of chance and hazard. It does not just happen. The script for the long human story was written by intelligences much greater than our own. Certain gains and goals for mankind – and for the biosphere of earth – must be attained within certain intervals of Earth time. These gains are essential for the balance and growth of the solar system of which the Earth is a part. The solar system may itself be subject to a similar pressure in the interest of the galaxy of which it is a part. The direction, speed and end of this process is "the Will of God." The Will of God is the aspiration of Divinity that the universal process shall proceed in a certain way to a certain end while leaving open the possibility that it may elect to proceed quite otherwise to quite else. Very high intelligences direct the evolution of the universe in an attempt to ensure that the Divine aspiration shall be realized. These intelligences are coercive in proportion as their material is unconscious. They are persuasive in proportion as their material is conscious. (6)

Scott presents a picture of a universe in which free will and determinism coexist. "The life of humanity is subject to direction by an Energy or Intelligence above – but not infinitely above – the level of humanity itself. Such direction is implemented at the level of life by human agents: that is, by exceptional men and women attuned to and partly identified with the level above." These specially selected individuals participate in a cosmic process that has been called the "Magnum Opus" or "Great Work." This spiritual effort is equivalent to a vertical ascent to a higher level of consciousness as opposed to a gradual rise with the evolutionary tide:

The universe is a gradient of consciousness and on this gradient the earth occupies a low level. Its highest raw material is mankind. Mankind is collectively unconscious of the evolutionary process of which he is a part and he is subject therefore to a determinism approaching one hundred percent. Even so, the direction imposed on mankind is only relatively coercive. Because of the high energies which are potential in him, man may not be compulsively

directed. Means have to be employed which do not outrage the integrity of his potential nature. This is achieved by arranging a bias in favour of those situations which contain developmental possibilities and by limiting man's *opportunities* for making involuntary choices. About this line there may be marginal interplay of determinism and free will . . . Responsibility for this process on Earth lies with an Intelligence which has been called the Hidden Directorate. No grounds exist for an opinion as to whether this Intelligence is, in any sense, comprehensible to man, a single or composite Intelligence, or whether it is discarnate or corporeal. Below this level, certain members of ordinary humanity, whom qualitative changes have taken place, are in touch with the Directorate and may at intervals share its consciousness. This group of advanced human individuals is the reality behind all legends of "masters" and "initiates" from earliest historical times to the present. (7)

Certain spiritual teachings propose that there is a holographic design or pattern in life and the natural environment which is imperceptible to most people. However, it is possible to sense and, to some extent, harmonize and work with this archetypal pattern. "The Design, of its very nature, excludes indoctrination or forcible direction of any kind. Man is not compelled to evolve; he may only be shown the evolutionary road and assisted along it when, of his own volition, he takes this option. When he rejects it, the overseeing power can only work to mitigate the consequences – sometimes over centuries – and to amplify the effects of a right choice whenever this is made." In *Journeys with a Sufi Master*, H.B.M. Dervish suggests that humanity is an integral part and conscious instrument of a 'cosmic plan':

Sufis claim that there is an evolutionary plan for the planet Earth and that history, seemingly haphazard and random, is not the blind, accidental process it seems. The evolution of organic life was supervised, and in the same way, the human race continues to be guided, encouraged or restrained into alignment with a universal plan. The Sufis, who have been known by different names in different ages, are said to be agents of this Supervision and, to the extent which is necessary for their ministry, they are given access to the plan. The plan is known as the *Naqsh*, the design . . . Sufi influence on history has never been by physical or mental duress, and is almost always indirect, little seen and tangential. Promising laymen (known as Receivers) may be influenced to start an organization and may do so under the impression that the idea was their own. Sufi experiences indicate a huge number of movements for human welfare have been unobtrusively guided in this way. Sometimes notable figures in such organizations have suspected that certain sympathizers, advisers – sometimes philanthropists – have been in some way 'not ordinary.' Historically, for example, the Saracen armies which came through North Africa to invade Spain in 711 A.D. were accompanied by a Sufi presence and it was this which, through the cultural centres of Fez, Cordoba, Seville, Granada and elsewhere helped arrange for the renewal of learning in a Europe which was emerging from the Dark Ages. The migration from Europe to the New World was similarly 'accompanied.' (8)

Self-Knowledge and Inner Development

The world's great spiritual traditions, teachings and teachers provide a path to a higher state of consciousness and being that reflect the next stage of human evolution and development:

Through their experience of higher consciousness, our mystics, saints, sages, and spiritual geniuses were able to foresee across the centuries the vast sweep of human destiny – a climb from darkness to illumination, from savagery to a godlike condition, from blindness to “the light which lights the world.” They were able to see the human race poised midway between the apes and the angels, ready to become fully the gods-in-hiding we are now . . . We have the necessary operating instructions and technical manuals to do it in the form of sacred scriptures and spiritual teachings of holy men and women throughout history who have discovered the sparkle of Spirit within themselves, this evolutionary potential, and recognized it as a gift from the Creator. Those teachings and those examples have at their center the development of a new and higher state of consciousness – God-consciousness, the “peace which passeth understanding,” the direct experience of divinity dwelling in us, now and forever, creating us, preserving us, urging us to ever higher states of being. (9)

Gurdjieff taught that each human being is potentially a complete cosmos with the possibility of developing and transforming himself to a higher level of existence through a process of ‘inner transmutation.’ By conscious inner work on oneself (‘conscious labour and intentional suffering’) one can learn how to serve a higher purpose, rather than remaining only as an unconscious mechanism for the transfer of energy for the use of other domains of the natural world.

Higher knowledge of our place in the cosmos is transmitted to humanity through authentic spiritual teachings. This practical knowledge of human transformation develops self-knowledge and harmony with the spiritual dimensions of existence through conscious effort and the awakening of higher levels of consciousness. Jacob Needleman:

Higher knowledge exists. Not only does it bring us facts of an entirely different nature and scale than can be brought by external empiricism, external experience, but such knowledge also is and can become a force of self-creation by which worlds are born and live and die – and among such worlds are we human beings, such as we are meant to be. We need a new language, or perhaps the old language carrying the current of being, in order to begin to understand the experiences that are granted to us as human beings, experiences that need to be cultivated, intentionally and precisely, in order to serve as a force not only for self-knowledge but for self-transformation. We know there are experiences that transform us in a moment – moments that are then forgotten or that

depend on infrequent accident. But what if we could become more available to such experiences, live in a way that could invite them more into our lives? What if we could, in Gurdjieff's words, remember ourselves always and everywhere. The question remains: There exist in our lives experiences of oneself that need to be understood as a call. But a call . . . to what? And a call *from what?* (10)

The foundation of all spiritual teachings is self-knowledge, sometimes termed 'inner empiricism.' Basic human experience, rather than scientific empiricism, is the raw material or ore that needs to be refined in the alchemical process of spiritual development. "Through inner empiricism, knowledge about the universe and man is obtained of a kind and with a content that is inaccessible to modern science."

In the vast realm of the inner world of man there exists, in miniature as it were, the entire great world around and above us, the entire universal order. The dominance of the school of external empiricism is based on the assumption that man is only a tiny fragment of the whole of nature and the universal world. But what if it were otherwise? What if human beings were in some real sense unique creations containing in their essential being all the laws and elements, all the forces and energies – from the most conscious to the most inert – that are at play in the great universe? If that were so, then self-knowledge would be – could be – far, far more than information about our psychological moods, emotions, memories, thoughts and behavior. Self-knowledge would be far more than the results of looking at ourselves from "outside," as it were – that is, from our everyday conceptual mind by which we try to organize the world as it is received by our senses. If a human being were really as it was understood in very ancient times, a microcosm, a miniature universe, then self-knowledge not only would be the knowledge of reality so longed for in the hopes and dreams of science, but also could be a means itself of inner self-creation – inner self-creation parallel in its way to the creation of worlds that takes place in the universe itself. (11)

A fully developed and realized human being has the possibility and capacity to embody the higher levels of cosmic energy inherent in the universe: "As human beings we can know that a single creative energy connects everything and that we are integral to it. We are one with the Whole."

At the highest level of human development, according to Indian philosophy, the light of consciousness can be expressed through the balance or equilibrium of the three creative *gunas* (primary qualities or modes of nature): *rajas* (energy), *tamas* (inertia) and *sattva* (intelligence). When these are balanced and in harmony an individual can creatively manifest himself in all aspects of life: "Such a being is the enjoyer of all the worlds, from the earthly experience of good food, material beauty, sex, etc., to the highest octaves of spiritual consciousness."

To such a one the whole creation is the body of God, and matter and spirit become one cosmic vibration of AUM.”

The concept of a ‘human being as a microcosm’ refers to a person who has fully developed and harmonized all aspects of himself – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual – through the refinement of consciousness. In *The Third Striving* Keith Buzzell, a student of Gurdjieff’s Fourth Way teaching, writes: “Man becomes truly an image of the Megalocosmos if he evolves to the level of having a Real I with a triune ‘nature’ of higher intellect (third brain), emotional being (second brain) and physical body (first brain) in a true harmonious relationship.”

Human beings have a special role, by virtue of our capacity for consciousness, but we do not necessarily fulfill it. While the body is a well-functioning cosmos, at least for a time, the psyche generally is not. Our inner lives are buffeted here and there by random associations and reactions to external stimuli. We start out with a particular purpose, and wind up creating the opposite effect of what we intended. A perceived criticism changes our mood for the day. We tend to live in an inner chaos of daydreams, partially digested notions, and half formulated plans. But the possibility exists for the development of attention, awareness, and intentionality, for the growth of presence . . . In the end a finer body of attention, of presence, can exist within the physical body. It has all the characteristics of another cosmos: it is relatively independent, self-contained, and selectively permeable to the outside. While the nature of the materiality of this entity is unclear, for some this is the soul, which can exist independently of the body if it is sufficiently formed. This body of attention and awareness may play a different role from the physical body in the larger cosmoses of which it is a part. The physical body is part of the ecology of the earth, transforming biochemical substances; the soul is part of the ecology of consciousness, transforming perceptions. The real meaning of coming home to God may be the establishment of a home in oneself, which permits one to share in, and contribute to, the universal consciousness. (12)

It is important to emphasize that the idea of ‘man as a microcosm’ only refers to those human beings who are fully developed and conscious in terms of spiritual knowledge and qualities; to those who have travelled and completed the path of inner transformation in the fullest sense. Jacob Needleman offers a sober reflection on this important point:

What does it mean that [the universe] is in man? And not only in man as separate processes in all their variety, but as a cosmos, an ordered whole under the rule of a ladder of governing, lawful intelligence? The response seems clear: In whatever sense and whatever way all this is in man, it is not in *my* life or in *my* awareness. I, this individual person, pursue my life nowhere near an awareness in myself of this incredible spectrum of time, force and structure, not to mention the intelligence that governs it from without and within. This realization is the key to the idea of the microcosm. And it is precisely this key that is missing or

unemphasized in almost every account of it that we may come upon. Man is a microcosm, but *I am not that man.* (13)

Conscious Attention, Presence and Action

The transformation of a human being to a higher state of consciousness and the creation of a stable inner unity requires the production of a finer psychic energy, through inner work and the development of conscious attention:

There is something about the body that is absolutely essential to the development of man's possibilities, of why we are here on earth. If we are on earth for a reason, for a purpose, then the body must be there to serve that purpose. Here we are faced with the age-old drama of human freedom. Man is free, which means there is a certain freedom that makes it possible to become what we are meant to be. It has to do with the possible freedom of our attention, which is perhaps the only free element in human beings. Such as we are, the possibility of human freedom exists in the attention, and that can carry an influence down into our bodies and into the life of the earth. We become instruments of God. And in the process, we become truly human. (14)

Spiritual teachings throughout the world stress that human beings have a unique role and purpose in the universal order which is dependent on the development of a refined quality of conscious attention and awareness: "The universe is ordered and aligned in the mysteriously perfect intelligibility that is given to the human mind to know and the human soul to incarnate in its freely chosen act of attention." Jacob Needleman:

Wherever the process of cosmic creation is taking place, there is, and must be, a specifically human energy, filling as it were, the stages and steps in the descent and manifestation of what it is that originally emanates from the Source. It is at these everywhere-appearing junctures in the cosmic and planetary world that Man is created and needed as the microcosmic God, the "image and likeness of God," whose work it is to "make straight the ways of the Lord." Man must choose; that power and gift is his essence. And the instrument, the principal instrument of his choice is his uniquely human attention. But as he is now, man on earth is a being without Attention. His body, the cells and tissues of his body obey only the attention of the animal or the plant or the mineral within him. Man's being, as he is now, cannot obey his mind; it is his mind that obeys his body . . . One of the names of God is Attention, the Attention that fills the world and the universe and that Man is created to incarnate in himself so that he can freely obey and be as God in the created world of his own body and therefore manifest toward man and nature what is needed from him. This means that it is the essence of Man to incarnate the highest energy of the universe. (15)

In many of the world's spiritual traditions, the state of consciousness characterized by awareness and presence is said to be the master key to unlocking our latent human potential; the point demarcating the intersection between the phenomenal and spiritual worlds: "This presence is like a passport to greater life. Presence is our connection to that greater Being to which we belong, but which is often buried beneath mundane concerns, bodily desires, emotional disturbances, and mental distractions. Through knowledge, practice and understanding, this presence can be awakened." In *Living Presence*, Kabir Helminski speaks to the importance of presence in spiritual development:

Presence signifies the quality of *consciously being here*. It is the activation of a higher level of awareness that allows all our other human functions – such as thought, feeling, and action – to be known, developed and harmonized. This presence is the way in which we occupy space, as well as how we flow and move. Presence shapes our self-image and emotional tone. Presence determines the degree of our alertness, openness and warmth. Presence decides whether we leak and scatter our energy or embody and direct it. Presence is the human self-awareness that is the end result of the evolution of life on this planet. Human presence is not merely quantitatively different from other forms of life; humanity represents a new form of life, of concentrated spiritual energy sufficient to produce will. With will, the power of conscious choice, human beings can formulate intentions, transcend their instincts and desires, educate themselves, and steward the natural world. (16)

Higher levels of consciousness enhance the quality of attention and presence, thereby opening up the possibility of connecting with deeper levels of reality. Spiritual voyager James George: "Only when I am fully present is it possible for a human being to be united with the Source of All, and be the vehicle for the action of a higher force in our world." And in *Markings*, Dag Hammarskjöld writes:

"Consciousness emptied of all content,
In restful harmony –
This happiness is here and now,
In the eternal cosmic moment,
A happiness in you – but not yours."

With a developed level of consciousness, it is possible to control and direct one's attention, being aware of what attracts and moves it moment by moment. Kabir Helminski: "It is not until we come to true consciousness that we find a capacity that allows a wide field of awareness and thus a global comprehensiveness to our perception and state of being. True consciousness opens us to wholeness, allowing a total experience of body, thought and emotion."

Self-realization leads to a transformation of one's total being – both inner awareness and outer behaviour – and a commitment to devoted service to the world. Sri Aurobindo, the great 20th century Indian sage, believed that individual spiritual development foreshadows the evo-

lutionary future of the human race, as expressed by higher qualities such as unconditional love, compassion, empathy, insight and mystical states of consciousness. John White highlights the importance of humility and selfless service as concomitants of self-realization:

The true response to self-realization is humility. The true response is also selfless service – the behavioral reflection of unconditional love. When you realize your true Self, you automatically respond to the call of humanity. Thus, the enlightened are more involved in human society than any other group is, even though they may live retiringly or reclusively, because they alone see the truth, beauty, and love at the heart of existence. They alone live in accord with that perception to help others change consciousness and thereby discover the essential perfection of all things. Purpose, meaning, direction in life, understanding, happiness are what all people are searching for, however ignorantly. And that is what the enlightened seek to help others find, patiently, humbly, lovingly, without concern for reward or recognition, status or power (all of which imply an “other”) because ultimately it is all being done for oneself. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” (17)

One of the most significant consequences of inner development is an enhanced social awareness and full engagement with all aspects of life. The importance of a holistic, integral vision of life is stressed by Allan Combs in *The Radiance of Being*: “We are compelled to broaden our notions of what it is to live an integral life, to include our personal relationships with others as well as our styles of participating in the social and natural worlds around us. We can no longer live spiritual lives that are detached from the human and natural worlds in which we move. Nor can we engage in wise political action without the inner compass that comes only with spiritual development and insight.”

Human beings, both individually and collectively, have the possibility of transformation and expansion of consciousness through conscious evolution, leading to self-transcendence and an enlightened state of being which regards humanity as one organic whole. Such an evolutionary advance has the potential of creating a new world culture, based on the perennial wisdom articulated by spiritual traditions throughout the ages. It would embody life-affirming values such as equality, peace, harmony, freedom, tolerance and compassionate action and service. “Changing consciousness changes thought; changing thought changes behaviour; and changing behaviour changes society. Personal evolution becomes social evolution. By changing yourself, you help to change the world.” Only a transformation of consciousness will allow humanity to discover the knowledge, practices and wisdom to meet the many challenges facing the world.

Some contemporary thinkers believe that the evolutionary process is now developing a new stage in the human journey. John White: “A new global society will be created, a civilization founded on love and the perennial wisdom of sacred traditions. The change of consciousness underlying this passage involves the transcendence of ego and the recognition of the unity of life in all its kingdoms – mineral, plant, animal, human and spirit.” As one’s own spiritual life

matures and deepens it is realized on every plane of reality. White presents a useful schematic map of these levels of reality (18):

- In *physical* terms, spirituality is recognizing the miraculous nature of matter and the creative source behind the mystery of matter.
- In *biological* terms, spirituality is realizing that a divine intelligence underlies all life-change and that such change is evolving all creation to ever greater degrees of wholeness in order to perfectly express itself.
- In *psychological* terms, spirituality is discovering within yourself the ultimate source of meaning and happiness, which is love.
- In *sociological* terms, spirituality is giving selfless service to others, regardless of race, creed, color, gender, caste, or nationality.
- In *ecological* terms, spirituality is showing respect for all the kingdoms in the community of life – mineral, vegetable, animal, human, spirit, and angelic.
- In *cosmological* terms, spirituality is being at one with the universe, in tune with the infinite, flowing with the Tao.
- In *theological* terms, spirituality is seeing God in all things, all events, and all circumstances, indwelling as infinite light and unconditional love, and seeing all things, events, and circumstances in God as the matrix or infinite ocean in which the universe occurs.

A spiritually-developed consciousness recognizes the interdependence of humanity with the cosmos – both are co-creators of a mutually supporting destiny. “The grand theme of history is the evolution of consciousness: a story of ever-more-complex forms of life coming into physical being in order to express more fully the consciousness behind existence itself.”:

Our primary task as citizens of Earth is to attune ourselves spiritually with Life – with the processes of the planet and the cosmos – and thereby understand that, if we are at the end of a cycle, we are being given an occasion to grow, to evolve, to transform ourselves on the basis of deeper understanding and wider vision . . . To the awakened mind, every experience is a blessing, even situations commonly labelled misfortunate or even tragedy, disaster, catastrophe, cataclysm. The attuned consciousness will receive all it needs, and more, from a loving universe whose whole purpose is to nurture the evolution of organisms like us to a higher state of being. (19)

Human beings can consciously participate in the evolution of consciousness within the universe. By embracing values and qualities such as unity, empathy, compassion and service, we can be part of a universal co-evolving process which gives meaning and purpose to human existence: “Our essential nature is identical to the essential nature of the cosmos – pure consciousness, or love, or spirit. We are here to access, embody, and transmit this divine consciousness into the world until material reality is made sacred.” In *The Intelligence of the Cosmos*, Ervin Laszlo writes:

The sacredness of being human is that we each have a role in bringing the unfinished material reality into greater coherence, and thus completion. If enough localized consciousnesses awake on this planet we can catalyze a localized planetary field into conscious awareness. That is, a planetary matrix is sufficiently prepared to receive, “bring in,” the greater consciousness pervasive in the cosmos . . . In this case we are each a conscious agent of cosmic realization and immanence. We each have an obligation in our existence on this planet to raise our individual, localized expressions of consciousness. In doing so, we both infect and inspire others in our lives to raise theirs, as well as reflecting back our conscious contribution into the source That Is. In this way, we can act as both citizens of the cosmos as well as caretakers for the sacred cosmic order. This sacred cosmic order informs us that our reality is not a static state but an active, fluid realm that makes demands on us. We are on a path of completion – of conscious completion and communion – that is the eternal path of the sacred. Through this sacred journey of completion, we connect and commune with everything else in our reality matrix – and *beyond*. We can achieve this through our small acts of conscious participation, and regain our communion with the cosmos. (20)

Expanded Consciousness

Both Eastern and Western thinkers have described the evolution of human consciousness as passing through a sequence of stages from the more primitive (archaic, magical, mythical) to more subtle (intuitive, archetypal, holistic), culminating in the highest state of consciousness termed ‘superconsciousness’ (Sri Aurobindo), ‘integral consciousness’ (Jean Gebser) or ‘ultimate consciousness’ (Ken Wilber). In *Science and the Akashic Field*, Ervin Laszlo speculates about the next evolution of human consciousness:

Consciousness evolution is from the ego-bound to the transpersonal form. If this is so, it is a source of great hope. Transpersonal consciousness is open to more of the information that reaches our brain than the consciousness still dominant today. This could have momentous consequences. It could produce greater empathy among people, greater sensitivity to animals and plants, and to the entire biosphere. It could create subtle contact with the rest of the cosmos. When a critical mass of humans evolves to the transpersonal level of consciousness a higher civilization is likely to emerge, with deeper solidarity and a higher sense of justice and responsibility. Will such a consciousness-evolution actually come about? This we cannot say: evolution is never fully predictable. But if humankind does not destroy its life-supporting environment and decimate its numbers, the dominant consciousness of a critical mass will evolve from the ego-bound to the transpersonal stage. And this quantum leap in the evolution of consciousness will catalyze a quantum leap in the evolution of civilization as well. (21)

Albert Einstein recognized that the future of the human race lay in the transformation from the sense of an isolated self to a deeper, expanded level of awareness that encompasses all living beings:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. (22)

Both modern science and traditional spiritual teaching support a new, comprehensive vision of reality that encompasses an expanded awareness of the nature of consciousness and the meaning and purpose of human existence on earth. This expanded viewpoint is accomplished by a process of conscious co-creation and co-evolution between humanity and the cosmos. In their thought-provoking book *CosMos*, Ervin Laszlo and Jude Currivan write: "In the new vision of the nature of integral reality, human existence is not an accidental by-product, nor the outcome of the blind play of genetic mutation and natural selection. Our existence has meaning and a human, a planetary, and even a cosmic purpose."

We are the co-creators as well as the creation of the world. Our human mission is to facilitate and empower the dynamic journey of exploration and evolution of the universe: toward the coherence of each with all, and of all with each. Our consciousness is the key to fulfilling our human mission. Our consciousness is far deeper and wider than most of us had hitherto thought. Until quite recently, scientists had generally considered that our consciousness is confined within our bodies and our sense of self within our personalities. But if this were so, then our skin-enclosed brain and ego-bound consciousness would set the ultimate limit of our awareness and our ability to comprehend the world. But if our awareness, as scientific research is now revealing and as the mystics of all traditions have discerned, transcends our physical form and is more – much more – than our human persona, then we have the innate ability to envisage, understand, and experience the Cosmos at levels far beyond the limitations of our ego-selves . . . Our awareness is rapidly expanding beyond the limitations of the past. In this unfolding Shift of consciousness – a shift in our individual consciousnesses as well as in the global mind our nearly seven billion consciousnesses are now constituting – we are gaining deeper insights into the nature and purpose of the whole-world than ever before. (23)

The development of consciousness and being is accompanied by a movement away from the grosser laws of physical existence to the more subtle laws of spiritual reality. In *Science and the Sacred*, professor of comparative religion Ravi Ravindra writes: "The spiritual and the natural

realms may be distinguished by different sorts of laws, but they are not separated by an abundant lawfulness in one realm and an absence in the other. There may in fact be more of a continuity in practice between these realms than suspected." He further elaborates:

At the level where most of us live, practically all our behavior and everything else about us is completely determined by ordinary laws. At higher levels of spiritual development, one develops increasingly those aspects of being that are free of the lower laws and subject to the higher laws. Whether we follow the essentialist metaphor, as used in most religions, and say that we can discover our deepest spiritual Self or God which is already in us, or whether we follow the existentialist metaphor so that a person has to create this spiritual part, the important point is that some purposeful action, an intentional undertaking, is required from human beings . . . However, not everything in a developed human being becomes free of the usual laws of birth, change, and decay. The physical body still obeys the laws of its own level; but one discovers or creates and progressively lives from a more subtle part of oneself that itself is relatively freer of the laws to which the body is subject. Only at the highest possible inner development of a person could one say that the most spiritual part – God, the Absolute, Brahman – is beyond all laws and is therefore completely and absolutely free. (24)

Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle places pure consciousness or being at the centre of his teaching of human development and transformation: "*Being* points to the essence of who you are as timeless, formless, and unconditioned consciousness. *Human* and *being*, form and essence, are ultimately not separate, in the same way that a wave or ripple on the surface of the ocean is not separate from the ocean or from any other wave or ripple, although it may appear to be so." He speaks to this from an evolutionary perspective:

Being, or pure consciousness, emanates from the Universal Source of all life – God – as light emanates from the sun. Unlike the sun, however, the Source does not exist in space and time. It is unmanifested and therefore inconceivable, so there is nothing you can say about it. However, your consciousness emanates from the Source, so you can never be separate from it, just as a ray of sunlight cannot be separate from the sun but always remains connected to it. The Source emanation pervades the entire cosmos – which is to say, our dimension of space and time – and it is the intelligence underlying and guiding the evolution of what we perceive as the physical universe. So the universe, including human beings, was not just created in the distant past but is still in the process of being created . . . There is direction and purpose behind the evolutionary process. Where it is going, however, is beyond all imagination. What we *can* say is that the evolutionary impulse behind the process is the growth of consciousness. The universe wants to become more conscious, and the main life purpose for all human beings is to come into alignment with that universal purpose. Entering into conscious alignment with universal purpose is an amazing evolutionary leap. (25)

It is becoming increasingly clear that humanity is now at a critical stage of its evolution and is undergoing a profound shift in consciousness, both on the individual and collective level. Each human being is an integral part of an intelligent, evolving universe in which all parts are inter-related to form an integral co-evolving whole. "We participate in its structure and order, we access its intrinsic and constantly accumulating intelligence, and we contribute to the growth of its consciousness. Our life, our existence, then, cannot be without purpose and meaning. In the simplest terms, *humanity's mission is to advance the evolution of the Cosmos.*"

One of the functions of the inner world of human consciousness, according to Gurdjieff's teachings, is to "reunite, on many levels, what has been separated and dispersed." In this way, the smaller, individual consciousness joins with the universal consciousness to impart order and harmony to the larger world, thus preventing its decay over time: "A human being's perceptual capacities, if harmonized and honed, allow a merging of each individual consciousness with the consciousness of the universe. Consciousness needs first to be separate for this joining to be meaningful. The higher nature needs the lower, and individuation precedes transcendence. When properly harmonized and developed, human capacities can complete the cosmic cycle."

Every human being has the possibility and potentiality of becoming a conscious agent of evolutionary unfolding and cosmic realization. Such an individual evolutionary purpose is said to be "woven into the fabric of nature" in order to help the universe fulfill *its* purpose and destiny" Ervin Laszlo: "We each have an obligation in our existence on this planet to raise our individual, localized expressions of consciousness. In doing so, we inspire others in our lives to raise theirs, as well as reflecting back our conscious contribution into the source THAT IS. The hidden treasure that is at the very core of our existence wishes to be known – for *us* to be known – by our individual journeys of self-realization." Shamik Desai provides an eloquent perspective on this Great Work:

All the great wisdom traditions agree that every "thing" is a manifestation of a larger Oneness. They hint regarding the meaning of existence: the One Source yearns deeply to know and love Itself. Hence, it has manifested in a material form (at a higher level of vibration) with the intention of realizing itself through a process of re-spiritualization. This process unfolds as each sentient being in the universe "opens the spiritual eye" and perceives the universe through the lens of Oneness, and then turns its super-perceptions into reality through loving, mindful engagement . . . The meaning and purpose of existence is to align and harmonize our relations with the unseen order, the Ultimate Reality, as individuals – and those among us with an evolved consciousness are to seek such alignment also at the societal and planetary levels. (26)

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