

The background of the page is decorated with several stylized handprints in various colors including blue, purple, green, and orange. These prints are arranged around the central text, with some appearing as if they are reaching towards the center. The prints have a simple, graphic style with visible fingers and palms.

Envision the Future of Education: Contemplative Learning of Unity in Diversity

Shiv Talwar

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A Draft Proposal for the attention of

Stakeholders in governance and
education for holistic cultivation of
the self for world unity, peace,
harmony, health, individual and
planetary wellness

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Executive Summary

Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc. (SHEN, Est. 2000) exists to explore possible resolutions for some humanity's grave global problems. After over twenty years of study and research into humanity's scientific and spiritual heritage, we have come to an understanding that the ultimate findings of science on the existence of the universe converge with those of spirituality. According to modern science, the whole of the material universe originates from an unseen reality termed energy. Spiritual wisdom of all religions likewise perceives the universe of body and mind emerging from an unseen reality called spirit, itself a union of two other unseen realities, energy and consciousness, as indivisible as two sides of a coin. Other than the difference of traditional terminology -- and the greater scope of spiritual inquiry, which includes mind -- the insights of science and spirituality are the same.

At first glance, an invisible reality causing the existence of a universe 92 billion light years across appears irrational. Rationality and sensibility are coextensive. If something is not accessible with sense perception, its acceptance is irrational. Prevalent systems of education are bounded by rationality.

Einstein showed that energy and mass are equivalent. Matter has mass while energy has none. Mass of matter arising from energy with no mass seems like an insensible contradiction but Einstein established it as the truth. Truth cannot be limited by rationality.

Einstein was a theoretical physicist. He discovered energy-mass equivalence by focusing his attention to seek the truth underlying matter, and he found it in the same manner as our prophets, sages, seers and philosophers established that the universe of matter and mind comes from spirit outside the reach of our organs of perception. This process of discovery is termed *contemplation*: seeing the truth with the "eye" of the mind when it is situated outside the reach of the eye of the body.

The concept of an invisible truth of both science and spirituality is an abstraction of the highest order. Like many abstractions, it is not commonly understood, and many of us are completely unaware of it. At the same time, no concept is more desperately needed for human harmony today than this one.

Humanity is relational. When I perceive you as different from me, I treat you as different. When I perceive you as the same, I treat you as if “you” are “I.” Therefore, contemplative education, leading to an inner experience of the invisible truth underlying all existence, will help us resolve existential global issues we face today.

With that understanding, in 2019 we resolved to draft a proposal addressed to global stakeholders in educational policy to re-envision the future of education. Education of the future needs to include contemplative content to cultivate lived feelings of unity in diversity. The goal of such a re-envisioning of education is to unify all existence into a planetary family by creating a culture of peace, harmony, health, wellness, and respect for all existence. Taking care of the shared family abode will be a natural outcome.

Our current educational systems operate primarily in the domain of rationality defined by sense perception. The seemingly infinite perceptible universe cannot be the result of anything finite. Neither can it come out of nothing. Its source is a mystery that is both infinitesimal and infinite. It will always remain a mystery, but it is one that we can experience with the eye of a contemplative mind. Without denying the rationality of sense perception, contemplative education reaches beyond it. It lends itself to critical thought and analysis, yet reaches beyond differentiation to integration. Didactic in nature, it is meaningful both for the religious and the secular. While rational learning gives rise to reductionist states of mind, contemplative education gives rise to holistic worldviews.

Rational learning develops the capacity to *have* more.
Contemplative learning develops the ability to choose to *be* more.

The Proposal

Background Thinking

This proposal is about the appropriate introduction of contemplative learning, at all levels of public and private education, to cultivate lived feelings of unity in diversity of existence.

The current system consists primarily of rational education — in other words, it is based on the immediate logic developing from everyday sense experience. Rational education does not have the capacity to address serious global problems faced by humanity today. Beginning with common everyday sense perception, science expands the scope of rationality with the development of scientific instruments and mathematical logic to access the subtleties of physical existence; our eyes and common sense can deceive while instruments and numbers do not lie. In addition, science insists on empirical verification with replicable experiments performed calmly with full care and attention to detail in well-equipped laboratories. The scientific method thus pushes the rationality of sense experience to its limit.

Rationality based upon everyday sense perception limits us to the bounds of the definite and the differentiable. On the other hand, the rigorous application of the scientific method eventually leads to the ultimate truth of the existence of matter, which is neither finite nor differentiable.

Just like our modern scientists, the sages, seers, prophets and philosophers of antiquity also were curious to know about the secrets of existence. They too realized the insufficiency of everyday sense perception for exploring

the reality underlying the apparent. They learned to cultivate clarity and sharpness of sense perception, with undisturbed attention and careful observation of nature and its phenomena in an inner ambience of calm. Their exploration, like that of modern science, was time-consuming and incremental. They too finally arrived at the ultimate truth that the existence of the finite, differentiable universe of lies beyond the finite and the differentiable.

Science has limited its scope to matter, while the scope of ancient spiritual exploration included the entire universe of matter and mind, both inanimate and animate. Material science calls the ultimate reality of inanimate matter *energy* while the spiritual science of our sages, seers, prophets, and philosophers calls its ultimate reality of the animate and inanimate *spirit*.

In material science, we proceed from our everyday sense experience and its immediate logic. If we follow it rigorously and ceaselessly expand its reach with instrumentation and mathematical logic, we continuously and incrementally progress from subtlety to subtlety until we reach a point of discontinuity beyond which we cannot go. Science at this point has reached its infinitely subtle ultimate reality called energy. What is infinitely subtle is also totally imperceptible irrespective of the sensitivity of instrumentation, but it is not inaccessible to critical and logical thinking, mathematical or other. Thus, modern material science finds that all gases, liquids and solids as well as sounds and other waveforms flow from energy. Science is silent on mind and consciousness characterizing the animate because it considers these topics outside its scope.

In spiritual science too, we proceed from our everyday sense experience and its immediate logic. If we follow it

rigorously and ceaselessly expand its reach with calmness, care and attention to detail in observation of mind, matter and natural phenomena, we continuously and incrementally progress from subtlety to subtlety until we reach a point of discontinuity beyond which we cannot go. At this point, a spiritual scientist has reached the infinitely subtle ultimate reality called spirit. What is infinitely subtle is also totally imperceptible irrespective of the sensitivity and sharpness of our sense perception, but it is not inaccessible to the eyes of the mind. Thus, ancient spiritual science finds that all gases, liquids and solids as well as sounds and other waveforms flow from spirit, and so does our mind.

Common human language defines the animate as a being comprising a body and a mind. Solids, liquids, gases, sounds and other waveforms flowing from energy constitute our body. Mind animates the body of the animate with consciousness at its core. Thus, for practical purposes, spirit in an animate being may be considered a unity of energy and consciousness.

According to spiritual science, both the animate and the inanimate comprise a body on the exterior whose behaviour is run by a conscious mind in the interior. Our language calls the inanimate mindless and attributes its behaviour to specific laws of nature. Thus, the difference between the animate and the inanimate is only semantic. To the extent that there is a mind with consciousness, there is animation and a sense of freedom from natural laws.

The ultimate reality of spiritual science discovered by our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers comprises the spiritual wisdom underlying religion. Their method of exploration is termed contemplative or seeing with the eye of the mind. It comprises the use of human capacity to pay undivided attention to careful observation and rigorous

application of logic to sharpen the perception of the inner eye in making sense of the information collected. The progress is successive until we cannot proceed further and the explorer is satisfied that they have arrived at the point of discontinuity.

The method of modern science differs from the contemplative method of ancient spirituality only in the addition of external resources, including replicable empirical measurements. The contemplative method depends primarily on the inner resources of the explorer, especially a careful, attentive and calm mind. The methods thus differ only in the resources and tools of exploration, not in their essential goals and objectives. They both seek the ultimate reality underlying existence and they both use internal tools of contemplation, without which no research is possible.

Our natural scientists, sages, seers, prophets, philosophers and spiritual scientists have revealed the truth of an infinite and infinitesimal ultimate reality that underlies and unifies the diversity in the universe. But, the generality of humanity is unaware of it. Of those who are aware, only a small percentage have absorbed it, developed a personal insight into it, and brought it within the domain of their personal experience to live their lives with the feelings of unity in diversity.

Our human condition leads us to seek easy answers to hard existential questions rather than having to seek and find. Our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers experienced how their discovery of a unity in diversity transformed their lives. Out of compassion, they started sharing so that the populace in their immediate locations would be transformed as well. That gave rise to organized religion. The difficulty, if not impossibility, of talking about the

unseen, as it is, gave rise to an appeal to acceptance of religious authority as an easier answer. Systems of belief offering easy answers to deep existential questions fail to transform in the way that seeking and finding do. Religious authority, however, causes the development of feelings of a limiting identity to cherish and defend, while seeking and finding brings the unseen unity in diversity within the domain of personal experience to live lives of harmony with one another and the environment around us.

In our opinion, the time has now come for our houses of learning to take the lead in making us aware of the unseen truth “as it is” and to teach us systems of contemplative seeking and finding to form, re-form, and transform our being. That is the purpose of this proposal.

Diversity and Unity: We are Both

Sensible rational learning limits our mind to disconnected specifics, a reductionism that deprives us of an experience of our holism through the ultimate reality that unites us. Reductionist narratives and understanding are characterized by the exclusivity of separation while holistic narratives are characterized by inclusivity. Our reality is bipolar. We are exclusive and divided by the finiteness of our body and mind, while we are united by the lack of finiteness and inclusivity of our substratum, spirit-energy.

We need to learn about the diversity of existence for our survival: sustenance as well as procreation to keep the universe going. To put food on the table, we must be educated rationally, cultivating the clarity and definite perception afforded us by our physical organs of cognition. At the same time, we must be educated to understand that this learning is reductionist and divisive. It does not tell the

whole story, and it leads to mere survival with neither health nor harmony.

In this light, we proceed to learn from the ultimate finding of our natural and spiritual scientists, sages, prophets, seers and philosophers that the universe and all its beings ultimately result from an unseen reality, whether called energy or spirit, an indivisible union of consciousness animating the mind and energy animating the body. We reflect and contemplate upon it to validate it in our everyday experience. This learning may not put food on the table to survive, but it will enable us to live in health and harmony.

The ultimate truth arrived at by both modern science and ancient spirituality is relational. Our bodies on the exterior are run by a mind on the interior in accordance with consciousness at its core. Ordinarily, we are aware that we exist but unaware that we are all spirit-energy beings and therefore conjoined at the hip.

This proposal examines the unique characteristics of contemplative education that allow it to cultivate feelings of unity in diversity, in contrast with the prevalent rational education. We are not suggesting that it is a choice between the rational and the contemplative — we need a judicious blend of both because it's the rational, when pushed to its boundaries that leads to the contemplative. This proposal concludes with historical examples of cultures and countries shaped with the type of education we propose. The populace in these countries not only lived in health, harmony and fullness with sound governance but also contributed creative ideas in various disciplines of knowledge for the common welfare of humanity.

Current Situation and the Proposed Suggestion

The educational systems prevalent in the world today are primarily in the rational domain. If something or some notion is validated by one or more of the cognitive senses, it is said to be rational. On the other hand, there is a system of education which is defined as contemplative.

Contemplative education is more comprehensive, reaching beyond the prevalent rational to include harmonization of opposites with causative relationships.

Three major problems facing the world today are:

- Intolerance and bigotry based upon differences of any kind such as faith, caste, creed, race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.;
- Mindless exploitation of natural resources of the planet;
- An epidemic of degenerative diseases of the body and the mind caused by stress.

With rational education, these problems seem to be intractable, while they are amenable to being addressed with contemplative learning; setting the stage for solving one problem with contemplative education sets the stage for addressing the others as well.

Sense perception, the basis of rationality, analyzes, fragments, divides, classifies and organizes, and the prevalent system of rational education leads us to intellectual growth within the bounds of rationality. Education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity must get us beyond these bounds to lead students to an integration of existence. We can understand the difference

between ordinary rational and contemplative education by saying that the goal of ordinary education is a rational view of the world while that of contemplative education is a worldview that transcends rationality without denying it. The worldview of rational education is reductionist and exclusive, while the worldview of contemplative education is holistic and inclusive.

This proposal envisages the institution, at all levels of public and private education, of contemplative education to cultivate lived feelings of unity in diversity of existence. While mere learning primarily aims to develop understanding of the mind, the primary objective of contemplative learning is to form, re-form and transform one's self. We will dwell on the differences in a later section.

There are two types of content in education to cultivate harmony: (1) conceptual content aimed at creating mental understanding, and (2) strategic practices involving our bodies and minds to form or transform the person that we are in relation to the rest of the universe. Conceptual content, to some extent, moulds our minds, but strategic practices are necessary to mould our consciousness that runs our minds. We then lead a life of purposeful relationships in families, neighbourhoods, communities, countries and the world. We take charge of our behaviour rather than being guided by our survival emotions. Regular use of these practices naturally cultivates physical and mental health; harmony, cooperation, and peace between people; harmony between people and the natural environment; and exuberant lives with feelings of belonging, meaning, energy and purpose.

Education is empowerment. A narrowly empowered person is likely to use their power for narrow selfish or divisive

reasons. On the other hand, a broadly empowered person is likely to use power for bigger unifying and collective purposes. Education to cultivate unity in diversity is a unique opportunity to broaden the mind and raise its executive consciousness. Therefore, it should be given top priority at all levels: preschool, primary, presecondary, secondary and postsecondary.

The current rational systems of education result in the growth of exclusive reductionism, thus limiting human potential. The contemplative education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity that we propose is holistic and inclusive and transforms human beings to achieve their maximum potential.

Nature of Contemplative Education

Rational Learning

We see diversity every day with our senses. A is A, B is B and C is C. How do they unite? They unite if we consider that they are the products of our tongue. They are three letters of a family called the alphabet which our tongue uses to synthesize speech.

If A represents John, B represents Joan, and C represents a tree, then A, B and C are parts of a family called the universe. According to both spirituality and science, the universe is a manifestation of an underlying unmanifest. They then all are a manifestation of that same unseen reality, whatever that may be.

“A, B and C are diverse” is our everyday reality perceived by our senses and “A, B and C are one” is the understanding of the mind that results from a classification

of individual letters into an alphabet or individual beings into the universe.

Optical Delusion of our Consciousness

Unity in diversity is an extremely subtle truth, hidden from view and inaccessible to perception by natural means. Yet it is not merely a figment of imagination. We can think about it as the underlying reality of our existence. We exist — there must therefore be an ultimate cause of our existence. It has been experienced by a significant number of explorers who sought it.

Sages, seers, prophets and philosophers of antiquity from all traditions proclaimed it as their ultimate discovery. They taught it to the generality of members in their geographical communities as the most meaningful truth to learn to lead a life of health, harmony and wellness. In modernity, they are joined by our eminent scientists like Albert Einstein. We reproduce below an excerpt from a letter Einstein (Calaprice, 2005, p. 206) wrote on February 12, 1950, to a distraught father who had lost his young son and who approached Einstein for comfort:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

What wisdom Einstein shared in this message! When we contemplatively experience the oneness of our ultimate reality, Einstein's "optical delusion" of separate and diverse beings in the universe disappears. The "optical delusion" lasts as long as its true nature is unknown; when that comes to light, the delusion disappears. It is like the reality of a dream which disappears the instant we wake up.

Lots of people learn science; everybody knows that they have a material body and every Grade 12 science student knows that matter is from energy. Why can't we all connect the two pieces of information together to realize that underneath we are all the same? The difference is that matter being from energy is not our personal experience — neither of our physical eyes nor of the eye of our mind. With the eye of his mind, Einstein personally experienced that energy is the common ground of all of us. We call that discovery because no physicist before him had formally announced it. He credibly described his experience in his research paper. Our physics teachers learned it from Einstein's teachings and they taught us. For us, it is just a piece of information we gathered with our ears, even if our teachers were excellent communicators and explained it well. The human condition is such that book learning is of little practical application in our daily lives until we make it a part of our personal experience.

Was Einstein the first person ever to discover that, underneath our individual appearances, we all are the same? Look at the very first verse of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Earth is matter and heaven is not earth like matter, even though both are parts of creation (nature). Body is corporeal (sense-perceptible matter) and mind is not. On some level we have known about unity within diversity for

a long time, but we did not live like a part of the whole before — or even after — Einstein. We never made this fact a part of our life experience. Experience can be described but not transmitted. The usefulness of descriptions is in the possibility of inspiring others.

Discoveries like Einstein's constitute our spiritual and scientific heritage. Through our five senses of cognition, we are subject to a constant onslaught of the optical delusion of our consciousness. Intellectual learning or acceptance on faith of the principle of unity underlying diversity is not enough to overcome it. This ongoing onslaught of the optical delusion resulting from sense perception must constantly be overcome by everyone personally with inner exploration by an attentive human mind in an ambiance of inner calm and clarity. Such learning is called contemplative learning.

Isn't all research, scientific or otherwise, the overcoming of an optical delusion created by our senses? What is special about the optical delusion to which Einstein refers in this quote?

It is true that the underlying truth of everything is hidden from our sense perception. In all other cases, we seek the underlying truth of a definite object and the underlying truth in itself is also definite. Anything definite is in the domain of sense perception, and its truth can be established with empirical observation using technological instruments. Definite objects are limited, and their underlying truth is of limited importance.

When the object being explored is the entirety of the universe of sense perception, its underlying cause is not a definite thing in the domain of sense perception. No scientific instrument can once and for all empirically verify

something that is not a thing at all. Being totally invisible, it is not subject to empirical observation by any instrument technology can devise. On the other hand, this thing-that-is-not-a-thing relates all that exists into one planetary family. As such it is hugely meaningful. The process of learning it so that it can be useful in the everyday life of an individual must involve ongoing inner contemplation to keep ahead of the constant onslaught of the optical delusion resulting from divisive sense perception.

This learning happens in three steps:

- Gathering information through sense perception in a teaching-learning process and observation of existence;
- Reflective revisiting of information gathered by the senses to process it into knowledge and understanding;
- Further processing of the collected information and the resulting understanding in periods of focused one-pointed contemplation.

We need to contemplate regularly for complete assimilation and embodiment of the final understanding to use in everyday behaviour in the external world. Without this last step, Einstein's optical delusion remains an optical delusion and unity in diversity remains merely an empty cliché.

Conscious Sense Perception

We start with the *cognitive* state of consciousness. Information gathering using the five senses of knowing is where education, as well as learning, begins. Our senses can only perceive differences. Perception of differences indicates boundaries. When I look at Jim, I see his profile, he is so tall, he is white in complexion, he is male, etc. When I look at Jane, I perceive her in a similar

manner. Cognition is how we recognize an individual. In such a learning, Jim will always remain Jim, and Jim and Jane will never be the same.

Perception of unity in diversity, however, is not cognitive like seeing with my eyes. If we cannot perceive unity in diversity, how can we feel it? This kind of learning needs a state of consciousness different from that we have while perceiving with our senses. Our senses can only perceive unconnected individuals.

Conscious Reflection

The next state of consciousness is *reflective*. In the reflective state of consciousness, we return to the information we gathered with our senses and try to make *sense* of it. In this state, we begin to find similarities and relations and discover connections. This is the beginning of unification, but our unification is within boundaries of rationality drawn by our senses. We conclude Jim is a man; Jane is a woman. Jim is a Christian name, so he must be a Christian. Ahmed is not a Christian name, nor is it a Jewish or a Hindu name, so he must be a Muslim. Jim and Jane are both Christian names, so they are both Christians although Jim is a man and Jane is a woman. In reflection, we still are caught up with differences, although differences go past individuality and take us to organization or classification.

Contemplative Consciousness

Human beings are capable of another state of consciousness, called *contemplative* consciousness. In this state of consciousness, we break out of the limits of rationality, organization and classification imposed by our senses. We start seeing what lies beyond the limits of rationality. In the contemplative state, we discover the

underlying oneness of Jim, Jane and Ahmed without denying their differences. Jim, Jane and Ahmed are not the same, but beyond their differences they are one. When we are truly contemplative, we discover the nonduality of Jim, Jane and Ahmed past mere knowing to the level of heart feeling so that we can live it in our daily lives.

The Need and Nature of Contemplative Education

Ordinary education leads us to intellectual growth within the bounds of rationality, but to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity we must get us beyond analytical cognition, classification and organization of information to an integration of the paradoxes underlying existence. We can understand the difference between ordinary and contemplative education by stating that the goal of ordinary education is a rational view of the world while that of contemplative education is a worldview that transcends rationality without denying it. The former worldview is fragmented while the latter is holistic.

That explains why the current system of education does not resolve the problem of intolerance, bigotry and identity-based hatred. If it did, there would be no lack of tolerance of differences in the so-called educated world; bigotry and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, etc. should have been long gone. On the contrary, bigotry is on the rise. The malady has spread even to politics, a noble vocation of common good and public service, relegating it to an activity of seeking power by means fair or foul rather than working together for the national good.

Underlying intolerance and bigotry is fear. Fear of survival and fear of losing our identity play major roles, as does anxiety — another form of fear, differing only in intensity

— about not getting what we want and getting what we don't want.

Fear is not only psychological, but also physiological. The body responds to fear and anxiety by running our automatic survival functions at a fast pace. The higher the intensity of fear and sense of helplessness in addressing its causes, the higher the frequency of breath and heart pulsation and the lower the rate at which we digest. This is so because of the intelligence of our body to keep it in readiness to jump into action to face fear. Constant elicitation by the body of its inner fear response is one of the two major reasons for our physical and mental suffering, the other being infection by external organisms.

Consciousness of unity in diversity handles fear psychologically. If we understand unity, we know that we are one and that there is no one of whom we should be afraid. If we also accept diversity, there is no threat to our identity. Unity in diversity is a paradox; unity implies oneness while diversity implies multiplicity. It is not rational to accept unity and diversity at the same time. Our ordinary state of consciousness cannot accept such a contradiction. The idea of opposites harmonizing to make a truth is acceptable only to contemplative consciousness. That is why we talk of contemplative education as unity in diversity.

The process of contemplation requires a sense of calm to discover and personally experience clarity and harmony of unity, which in turn leads to a higher sense of mental calm. Mental calm dispels fear; fear and calm simply cannot coexist.

Thus, contemplative education to cultivate feelings of unity in diversity deals psychologically with fear; a personal experience of unity in diversity as the truth of existence

eliminates the need for fear. Contemplative education deals physiologically with fear by dispelling it with the elicitation of calmness, which slows the speed of the autonomic survival functions of the body, such as breathing and heart rate, while accelerating digestion. Calm prevents and reverses senescence.

In the context of fear and anxiety, when breathing, heart rate, etc. are elevated, how does one become calm for getting into a state of contemplation? All one needs to do to elicit calmness is to consciously decrease the rate at which one breathes. That initiative automatically reduces the heart rate while improving digestion. That is how our physiology works.

Truth, Paradoxes and Contemplative Learning

If we look at an object of sense perception and explore its cause, first we think of its immediate cause. The immediate cause may be obvious or hidden. If it is hidden, it may need some searching. Having identified the immediate cause, we may be curious about the next cause. The process may go on and on without an end, and every time we regress we come up with a cause underlying a cause. If we continue regressing infinitely, we finally arrive at a cause which is termed the ultimate cause. The immediate cause of different objects may be different, but the ultimate cause is the same; the ultimate cause is thus the common ground of all existence. It is also known as the ultimate reality or the truth or reality underlying existence.

Modern science explores the ultimate reality of the material world and comes up with energy as its answer. Matter is perceptible by the senses while energy is totally imperceptible, or a total mystery. Isn't it paradoxical to say that this entire universe, 92 billion light years across and

expanding, is the product of energy which can be represented by a point of no dimensions? It is like saying that something comes out of nothing. Modern science was perhaps led to this conclusion by ancient spirituality which explored the ultimate reality of the entire universe of matter and mind and identified imperceptible spirit as its ultimate truth. Spirit is thought to be an indivisible unity of consciousness manifested by the mind and energy manifested by the material body — again a paradox of the universe being sourced from nothing. Terms used may be different, but the conclusion is not.

Rationality is a product of sense perception. Sense perception is definite. Rational education does not entertain indefinite notions such as infinity, infinite regression, paradoxes and ultimacy of causation. It also does not entertain indefinite ideas of the purpose and meaning of life, unconditional love, compassion, etc. However, such notions are included in contemplative education. We can say that contemplative education is more comprehensive than its rational counterpart.

Another way of characterizing contemplative education is that it aims to open the eyes of the body as well as the eye of mind, where its rational counterpart is limited to the eyes of the body only. For rational education, an object A and an object B always remain two different objects, where for contemplative education, an object A and an object B are outwardly two objects, but inwardly one as their ultimate cause or reality is the same.

Historical Perspectives

Contemplative learning is not a new idea. In fact, its origin is ancient, with roots going back to prehistoric Vedic period. The Vedas present six schools of thought; one of

those, called Yoga, is in the nature of applied science or technology, while the other five present perspectives on the science which Yoga applies. It was only natural that the land where the Vedas originated was the first geographical area where contemplative learning was practised. That land came to be known as India.

The French philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778) regarded the Vedas as exceptional: “The Veda was the most precious gift for which the West had ever been indebted to the East.” Manuscripts of the Rigveda were selected for inscription in UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register in 2007 (Vedas).

The Indian Experience

We are suggesting a model of education that was prevalent in the ancient Vedic culture of India. This model is characterized by the priority it allocates to the broadest possible truth of existence — spirit, the infinite and infinitesimal essence which underlies and interconnects the entire universe of the animate and inanimate. All other knowledge and understanding is secondary to comprehension of this incomprehensible mystery. We quote here a verse from ancient Vedic literature which, in describing an ideal teacher, indirectly defines the ultimate goal of education. The verse translates as “I bow to the teacher who conclusively shows *That* which pervades the indivisible universe of the animate and the inanimate.” Here the word *That* alludes to the unseen and unidentifiable Self of all that exists. The original Sanskrit words of the verse (Shree Guru Gita, Verse 67) are reproduced below:

अखण्ड-मण्डलाकारम् व्याप्तम् येन चराचरम्।
तत्पदम् दर्शितम् येन तस्मै श्री गुरवे नमः॥

Emphasis on broad-based education does not imply lack of economic achievement. About the economy of ancient India, it is said that for a continuous duration of nearly 1700 years from the beginning of the Common Era, India was the topmost economy, constituting 35 to 40 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product of the world (2,000 Years of Economic History in One Chart, 2017), (Wikipedia, The Economy of India).

In addition to wealth and prosperity, the contemplative explorations of Indian thinkers can be credited with some amazing discoveries, culminating in their unveiling of an unseen reality abruptly bursting forth into an immensely vast universe of mind and matter. This underlying unseen is self-existent. The process of the unmanifest manifesting is driven by its own inner fire, but how it happens remains a mystery. A poetic rendering of the origin of the universe is found in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Rigveda (Talwar, 2019, pp. 64-92).

Raimon Panikkar, a Jesuit priest, theologian and proponent of interreligious dialogue for peace, regards the Vedas as “one of the most stupendous manifestations of the Spirit” and the Vedic Epiphany as belonging to “the heritage of mankind,” its deepest function being best served “by sharing it in a spirit of fellowship with humanity at large” (Panikkar, 1994, p. 3).

The Nasadiya Sukta paints a remarkably modern picture of the origin of the universe. Sanskrit *Nasadiya* means “not the nonexistent” while *Sukta* means hymn. Thus, Sanskrit *Nasadiya Sukta* literally means the hymn of “not the

nonexistent”, “not the untrue” and “not the unreal.” The use of the double negative here indicates its objectivity: it exists but not in an ordinary way of a thing existing materially. The object being pointed to is an essence which bursts forth into a universe of matter and mind or energy and consciousness, energy being the unmanifest essence of matter and consciousness that of mind. Although the essence being talked about, being unseen and unmanifest in itself, is beyond human understanding, for practical purposes we may understand it as an indivisible combination of two unseen essences: energy and consciousness. This essence is the objective truth underlying all the truths of all objects, the building block of all building blocks. Being all-inclusive, it is the holiest of the holy. It is Panikkar’s *cosmotheandric* reality (Panikkar, 1994, p. 63), the reality underlying the *cosmos* (universe), *theos* (divinity), and *andropos* (humanity). It is the Spirit of the Universe, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Humankind:

And the earth was without form, and void;
and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face
of the waters. (Gen. 1:2)

Besides unveiling the truth of the unmanifest underlying the manifest universe, the contemplative culture of India contributed to the world a system called Yoga for experiencing the unmanifest with the eye of our mind with the same certainty as is possible while observing something with our physical eyes. We then can live life in conformity with the truth underlying existence. Yoga systematically enables the development of our executive functions to live a life of our chosen purpose, whatever it may be, right up to that of personally experiencing the unseen underlying

existence. The yogic process of achieving our purpose naturally results in a consciousness necessary for health and harmony.

The Nordic Experience

In recent history, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) (Wikipedia, Wilhelm von Humboldt), a Prussian philosopher, diplomat, education official and founder of the University of Berlin argued that education should not be narrowly understood as merely a preparation for the labour market. Broad-based education should be given top priority, while vocational skills can easily be learned later, he argued. In a letter to the Prussian king, he wrote,

There are undeniably certain kinds of knowledge that must be of a general nature and, more importantly, a certain cultivation of the mind and character that nobody can afford to be without. People obviously cannot be good craftworkers, merchants, soldiers or businessmen unless, regardless of their occupation, they are good, upstanding and — according to their condition — well-informed human beings and citizens. If this basis is laid through schooling, vocational skills are easily acquired later on, and a person is always free to move from one occupation to another, as so often happens in life.

The broad-based educational model promoted by Humboldt came to be known as the Humboldtian model of higher education (Wikipedia, Humboldtian model of higher education). The core idea of this model is a holistic combination of research and studies. The German idea of

Bildung corresponds to the Humboldtian model of education. The Nordic countries of Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland have adopted the German *Bildung* approach.

Bildung (*Bildung*) refers to the tradition of self-cultivation with consciousness-raising and transformative education to affect personal and cultural maturation by harmonizing the individual head and heart in a unification of selfhood and identity with the community and world at large. It is thus important for our nurture to keep us free and autonomous from an early age without being fettered and boxed in with notions and beliefs which we cannot challenge and negate as we grow.

When we are born, our consciousness results naturally from the experience we gain with our senses. This natural consciousness defines our ego identity. Self-cultivation often involves painful alienation from that identity. It is said that we must kill our ego self to reunify with our real Self. In other words, our personal development and maturation involves ongoing contemplative re-examination and unlearning, if necessary, of our early notions and beliefs to rediscover our Selfhood.

“Education [*Bildung*], truth and virtue,” Humboldt maintained, must be disseminated to such an extent that the “concept of mankind” takes on a great and dignified form in each individual. This shall be achieved personally by each individual, who must “absorb the great mass of material offered to him by the world around him and by his inner existence, using all the possibilities of his receptiveness; he must then reshape that material with all the energies of his own activity and appropriate it to himself so as to create an interaction between his own

personality and nature in a most general, active and harmonious form” (Bildung).

The European Bildung Network (European Bildung Network) defines Bildung as “the combination of the education and knowledge necessary to thrive in your society, and the moral and emotional maturity to both be a team player and have personal autonomy. Bildung is also knowing your roots and being able to imagine the future.” The German word *Bildung* is used because there is no English word involving so many aspects of inner formation and transformation.

Bildung has both culture-specific and universal dimensions. Behaviour is culture-specific. while its universal dimension comprises the development of personal executive functions, consciousness, knowledge, understanding, emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, wisdom, freedom, autonomy, a sense of belonging, human rights, planetary care, respecting the diversity of existence and individual responsibility towards various levels of collective human organization such as family, community, nation and the world.

In a 2020 column entitled “This Is How Scandinavia Got Great: The Power of Educating the Whole Person,” David Brooks of the New York Times (Brooks, 2020) wrote, “Almost everybody admires the Nordic model. Countries like Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland have high economic productivity, high social equality, high social trust and high levels of personal happiness.” Brooks credited their transformation to an educational initiative by Nordic leaders in the nineteenth century. They realized that if their countries were to develop and prosper, they needed

to implement an education model for their countries based upon the German Bildung concept.

According to Islamic scholar Javed Ghamidi (Ghamidi, 2015), it is the basic right of every child to have twelve years of broad-based education. Thereafter, they may choose to become a doctor, a scientist or a religious scholar. Religions want to introduce religious education at an early age. No one has the right to do this, or to force a child to become a doctor or an engineer. After a broad-based education of twelve years, they may choose to become whatever they may wish. For this to take effect, civil society must prepare itself, people must educate themselves and governments must be pressured not to allow any institution to take students for specialization before twelve years of broad-based education.

The broadest-based education is education to cultivate unity in diversity of existence, which conforms to the models of Bildung and Humboldtian education. Education to cultivate unity in diversity must then be a significant part of the preschool and primary school curriculum. Preschool- and primary-school-age children are the most receptive to the notion of *unity in diversity* and its challenge of a lifelong hunger for reflective learning and self-culture leading to wisdom, self-realization and the realization of our Selfhood in all existence (Talwar, 2019).

Having sown the seeds of unity in diversity at the preschool and primary school levels, we must follow up with suitable cultivation of these seeds at the presecondary, secondary and postsecondary levels. We must continue to widen the student's sense of belonging so that they assume responsibility not only for "me" but also for "we": family,

community, village, county, province, country and finally the planet.

University-level research is needed to refine and find new ways of communicating meaningful ideas to transform lives. We must unlearn minimalist and reductionist worldviews developing naturally from the lifelong onslaught of human senses that separate and divide. We must learn, adopt and embody all-inclusive holistic worldviews that harmonize and unite through a deep understanding of pluralistic societies and complex systems, clearly perceiving their underlying relationships and connectedness.

Determinants of Individual and Collective Happiness

In 2008, the constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan instituted Gross National Happiness (GNH), an index which is used to measure the collective happiness and wellbeing of a population, as the goal of the government of Bhutan instead of the usual GDP (Gross National Happiness). In 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to develop a holistic definition of development. It invited member countries to measure the happiness of their people and to use the data to help guide public policy. Since 2012, the United Nations has published an annual world happiness report (with the exception of 2014) to define a new economic paradigm based upon wellbeing and happiness.

Chapter 7 of the World Happiness Report 2020 is entitled “The Nordic Exceptionalism: What Explains Why the Nordic Countries are Constantly Among the Happiest in the

World” (World Happiness Report). It opens with the following paragraph:

From 2013 until today, every time the World Happiness Report (WHR) has published its annual ranking of countries, the five Nordic countries — Finland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Iceland — have all been in the top ten, with Nordic countries occupying the top three spots in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Clearly, when it comes to the level of average life evaluations, the Nordic states are doing something right, but Nordic exceptionalism isn’t confined to citizen’s happiness. No matter whether we look at the state of democracy and political rights, lack of corruption, trust between citizens, felt safety, social cohesion, gender equality, equal distribution of incomes, Human Development Index, or many other global comparisons, one tends to find the Nordic countries in the global top spots.

The concluding paragraph states categorically that, besides good and trustworthy governance, a culture of community and unity among the citizenry are the prime determinants of a country’s happiness:

Thus, institutionally, building a government that is trustworthy and functions well, and culturally, building a sense of community and unity among the citizens are the most crucial steps towards a society where people are happy. While the Nordic countries took their own particular paths to their current welfare state model, each country must

follow its own path. If citizen well-being and happiness are truly the goals of government, then serious research on institutional and cultural determinants of citizen happiness is the first step in starting an evidence-based journey towards fulfilling that goal.

On deeper examination of the two primary determinants of happiness emerging from the World Happiness Report 2020, the two seem to merge into one. Governance emerges from the community: from where do the governors come? If the governors are part of the community, good and trustworthy governance is natural. If the community deeply feels unity in diversity, how can governance not be likewise?

The scope of contemplative learning to cultivate feelings of unity in diversity is not limited only to building unity at the localized community level, but it also extends to the planetary level. We begin to feel our own self extending to other human beings as well as to the natural environment in which we live: trees out there, water running in the brook, the mountain where it originates, the flora and fauna on its banks, fish and aquatic life flourishing in it and the rocks that make the currents swirl.

Mental calm is a prerequisite for contemplative learning, and contemplative learning leads to lived feelings of unity in diversity, which in turn intensifies mental calm. Fear-based mental stress disappears with mental calm, and the disappearance of mental stress prevents and reverses a multitude of physical and mental illnesses.

The fundamental role stress plays in physical and mental health can be understood by referring to the work of Nobel

Prize-winning cell biologist Elizabeth Blackburn (Blackburn, 2017), (Blackburn & Epel, The Telomere Effect: A Revolutionary Approach to Living Younger, Healthier, Longer, 2018). Stress leads to the onset of senescence, or deterioration at the level of our physical body on the exterior and mind on the interior. Senescence robs cells of their ability to regenerate. As a result, we begin losing our health span and enter the disease span leading to the end of life.

Cells are the building blocks of our bodies and minds. The onset of senescence is like our own building blocks turning against us.

Concluding Remarks

Prevalent systems of education highlight the rational approach to learning. We envisage an approach to education that will push rationality beyond its boundaries of finiteness and differentiability to its underlying truth of the infinite and nondifferentiable. Education only in the domain of the finite and differentiable deprives us of the truth underlying this domain.

Diversity exists; that is a truth. And unity exists; that too is a truth. Diversity exists because of the existence of unity; diversity is visible while unity is too subtle to be visible except with the eye of the mind. Human history has shown that those few whose education opens the eye of the mind contemplatively to experience the invisible lead rich, full, harmonious, healthy and creative lives.

Contemplative education to cultivate lived feelings of unity in diversity helps humanity with the cultivation of health, harmony and happiness, allowing it to resolve many of the

global problems we face today without the imposition of uniformity. The advantages to be gained through the judicious institution of contemplative education at different levels of our educational systems far outweigh any financial and social costs involved.

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