

The Science of Spirituality

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“Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind,” world-renown physicist Albert Einstein summarized the message Swami Vivekananda delivered to the world over a century ago. Swamiji explained through his studies, writings, and talks, that the Hindu dharma is embedded in a deep and intellectual science without an understanding of which, one’s knowledge of Hinduism is incomplete. Swami Vivekananda’s discussion of the relationship between science and spiritualism emphasizes that the two concepts are inseparable -- religion without science results in bigotry and science without religion leads to ignorance. This is the true basis for Sanatana Dharma, Swami Vivekananda said, for the ideas of science and spiritualism are intertwined -- neither can be fathomed without an understanding of the other.

Swami Vivekananda argued that an understanding of science underlies any attempt to make sense of Hindu spirituality and Sanatana Dharma. In his address to the World’s Parliament of Religions in 1893, Swamiji spoke of how much more accomplished our civilization would be if it were not for the fanaticism, bigotry, and bloodshed that have possessed our world for centuries. He asked that the “bell that tolled this morning in honor of this present convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecution...and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.” Swamiji believed that persons of all religions and of all systems of the world have “produced men and women of the most exalted character” who are working to the *same goal* of achieving spirituality. While our methods of achieving spirituality may differ, the science of our world applies to us all and through it, we find unity. Swamiji believed that the science of spirituality is an “inner science,” in some respects superior to the material science that the focus of mankind has been on for centuries. Knowledge of the “inner science” will empower mankind to practice religion free of superstition and the blind beliefs that would otherwise routinely interfere with the pursuit of spirituality. Evidently, Swami Vivekananda was firm in his conviction that an understanding of the “inner science” would underscore any pursuit of spirituality by mankind, rather than undermine it.

As much as the Swami claimed that science underscored religion, he believed that spirituality was just as essential to maintaining consciousness in our application of the material sciences. In our day and age, one of the most valuable roles spirituality plays in science is to provide a moral and conscientious check on the ways and methods in which the rapid progress of material science will impact our world and its people. While Swamiji both respected and valued the progress mankind has made on the scientific front, he worried that the rate at which we acquire and apply this knowledge may in time pose a threat to human civilization. As such, a conscious state of mind becomes vital in choosing how we apply our scientific knowledge to the world, and religion acts as a forum for fostering this understanding. Meanwhile, Swamiji proved that spirituality and Vedic philosophy have proven successful in identifying and explaining the principles of contemporary sciences, namely physics. In fact, Swami Vivekananda introduced the world-renown scientist Nikola Tesla to the Samkhya cosmogony and theories of matter and energy given by Vedic philosophy, which Tesla found to concur impressively with the theories of contemporary physics. In his interactions with the great scientists of his day, Swami Vivekananda began the process of reconciling Vedic theories with modern science, influencing the work and ideas of countless contemporary scientists including Albert Einstein.

Clearly, Swami Vivekananda demonstrated both that spirituality is essential to maintaining a conscious frame of mind in applying the material sciences and that knowledge of Vedic philosophy has contributed heavily to the modern theories of physics.

The legacy Swami Vivekananda has left us has encouraged a harmony between science and spirituality in our world over the last 150 years. The concept that science and religion are inseparable ideas has been realized, for science without religion will lead to ignorance and religion without science to bigotry. An understanding of the “inner science” allows mankind to pursue the path of spirituality free of dogma and unites people of diverse religions and beliefs around the central science. Meanwhile, spiritual conviction allows the retention of consciousness as we apply our knowledge of the material sciences to the world and provides us with an understanding of how Vedic spirituality and philosophies have influenced contemporary science, much as Swami Vivekananda’s work continues to influence scientists and activists the world over. From these overlapping concepts emerges the science of spirituality, clear recognition of how important it has become to understand science and spirituality as interrelated ideas in our world.