

Within Thee the Universe is Folded

Introduction

Peace comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan-Tanka¹, and that this center is really everywhere, it is within each of us. (Black Elk)

Each of us is more than atoms and molecules, and that part of us which is more, let's call it spirit, is connected to the spirits of other beings. Both ancient and recent cultures have known and still know of this connection. The culture of the industrial world has mostly forgotten it, or denied it, perhaps because spirit doesn't show up on x-rays or MRI scans.

This paper attempts to look at the quality of this spiritual connection as it is perceived in cultures and belief systems that respect it. The paper will also review some of the evidence – mostly lack of evidence – that supports our connectedness, and review some of the methods used to stimulate our experience of connectedness.

As complex as our bodies are on the physical level – even the cellular level – there is still more complexity. Quantum physics implies subtle energetic connections between bodies that scientists have just begun to comprehend, and metaphysics implies spiritual connections that they may never understand.

“Dost thou reckon thyself only a puny form
when within thee the universe is folded?”²

The Quality of Connectedness

Hopefully we all experience connectedness at some point in our lives. *Intuition* is a common manifestation of our connectedness. Other experiences of connectedness include *empathy* where one might truly feel the pain of another, and *patriotism* where the display of symbols like a national flag produce strong emotions stemming from identity with a group.

It is doubtful that anyone absolutely disbelieves in intuition. Even men, who may lack any experience with it that they are willing to admit to, will admit to “women’s intuition.” It seems that everyone has known of a situation in which a mother has “known” that one of her children were in trouble and took some action, or some similar occurrence in which someone “knew” what they couldn’t have “known.”

¹ The Creator in the Lakota language.

² Imam `Alí, quoted in (The Seven Valleys, p34). `Alí was the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.

According to (Brehony p137) we are constantly experiencing intuition but fail to recognize it, or if we recognize it, we discount it. Most men and women have felt uneasy or unsafe in some circumstance, perhaps on a dark street in an unfamiliar neighborhood. Was this paranoia or intuition? Just because they didn't actually get mugged doesn't mean that there wasn't someone there thinking about harming them. Is there a difference in the feeling of paranoia and the feeling of intuition?

The manifestations of our connectedness goes far beyond intuition. In *The Secret Life of Plants*, Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird relate the experiments of Cleve Backster, a polygraph expert who experimented with polygraph machines connected to house plants. Backster found that the plants not only responded to an injury such as the burning of a leaf, they also responded to his *thought* of burning the leaf. At another time the plant responded to Backster cutting his own finger accidentally. It even responded to boiling water being poured down a drain killing the bacteria in the drain. (Warren). If a house plant is able to empathize with a bacteria, then surely humans are capable of similar experiences of connectedness. Science may never be able to fully explain the mechanisms which allowed Backster's plants to empathize or those which allow women to intuit. The assumption that some people make is that the connection is all in the spiritual dimension so there is no physical dimensions for science to measure. This may not always be the case.

The Brain and Connectedness

What, if anything, in the brain facilitates connectedness? Borysenko relates a theory by gynecologist Christiane Northrup that the female brain gets an intuitive boost by the hormone changes that take place at menopause. Northrup suggests that the LH and FSH hormones, which are only high during ovulation in younger women, remain high for postmenopausal women. There is some evidence that these two neuropeptides stimulate whatever brain function is responsible for intuition, making postmenopausal women more consistently intuitive. (Borysenko p150).

My own male intuition, for what it's worth, is that these hormones aren't the critical factor in the development or stimulation of intuition. I propose that the relationship between menopause and intuition may depend on the extent to which a man or woman has been reared in "self-in-relation" as defined by Borysenko. She states that women are conditioned throughout childhood to think of themselves in relation to others rather than "self-in-isolation" – her term for the conditioning of boys. (Borysenko p26). I suggest that this life-long understanding of self-in-relation combined with the struggle of authenticity experienced by perimenopausal and postmenopausal women are the critical factors. I further propose that this struggle is opening them up to their own primal energy, or *chi*. This new openness is allowing them to experience the expanded intuition that has physiologically been available to them all along.

Brehony points out that synchronistic events open us up to this other dimension. These events become more noticeable during a woman's midlife crisis.

We are constantly immersed in synchronistic happenings, but we mostly fail to recognize them because so much of our energy is devoted to dealing with our mundane life. Our five senses work very well in this arena, and there is scarcely a reason to think that

we might need any other sensory abilities to get through the day. But when we are at the chrysalis³, when we are emotionally open with new psychic energy flowing through our hearts, we are more likely to notice these meaningful coincidences in our lives. We open ourselves to the dimension of the transpersonal – that is, the parts of our nature that are beyond (trans) our ordinary, limited, personal self. It is in this mystical realm that we experience the Divine in our lives. (Brehony p137).

Developing Connectedness

What can we do to become more connected with our connectedness? There are several methods which have been suggested by various authors and many more methods used by non-European cultures. Dream analysis and meditation are often suggested. Art was described by Jung as springing from some connection with another plane. As stated earlier, Borysenko writes that the changes associated with menopause help women to become more connected. Each of these will be discussed.

Perhaps a first step in increasing our awareness or experience of connectedness is to believe that we are connected and be willing to open ourselves up to intuitive feelings. The Bahá'í writings⁴ include several references to the intuitive dimensions of human life.

...the beings, whether great or small, are connected with one another by the perfect wisdom of God, and affect and influence one another. If it were not so, in the universal system and the general arrangement of existence, there would be disorder and imperfection. But as beings are connected one with another with the greatest strength, they are in order in their places and perfect. (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Pg 246)

It isn't just metaphysical writings that entice us to explore our connectedness. Quantum physics is redefining our understanding of the rules that our physical world obeys. It seems that everything may be physically connected as well.

As Bohm⁵ states, the world is an "unbroken wholeness"; everything is non-locally⁶ interconnected. We need to learn to perceive holistically because our world and the entire universe is actually interconnected. It is erroneous to continue to perceive our world as a conglomeration of separate, unrelated parts. In light of

³ She is using the term to describe the midlife transition.

⁴ For information on the Bahá'í Faith see <http://www.bahai.org/>.

⁵ David Bohm, Nobel Prize winning physicist.

⁶ Not in obvious physical contact, e.g., two people on separate continents.

emergent scientific principles, the Cartesian world view is decidedly misleading. (Polich)

A famous experiment in 1982 proved that there can be a “physical” connection between distant objects:

For example, suppose that twin particles were emitted from an excited atom and they were both spinning counterclockwise on their axis and directed in opposite directions from each other. Changing the spin of one particle to clockwise would be instantaneously reflected in the other, no matter if they were at opposite ends of the universe.

What this experiment reveals is that these particles are connected in some mysterious way. This seems to violate how everyone views the world. The world is normally viewed by the principle of local cause. This means that what happens at one location does not depend upon variables controlled by an experimenter at a distant location. However, connectedness proves that under certain conditions what happens at one location does affect what occurs at another location. (Warren)

Religious writings from many faiths, and scientific research, lead us to believe that we are connected somehow, but it appears that science is not yet ready to specify how the connection occurs. How do we sense our connectedness?

Brehony and Borysenko state that developing a sense of connectedness is easier after midlife begins. Perhaps wisdom has something to do with it. Perhaps having gone through some grief helps us to separate somewhat from the material world and live partly in the world of the spirit. While it doesn't seem possible that intuition and connectedness are solely the province of the older human, it does seem likely that younger people are more distracted by physical events. Or perhaps older people try harder to understand their spiritual selves. There is, according to Borysenko and others, a strong desire in older people for more authenticity and integrity. They are tired of putting on a false front and are willing to do the personal work that it takes to find out who they really are.

Somehow dreams can be a part of this process of developing, or uncovering, our intuition. Jung believed that dreams are a self-dramatization of the actual state of the psyche and the unconscious. They are natural and purposeful and exist to help us understand our inner life. (Brehony p208). Interpreting dreams is not simply making an isomorphic mapping of a dream image to a psychic phenomena, e.g., a dream of a lake does not necessarily mean a romantic emotion. Jung identified three steps to take when interpreting dreams in a therapeutic session; (1) have a clear understanding of the details of the dream, (2) identify the natural or cultural associations of the details which Jung referred to as hints, and amplify the meanings. (3) consider the amplified dream in the context of the life involved. (Hall p34).

Dreams are perhaps the most potent proof that our lives are more than atoms and molecules.

Consider thy state when asleep. Verily, I say, this phenomenon is the most mysterious of the signs of God amongst men, were they to ponder it in their hearts. Behold how the thing which thou hast seen in thy dream is, after a considerable lapse of time, fully realized. Had the world in which thou didst find thyself in thy dream been identical with the world in which thou livest, it would have been necessary for the event occurring in that dream to have transpired in this world at the very moment of its occurrence. Were it so, you yourself would have borne witness unto it. This being not the case, however, it must necessarily follow that the world in which thou livest is different and apart from that which thou hast experienced in thy dream. (Gleanings, p152)

Brehony quotes a conclusion from a dream research project that seems to say that not only are our sleeping hours different from our previous understanding but that our waking hours are probably more complicated than we thought.

We are emerging from a period when wakening and sleeping were considered polar opposites into a more complicated but more exciting era in which we must ask again the important questions in the light of a nonunitary conception of sleep that itself may be a precursor to deeper understanding of waking life as being composed of interacting psychological and neurological motives. (James Hall quoted in Brehony p208)

Meditation is another method that could be employed to stimulate our awareness and practice of intuition. Meditation could be defined as a direct experience of one's own spirit. It has been said that prayer is talking to God, and meditation is listening for the answer. While it can't be proved that meditation increases connectedness directly, the meditator is at least experiencing their own spiritual self, if not anyone else's.

Although there are many forms of meditation, a popular form uses a mantra⁷ to contact one's spiritual self. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi defines mantra meditation this way,

The technique may be defined as turning the attention inwards toward the subtler levels of a thought [the mantra] until the mind transcends the experience of the subtlest state of the thought and arrives at the source of the thought. This expands the conscious mind and at the same time brings it in contact with the creative

⁷ Mantra, a word or phrase repeatedly said, thought or sung as a meditation. The word may have meaning or be meaningless. They are often a reference to God or one of His attributes.

intelligence [spirit] that gives rise to every thought. (Maharishi, p350)

Abdu'l Bahá says that meditation not only connects us with the spiritual world but also allows the spiritual world to influence art and science.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God. (Paris Talks, Page: 175)

If making art is a conduit through which the spirit worlds can communicate to us, perhaps making art could also be used to increase our awareness of our spiritual selves and our ability to contact the spiritual dimensions of our life.

People in middle or late life sometimes get their child-like creativity back. Perhaps this is due to the struggle for authenticity that is a part of some healthy mid-life transitions. Making art can become a channel through which something – God, spirits, muses – communicate with us. It may not be bi-directional.

Jung believed that art sprang from our spirit. Here Jung describes the struggle of creative writing.

“These works positively force themselves upon the author; his hand is seized, his pen writes things that his mind contemplates with amazement. The work brings with it its own form; anything he wants to add is rejected, and what he himself would like to reject is thrust back at him.” (Jung, vol 15, par 110).

He is obviously describing an anti-intellectual process – the intellect is seen battling with the muse.

Another tool which may assist about half the population in establishing better connectedness is menopause. Borysenko suggests that the hot flashes of perimenopause are a tool which can be used to increase awareness of our spirit self and connect with it.

What if women used hot flashes in the same way that the monks⁸ did, consciously thinking of their stresses and worries and offering them to be burned up in the inner fires of transformation. When I have a hot flash, for example, I think of what has been stressful for me lately. Am I exhausted from traveling, tired of

⁸ She previously referred to Buddhist monks who would raise their body temperature during a yoga practice.

writing, or worried about my children? I say a little prayer of thanksgiving for all the good things in my life, and then I offer the specific things that are stressing me to the inner spiritual fire of the hot flash in much the same way that people talk of giving up their troubles to God.

I believe that hot flashes represent a rising up and rebalancing of the life-force energy that can help women burn off stress, rather than adding to it, an idea that has some basis in Chinese medicine. (Borysenko p165)

Borysenko quotes naturopath Farida Sharan who had similar experiences during her six months of hot flashes.

Toward the end of the fourth month the releases increased in purity, beauty and intensity. As I grounded more deeply in my being, I began to perceive the reality of my life around me in a different way. My martyr persona was dissolving. I could no longer do things the way that I always had. I saw more deeply. It was as though I read people's minds and motives and looked at my life and realized that I would have to change. (Borysenko p166).

The Research Ahead of Us

What we have seen in this brief discussion are several metaphysical statements that probably would be difficult to verify and a few verifiable scientific facts that imply connections between all beings but don't explain the connections or how to measure them. As scientists we must be careful not to reject concepts which are based on phenomena that we have not learned to measure.

What science proves to be non-existent, we must accept as non-existent. But what science simply does not find is a completely different matter. (Dalai Lama)

By the time man has a partial grasp of the physics that connects the aggressive thought in Cleve Backster's mind to the jiggling pen on the polygraph machine which is connected to a house plant that's about to be singed, we will have studied more about dreams and waking states, more about meditation and the levels of thought in the mind, more about creativity and how it comes to artists, more about the brain and what really happens at menopause, and more about quantum physics which may tell us that it was all really physical all along and there was never anything spiritual about it.

But I doubt it.

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