

## **The Real and the Ethereal: The Intersection of Scientific Knowledge and Spiritual Wisdom**

### **An interview with Eva M. Zsigmond, Ph.D.**

Since life is a unified experience of objective and subjective realities, we need both measurable observations and perceived interpretations to make sense of our world and to find meaning in our existence. In this quest to understand ourselves and our place in the universe, spiritual wisdom is a quintessential partner to scientific knowledge.

As a research scientist, Eva Zsigmond has spent her academic career deciphering molecular pathways and studying new ways to learn to treat devastating human diseases, such as heart disease and more recently, degenerative eye disease. Eva believes that the innate curiosity of human beings about the natural world propels scientific discoveries and she eagerly shares her enthusiasm for science with her colleagues, students and the community. She emphasizes that “breakthroughs in medicine and technology have profoundly improved our lives in the last one hundred years and these advancements in quality of life are directly related to diligent and dedicated scientific investigations.” She feels that Carl Jung most aptly expressed the vital role that science plays in our lives when he said: “Science is the tool of the Western mind and with it more doors can be opened than with bare hands.”

Eva’s life-long passion for science has been paralleled by an equally compelling interest in spiritual practices. She freely admits that “science alone has not been able to provide all the answers to the pressing mysteries that we seek to solve about our biology, consciousness and environment.” Once again turning to the teachings of Jung, she points out that at the core of Jungian analytical psychology is the concept of individuation, the process of integrating opposites while still honoring their relative unique contributions. Eva quotes Jung’s famous words that “it all depends on how you look at things and not how they are in themselves”. She feels that Jung’s poignant statement underscores the key role that the interpretations provided by spiritual wisdom play in creating a more accurate picture of our internal and external universe. Eva trusts that expanding the dialogue between science and spirituality will lead to a deeper understanding of how the two paths can complement each other to accelerate the evolution of our thought and spirit.

The discourse between science and spirituality has not always been a harmonious one because they each have a different approach in answering sometimes similar questions. Eva explains that “science meticulously isolates each component of a problem in order to collect valuable data that will help to build a comprehensive picture of understanding. The rigors of the scientific method bring an inherent

logic and structure to our aim of gathering of knowledge.” She adds that, “although science brings a method to the maddening task of deciphering the complexities of our inner and outer worlds, from the vantage point of spirituality, the reductionist approach creates its own brand of ‘madness’. When it comes to understanding the nature of our own existence, we, as sentient beings, cannot be reduced to a simple mathematical equation and sometimes a narrow focus on the isolated parts may actually cloud our comprehension of the whole.” According to Eva, a clear example of a pressing question yet unsolved by science is the nature of human consciousness. She poses a classic question, “are we separate biological beings with a complex brain that gives rise to the conscious mind, or are we spiritual beings with a mind inseparable from a greater consciousness that animates our bodies?” In Eva’s view, the purview of spirituality is to work synergistically with science to synthesize the deluge of information that we collect into a harmonious unit that not only makes sense, but also brings fulfillment and joy into our lives.

In her upcoming lecture, Eva will try to connect the dots between ‘left-brain’- oriented scientific thought and ‘right-brain’-aligned spiritual experience. She emphasizes that to answer the ultimate questions of our existence science and spirituality have to work together, as the first one puts forth and tests each new thesis and the latter, takes the thesis to synthesis by providing a greater context of unified meaning. In response to our question of “what is a salient example of the relationship between science and spirituality, Eva responds by quoting the physicist Heinz Pagels who said: “science shows us what exists, but not what to do about it”. To Eva, this quote highlights the need for spiritual wisdom to complement science by providing the vision of what we should do with everything that we have learned. Eva concludes our interview by expressing her sincere hope that her lectures will stimulate the curiosity of all the participants to search for themselves for new points of intersection between science and spirituality.

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