

***Who will Heal the Wounded Soul of Modernity? Is it Spirituality or Spiritual Modernity?***

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**Abstract**

The ancient sages of the world had been the real practisers to obtaining the optimal quantum of spirituality for rhythmic life. Soul loves fertile spiritual field to be cultivated. She needs a pure pool of water, a puff of air, and a serene and blessed environment to awaken the cosmic energies and spiritual forces. Unfortunately, we have confined ourselves with the narrowed walls of contamination, corruption, consumption, commercialization, and perishable comfort zones. The real tragedy behind it is that we don't want to come out of these boundaries. The body and soul both are badly wounded. They are endeavoring to convince our inner self to heed their agonies and pains but blinded and mesmerized with the material science, the God of modernity, we have turned our eyes and ears from the real and austere urges of body and soul. Spirituality is the doctor that can cure the injuries of the body and wounds of the soul because it is the spirituality that has the potential to control the Mind. The Designer has the Grand Design of which we know nothing. This designer has no name. He is the only DESIGNER of the cosmos. This is what the eastern and the western philosophers state in refined epistemological terms. The entire game of human existence through the philosophers of the world convinces us is the defined equation of Body, Mind, and Soul. In this equation, none has lesser significance. My conviction in this paper is to epistemologically analyze the roadmap for spiritual modernity in the world.

Keywords: Spirituality, Modernity, Soul

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## Introduction

The study of history foregrounds the four categorical out-breaking events in the formation of human civilization in the world. Firstly, the invention of 'the wheel' by the early people, secular in nature, had equal importance for every individual, made the struggle for life easier. Secondly, after a considerable long gap, the Renaissance took place and the new scientific discoveries and inventions changed the entire mindset of the orthodox world. Due to this movement, a wonderful new awakening in the people was perceived that put a strong challenge before the church and Christianity. Thirdly, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Industrial Revolution occurred, owing to this revolution the exploitation of natural resources and refinement of human life and behavior commenced simultaneously. And at last, in the fourth stage, the IT (Information Technology) revolution has brought ne-positive (negative and positive) effects in human life. The various forces which emerged in this civilizational development including religion, science, technology, modernity, evolved understanding of the universe, politics, economics have tightened their grip over human life with every passing day. Their excessive interference in human life has snatched the peace and tranquillity of the human mind.

Evidently, within this framework, we claim that we have erected the skyscraper buildings to live in, constructed high speed maintain roads for our transport system, developed well equipped national forces to protect our international borders, established vigorously sophisticated laboratories where other than scientific experiments natural RNA and DNA are being restructured, remodeled and redesigned. We are proud of our philosophies, literature, art, architecture, sculpture, and painting, etc. We are proud of our ultramodern medical system and information and communication technologies. At the same time, at every moment, we struggle against natural forces for our very survival. It is our long-cherished desire to control nature and its constructive and destructive forces for our vested interest. We are proud of our production and consumption habits. We are proud of our nuclear and biological weapons that can turn this civilization into dust within no time. We are proud of the fact that we have explored the traces of life-supporting surroundings on other planets and satellites known to us. We are proud of our magnificent military and embedded missile systems. With extreme confidence and pride, we declare that we have a sound educational and political system to bring prosperity and peaceful co-existence in the world.

Amidst all the luxury and comfort, we have made our lives capable of, is it not the fact that this pseudo pride has given birth to our pains and sufferings? Don't you think that the temperament of the modern and ultra-modern way of living has been succumbing to the entire humanity in the name of a comfortable life, brittle dreams, and adventurous lifestyle? Has it not evaporated the ooze and sharpness of our soul? Have we not mortgaged our physical, mental, and spiritual pursuits in the direction of the wrong run? Can we deny the fact that we have rendered this beautiful earth into a wasteland? It is not very easy to answer these questions. Have we ever focussed our attention on the facts what are the root causes of our sufferings and pains? Is it not possible to lead a painless life? But the fact, we must take into account, is that the diseases have fettered us in the form of endemic, epidemic, and pandemic. It is we who have invited these calamities and destruction before humanity. It is we who have rendered the world to lead the tiresome schizophrenic life. It is we who have polluted the natural elements (earth, air, water, fire, and space) that sustain life on this earth. It is we who have devastated the social harmony in the name of religion. It is we who are imposing war after war on humanity. It is we who are felling trees, destroying environmental diversity, killing innocent animals for our different mundane purposes. When will it come to

an end we don't know? But the coming generation will blame us for these atrocities which we have done to nature and natural resources because the course of history has never forgiven anybody.

A major setback to all our false points of pride has already been evident in the last year of the COVID-19 pandemic. All the systems and forces which we had nurtured in our civilizational development to accord meaning to our lives collapsed within few months of handling the spread of an invisible virus. With the external forces giving up in the time of crisis, the physical, psychological, and social health of humanity stand challenged. There has arisen a need today to change the paradigms in which we envisage life, a requirement to shift our focus from external forces to internal journey. In this backdrop, it becomes inevitable to acknowledge that we need to redefine our ways of living to conform to the new normal. This paper presents spiritual modernity as one of the alternatives to remodel human life. The paper delves into spiritual modernity around three pillars. First, an understanding of spirituality. Second, distinguishing spirituality from religion. Third, converging the first two pillars to arrive at an understanding of what spiritual modernity entails.

### **What is Spirituality?**

We have traveled much, known more, and boasted the most but have we ever endeavored to know ourselves? Have we ever made any serious journey inside us? Some two thousand and five hundred years back in the past an Indian prince (Siddharth) renounced his palace and family to know himself. This is the first instance in the history of the entire civilization of the world of realization of the self. He searched and researched the truth and cast spell on the curtain of illusion and delusion and ultimately became the Enlightened one. He taught us to maintain the balance between what we think and what we do. But we ignored this matchless treasury of wisdom and teachings and the preaching of the Enlightened One. Resultantly, we enslaved our real existence. We confined ourselves into the four walls of our desires, ambitions, greed, mutilated the sanctity of our life, and plunged ourselves into the sea of sufferings and pains. We have maximized our needs and greed and are so much accustomed to them that we become restless when we are away from them. If one wants to free oneself from the bondage of one's sense of perception every individual should ask seven simple questions to himself.

Who am I?

Where have I come from?

Why have I come for?

Where have I to go after this life?

Is there any God?

If yes, where does He live?

If not, why do we pray and worship?

If we honestly ask these questions to ourselves and try to find answers, this self-interview will open the closed doors of spirituality for the entire humanity of the world. Although, answers to these questions are not so easy because the magic of the material world will not allow an individual to reach this philosophical temperament. Tragically, everyone accepts the fact that ego, uncontrolled ambitions, hegemonic attitude, electronic gadget mania, narcissistic tempo, imbalanced food habits, intrusion of machines and home appliances in our daily life have shattered our routine and lifestyle. If we want to get rid of these clutches, we have to go into the shelter of spirituality and natural life. Now the question is how to

experience and practice spirituality in our life? To answer this question, we have to understand what spirituality is.

Right from the beginning of human civilization, the philosophers of both material and the spiritual sciences have been endeavoring to define this term, but in every definition, there has always been the space and scope of addition and subtraction in its very kernel from time to time. So, spirituality is a process of purification of body, mind, and soul. Out of these three entities, the soul has been proclaimed as invincible, free from any bondage. It follows the path of Dharma (Natural Law). That is why after the death of the body (perishable) soul leaves her abode for the other world (the so-called heaven and hell which we have no information of, we have only speculations) and mingles with the Ultimate Reality (ontological and epistemological scholars say so, of which we have no experience but our claim is based on the proclamations of the scriptures of the different religions of the world). But the matter of fact is that soul cannot exist without body and mind. At this factual point, we must focus our entire attention to wash out the impurities of body and mind. Out of these two elemental facts, the mind plays a vital role to formulate the set of thought processes. If the mind postulate positively body can be sustained. If negativity occurs in the thought process of the mind it harms the soul. Now the whole responsibility of existence depends on the mind. Immanuel Kant establishes it by saying, 'I think therefore I am'. The Hindu scripture, The Gita too has widely spoken about the different spectrum of the race and pace of mind. Because the restless mind destabilizes the stability of human existence. It is very difficult to control the mind but it can be done through the practice of meditation and Pranayama regularly.

Asamsayam mahabaho mano durnigraham calam

Abhyasen tu kaunteya vairagyen ca grhyate.

(Lord Krishna says, 'The mind is restless no doubt, and difficult to curb, Arjun; but it can be brought under control by repeated practice (of meditation) and by the exercise of dispassion, O son of Kunti)

By and large, the same practice was prescribed by the Enlightened One, The Buddha through, another name that is Vipassana (mindful meditation). In both practices, emphasis has been laid on the mind. The same philosophy has been conclusive, expounded by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century (AD) the Indian spiritual scholar and sage Patanjali through his Astangic Marg or Noble Eightfold Paths (Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dhyana, dharana, and samadhi). According to this school of philosophy, the main objective of life is to get liberation from the life cycle, get salvation and attainment of Moksha (to mingle one's existence in the existence of Absolute Reality from where there is no birth, no death, no suffering, no pain, no desire, no cravings, no aversion, no despondency and so on. There is only equanimity and stability and our very soul transmigrates this material world and stays in the blissful condition with the Supreme Being.

Spirituality establishes a close bond between life and nature, between God and its practitioners, between the matter and the mind, between nature and the human life, between all the flora and the fauna available on the earth. It sustains the perpetuity of peaceful and harmonious life. It begets fellow feelings and social harmony. It discloses the channels of liberation. It clears away all the dust and rust of our body and mind, and generates pure thoughts, pure perception, pure character, and infuses pure streams of sainthood in us. At this point cravings and aversions don't disturb us, because human beings are very close to the truth and sanctity of life. It is the spirituality that enabled the Buddha to search for the causes

of human sufferings and pains. So spiritual men and women may measure the depth of soul and Ultimate Reality because he/she is the master of unfathomed cosmic energies. The American poetess, **Emily Dickenson** points this fact out in these words- "Brain is wider than the sky, deeper than the sea, and it equals the weight of God". Science and sages have discovered that in the beginning there was nothing and, in the end, there will be nothing. The entire struggle is between two nothings. The entire chemistry of the world is an amalgamation of illusions and delusions. The moment they vanish, a flash of light of knowledge appears before us and we come to know the reality of mind and matter. Spirituality is capable to foresee what was, what is, and what will be between the two extremes of nothingness. It has divine eyes to visualize the unseen, divine ears to listen to the whispers and vibrations of the motioned universe, divine heart to sensationalize the intensified soft and swift messages of mysterious plans of the Grand designer (if there is any). It has divine messages a very few can sense it and last of all the divine dance of Lord Shiva destroys everything that is material.

Consequently, there is an acute softness in the modus operandi of a spiritual individual. It has a treasury that can buy peace of mind, the harmony of body, and the successful journey of the soul. It has the potential to understand the difference between the dream and reality. It can cure the bleeding wounds to which modernity has given birth to. A spiritually operated mind thinks beyond the normal limit and scope. It is like the firewall that protects our body, mind, and soul from all the impurities of the world. It can reformulate, reformate, and restructure our mundane life. It kills our ego, the emperor of all evil. A human being can get perfection through spiritual practices. It is secular. It is free from caste, religion, race, color, nationality, or any social, economic, and geographical boundaries. There have been very sound and practical spiritual tendencies and techniques in every religion of the world and people have been practicing it since time immemorial. It is the need of time that the practice of spirituality must be propagated and promoted far and wide to enable people to get an advantage out of it. In every school, college, university, and other academic and non-academic institutions a separate cell of spiritual science should be established with secular democratic values. Apart from it, the spiritual practices should be mandatorily incorporated in the curriculum and its proper teaching and learning must be ensured in the premises of every institution. It is the only way, without any doubt, that may bring the sustainable development goals prescribed by the United Nations Organization.

### **Difference between the Oriental and the Occidental Approaches of Spirituality**

Concerning the practice and study of spirituality here I would like to mention the difference between the oriental and occidental philosophies. The West talked about wealth while the east talked about health. The West talked about the matter while the East talked about the mind. The West talked about physical pleasure while the East talked about mental peace. The West concentrated its energy on exploitation while the East focussed its attention on the preservation and conservation of nature and the environment. Both these philosophies and their approaches are endeavoring to explore the reality and truth of the world and its affairs with different approaches. Interestingly, the West is striving to explore this reality in the outer world (material world) while the Eastern schools of philosophy in the inner world (spiritual world). Both have certain lapses. On the one hand, while exploring the outer world West completely ignored the spiritual world and thought that science, technology, nuclear and biological weapons can sustain the world and have the potential to answer the serious questions and challenges laid before human existence and they rendered the world into the worshipper of materialism and very cunningly, this materialism gave birth to the commerce, trade, comfortable life, medical facilities, endemics, epidemics, and pandemics, etc.

On the other hand, the oriental approaches side-lined the material world and concentrated all their energies in getting salvation from the cycle of birth and death and attaining the abode of God (whom none has seen so far) in the form of liberation and deliverance. To tell this truth to the suffering humanity the saints and seers have been coming on the Indian soil from time to time, sometimes as the preachers and sometimes as the social reformers. Unfortunately, the West and the East never met together. Had they met and discussed the variegated issues of the material and the spiritual world and studied the reasons of pains and sufferings of the world, undoubtedly, the human race would have been free from the clutches of wars, battles, terrorism, pandemic, ignorance, blind ambitions, disharmony, communal bigotry, black and white racial discrimination, superstitious practices, gender inequality, disparities, infanticide, poverty and miseries of life, etc.

### **Difference between Spirituality and Religion**

Occasionally, it is observed that we mistake religion for spirituality. Here it is pertinent to distinguish the difference between these two. It is a well-known fact that religion is a sect that has rites, rituals, dogmas, superstitions, and political terms. It can be said that it has an agenda or in other words, a group of like-minded people who have their scriptures, who follow a patterned belief and faith, who have their promotor, real and imaginary stories is attached with him that proves that they are not ordinary human beings but supermen and regarded as prophets. It has a well-organized operative system. Nobody has any right to put the question before them. Everybody has to follow the principles prescribed by the religious authorities. More or less this kind of system cannot be more than sectarianism. Time and again, followers of sectarian principles endeavor to prove their superiority over others. People have been practicing it at every age under the banner of a specific sectarian. Things become worse when politics intrudes in it.

Consequently, unnecessary wars are imposed on humanity. People who are involved in it, have nothing to do with spirituality and the peaceful coexistence of the people. They have the only goal to fulfill that is their political agenda. Contrary to it they declare that they are religious people. They can be religious but not spiritual because religion divides people and brings tension and ego. As Karl Marx says, 'Religion is an opium'. Historical pieces of evidence show that in the past the people of almost all religions did not have any hesitation to shed innocent blood in the name of religion. It is an opportune time to come out of the narrow walls of our prejudices to save the humanity of the world.

When we examine it neutrally, we find that it is far away from spiritual practices. Spirituality avoids any kind of shortcuts. It follows the natural laws (dharma, the Indian concept) and cannot violate them. This wonderful science (spirituality) concentrates its entire attention on the six sensory (five physical- eye, ear, nose, tongue skin, and one mental that is mind) experiences through which we try to understand the physical world. These six sensory bases play a vital role in sensation (sense of perception) and emotion. To understand the outer world, we take the help of all five sensory bases but when we try to know ourselves, we use 'mind' that is the sixth sensory organ. Sensation and emotion arise because of the contact with our sensory bases as Buddha says, "Contact of the eye with a vision, contact of the ear with sound, contact of the nose with odor, contact of the tongue with taste, contact of the body with something tangible, contact of the mind with any thought, emotion, idea, imagination, and memory." In a nutshell, spirituality is that journey within which not just helps us understand ourselves better but also nurtures our relationship with other human beings as well as the natural world. This understanding of spirituality and one's inner self is

often associated with saints and seers who have abandoned the material realities. Adopting an ascetic lifestyle, as is associated with spirituality, appears just non-feasible for modern life. That leads us to expostulate a viable alternative that entwines the principles of spiritual living and demands of modern life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: spiritual modernity.

## **Spiritual Modernity and How It Can Be Made Accessible to Entire Humanity**

Here we have two responsibilities, firstly, we have to know this material world and secondly, we have to know ourselves of our very existence. Knowing the world as well as oneself is to know the changing streams of consciousness. We are supposed to know the changes taking place inside our physical body, the changes taking place in the entire cosmos, feel the flow of blood in our veins and arteries. Every moment we pass through the different phases of physical, chemical, and mental changes. It is well experienced during the Vipassana practices. The physical realities are changing constantly. This is what the Buddha realized by examining himself. “With his strong concentrated mind, he penetrated deeply into his nature and found that the entire material structure is composed of minute subatomic particles which are continuously arising and vanishing.” The question is how to be aware of oneself, of the physical and psychological changes happening in us? In addition, how to integrate self-awareness with the overall wellbeing of the world? Answer to these questions involves congregated efforts of three stakeholders: individual, the community of which the individual is part, and the policy framework in which the community operates. Joint efforts at the level of these three stakeholders can pave the way towards a lifestyle that is imbued with tranquility, peace, and love without compromising the demands of modern life.

### **Individual-level**

Every individual must ensure:

- the avoidance of fast-food habits particularly in children.
- promotion of Yoga, meditation, and Pranayama in our daily routine.
- the enhancement of vegan culture in the world.
- the promotion of traditional and local health medication systems.
- the efforts to curb the scope of food adulteration.

### **Community-level**

The community should strive for:

- feeding the hunger by establishing a Foodbank in poverty-prone areas.
- providing clothes to the naked through Clothe bank.
- helping the weak and beggars from donations received by the church, mosques, temples, and other religious institutions.
- educating the ill-fated children and saving them from child labor through book, pen, pencil, eraser, and notebook bank.
- caring senior citizens through services in the old age care centers.
- sensible care for nature.
- promoting fraternity with human beings, animals, and plants.
- checking any kind of cruelty against animals.
- encouraging community Vipassana centers where people can gather for some time off worldly affairs and replenish their spiritual selves.

## **Public Policy Level**

The governments must initiate for:

- massive plantation movement for the protection of our environment.
- conservation and maintenance of existing wetlands like pools, ponds, and lakes to supply the needs of water for animals and birds.
- adaptation of some concrete measures for population control particularly in South Asia.
- the minimization of herbicides, pesticides, and other chemical products and by-products in agriculture and animal husbandry sectors.
- the reduction of carbon emission.
- redesigning the education system which inculcates all the above-listed values into a child's mind from the very beginning because the way children are brought up in a society reflects a society's future.

Here, I would like to clear this fact that this discussion does not mean that we should forsake this material world and go to the forest as a recluse to seek the truth. No, we are not supposed to do it because the ancient sages and truth-seekers of the world have already done it and prescribed a balanced path to be followed. There are many ways to go in this direction. Firstly, we have to practice equanimity, reduce our necessities, maintain the balance between the material and the spiritual world, control our mundane activities. Secondly, if we are concerned with the life of spiritual modernity we may go to medical institutions and offer our services to the sufferers. That is the real place where we can detach ourselves from the chain of pains and agonies, and know how to lead a healthy life. Here the person crying in pain does not need material wealth. His only wish there is how to recover health and get rid of pain and suffering. Thirdly, we have to develop our habit to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the weak and beggars, educate the ill-fated children. Apart from these steps, some more feasible efforts are to be initiated. We must strive for the eradication of social evils. This effort should not be confined within the national boundaries but it is the demand of time that we must propagate the good practices in every nook and corner of the world.

After doing these social works we may get innumerable benefits and immeasurable peace of mind. In this selfless duty, both the giver and the receiver will sense happiness indices and will increase the harmonious bond between the different groups of people. We have become so much self-centered and profit-oriented that we have forgotten all our innate attributes bestowed by enlightened people. We consider that the building that we have constructed and the paraphernalia we have collected and decorated around us are our indestructible kingdom. We think that it will never die. Working in the line of the material world, we mistake that this is the permanent world, but the truth is that one day we will have to renounce this world forever. Nothing will go with us after the death of this body. We will have to amend our habits because the amended habits will make us aware and cement the balance between the modern material and spiritual world.

## **Conclusion**

The world in which we are living today is the age of bombs, biological weapons, and missiles. These bombs and missiles will swallow this green earth within no time. How surprising is this fact that we had started our civilizational journey much before the Stone Age and today we have entered into the Space Age where we are searching the traces of life on the other planets but our cravings for shedding blood could not be prevented. In the

beginning, we would use these weapons against the dangerous animals in the forest during the days of our struggle for a comfortable and secure life but now amazingly we are deliberately using these weapons against human beings. It is not an exaggeration to say that we are sitting on the pile of gunpowder. We are manufacturing lethal weapons and supplying them to the militant's and terrorist's groups in the world and making money. Don't you think that it is the double standard of the political establishments of few countries? This is one of the many causes of unrest in the world and ironically, we are playing this game in the name of modernity and security. Is it very difficult to prevent the wrong practices for the sake of humanity and the earth? We have lost many things in the run of modernity and comfortable life. Once again, we must have to revive Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity for the peaceful coexistence of the world otherwise there will be nothing in our hands except dust and sand. The coming generation will curse us. We have seen this kind of sharp reaction in the blame speech of Greta Thunberg, the Swedish environmental activist who asks the world leaders for bringing destruction and devastation in the world and says, "You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with empty words. And yet I am one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

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