A REFLECTION ON THE EASTERN CONCEPT OF THE
HUMAN PERSON – HIGHLIGHTING SOME ELEMENTS
OF HINDU AND TAOIST WORLDVIEWS

MINA M. RAMIREZ

Some elements of the spiritual and cultural heritages from the East may enrich our self-understanding. These elements are being incorporated in different disciplines by several scientists who lead us to a shift of consciousness from a materialistic and mechanistic worldview to an organic and spiritual worldview.

1. THE DIVINE DIGNITY OF THE PERSON

The Indian when greeting another person devoutly bows to the other with joined hands and says ‘Namaste’ meaning, ‘The God/Deity in me greets the God/Deity in you’. In 1996, the Ramon Magsaysay Awards Foundation (RMAF) granted a prize to an Indian guru, Pandurang Shastri Athavale, for community leadership in villages of Bombay. His community development was premised on the social behavioral imperatives of ‘Namaste’. This greeting summarizes a whole ethical or organizing principle of life. It is a greeting that can be reconciled with our basic belief as a Christian that every person is called to live as a child of God.

According to Rabindranath Tagore, We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. (Sadhana, 1972 p. 30). To be conscious of the divine spark, of this divine energy in us, is to be able to relate well with others and with the world. By understanding the Self, this entire universe is known. (McLaughlin, p. 18) The Self here is capitalized because it underscores as it were the ‘God-self’ that should determine human behavior. To be conscious of the spirit-in-us according to Tagore is to win mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that world-
ly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and greatness of our soul (op. cit., p. 30). For the Hindu, the path to virtue is to be ‘soul conscious’, to be attentive to the inner reality as embodied spirit.

There is no mention of God or Deity as such in the Taoist worldview. And yet there is an allusion to the spirit in nature that needs to be understood by intuition and contemplation. It is the understanding of the workings of the spirit in nature that will lead us to the right path of action. The world-view of the Tao has been articulated by Lao Tzu (6th century BC). His classic wisdom is contained in his book, Taó Te Ching, where Taó means The Way (the way the universe works, the way nature is). If we respect the way of nature, we shall become a person of wisdom, knowing the right path in different spheres, especially in the realm of politics, governance and leadership.

Evolved individuals hold to the Tao
And regard the world as their Pattern. (Wing, R.L., 1986, no. 86)

The Taoist worldview like other wisdom writings is replete with paradoxes analogous to the workings in nature and alluded to by contemporary writers when speaking about social transformative processes from the inside out.

2. THE HARMONY BETWEEN PERSON, NATURE AND GOD

Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk who had immersed himself in the religious beliefs and practices of Hinduism, observed that in Western science there is a sharp distinction between the material, the psychological, and the spiritual. Not so is the thinking in the Vedas, the most ancient form of Hindu poetry in the world. Bede Griffiths explains, that for instance, ‘both the physical and psychological were understood as manifestations of the one supreme Spirit’. (Griffiths 1989, p. 59)

He cites a beautiful verse in the Vedas which illustrates these three aspects of reality. The fire which is the sun, the fire which is the earth, that fire is in my heart. (ibid., p. 60) In terms of images, heaven is the spiritual world, earth is the material world, and the human being is the psychological world which stands between the two. Thus the fire used for sacrifice brings the material goods to its source back to heaven. In the Vedic view if we live constantly returning things to their source, then we are living in the harmony, the rhythm, the rita, of the universe. (ibid., 61)
That every reality is sacred is the foundation of the moral principle of respect for every human being and all of creation. The principle of respect for life and all life-forms will allow us and the earth to develop organically and spiritually. It will guarantee the sustainability of our planet earth, which is threatened by a too materialistic and mechanical world-view.

Tagore writes of the man-in-the-universe:

India having been in contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realize, to enlarge his consciousness, that there is no such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects. (Tagore, 1972, p. 7)

Then again,

This fundamental unity of creation was not simply a philosophical speculation for India... With meditation and service, with a regulation of her life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything has a spiritual meaning to her... India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realizing it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace. (ibid.)

In the Hindu wisdom there appears no duality between oneself and the world, no division between animate and inanimate.

This view of harmony between the person, nature and God may be gleaned from the following passage from Lao Tzu in Tao Te Ching.

Attain the highest openness;
Maintain the deepest harmony,
Become a part of All things;
In this way, I perceive the cycles.
Indeed, things are numerous;
But each cycle merges with the source
Merging with the source is called harmonizing;
This is known as the cycle of destiny. (Tao Te Ching, no. 16 in Wing, R.L.)

The person is a body-mind-spirit unity. A consciousness of this unity in thought and in deed will bring about a sense of wholeness and holiness. This microcosm of the person reflects the interpenetration in the macrocosm of person, the world and God Who is immanent and transcendent.
The world in this context does not stand outside the person, not something that can be considered as just object to be manipulated and exploited; but is forming with the person an integral whole because it, too, is spiritual, sacred and has integrity.

3. LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE ASCENT TO THE GODHEAD

According to Griffiths, the breakthrough in consciousness to the transcendent Reality called Brahman involves the search for the Self, called Atman, the inner reality of the human person.

Through the practice of the discipline of the senses and the mind through meditation, a person may reach consciousness in the more subtle realm, into the transpersonal realm. The level of consciousness is the person’s ascent to the Godhead. (Griffiths, 1986, pp. 178-203) From the intellect (buddhi) to the great self (mahat) one reaches cosmic consciousness. Keeping this state in the self, when the still point is reached, is to be at peace. (ibid., p. 176)

A Final Consideration

These elements of Hindu and Taoist worldviews that have been explored now by scientists like Fritzjof Capra (The Turning Point, 1982; Uncommon Wisdom, 1988) Ken Wilber (The Eye of the Spirit, 1998), Deepak Chopra (The Seven Spiritual Laws of Leadership, 1994), Braud, William and Rosemarie Anderson (Transpersonal Research Methods for the Social Sciences, 1998); Clive Hamilton (The Mystic Economist, 1994) and others. It seems that a new cosmic consciousness is leading to a science that is inclusive of the spiritual dimension of the person. Today, there is recognition not just of I.Q. (Intelligence Quotient), not just of E.Q (Emotional Quotient) but also of S.Q. (Spiritual Quotient). (Wolman, 2001) In his theory of individuation, Jungian psychology was influenced by elements of the Hindu worldview. (Singer 1972, p. xx) Bio-spiritual exercises like Tai-Chi in China, Yoga in India, and Aikido in Japan are moving meditations which tend to integrate body, mind and spirit as well as make the person highly conscious of his/her interconnectedness with the environment and the whole cosmos. The way one breathes is the way to one’s life, health and being.

Reflections on human and social development based on the philosophy of the East have come up with interdisciplinary discourses among scientists
- physicists, economists, transpersonal psychologists, theologians who are Hindu scholars, Buddhists and artists with regard to a holistic world-view in the context of the world that needs a new paradigm, a new consciousness of the development process that takes seriously the spiritual dimension of the person.

In 1994 Corinne McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson published their book, *Spiritual Politics, Changing the World from the Inside Out* which underscores the role of ageless wisdom in politics and government. While being open to the richness of the Asian religious traditions including Hinduism and Taoism, the reflection on ‘The Human Person in Southeast Asian Politics’ (Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta) may also have to be assessed from the perspective of his rootedness in this ‘inside-out’ organic and spiritual world-view, thus realizing the importance of the inner reality of the person of the politician.

Amidst the darkness of a materialistic and mechanical world-view that we are experiencing at the moment, we are given hope and light that there is the dawn of a mystical and spiritual age (Tuoti, 1997) that will make whole and holy what we have collectively fragmented in the past.

We hope that in and through our Christian Faith, we shall move even more so with trust in the Power of the God-Within-us and among us. I believe that the Infinite within our finite selves is the secret of our effectiveness for bringing about total well-being to humanity and our world.

REFERENCES

Books:


Articles:


General Reference

Concepts of human nature in Taoism are thus intimately connected with the body. Because of its body sciences and experimentation with diet and chemistry, Taoism had a great influence on the development of traditional Chinese medicine. According to Taoist principles, illness can be viewed as a lack of alignment, or harmony, within the body. Another way of viewing the body was introduced in the Scripture of the Yellow Court, a Shangqing Taoist text, which stated that the gods resided within the human body. This scripture described the body as a divine court with internal dwelling places for each god. There was a god residing in each organ, a god located at the top of the head, one in each eye, one between the eyebrows, and so on. This article explains some of the basic concepts of Taoism, such as yin yang, chi and wu wei. So Taoists live lives of balance and harmony. They find their way through life in the same way that a river flowing through the countryside finds its natural course. The world is a spiritual vessel, and one cannot act upon it; one who acts upon it destroys it. Tao Te Ching. This doesn't stop a person living a proactive life but their activities should fit into the natural pattern of the universe, and therefore need to be completely detached and disinterested and not ego-driven. Perfect activity leaves no track behind it; perfect speech is like a jade worker whose tool leaves no mark. Tao Some elements of Taoism may be traced to prehistoric folk religions in China that later coalesced into a Taoist tradition. In particular, many Taoist practices drew from the Warring-States-era phenomena of the wu (connected to the shamanic culture of northern China) and the fangshi (which probably derived from the "archivist-soothsayers of antiquity, one of whom supposedly was Laozi himself.")