



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

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A Draft Proposal
Envision the Future of Education

Contemplative
Learning of
Unity in Diversity

For the attention
of

Lovers of World Peace and Harmony and Stakeholders
in
Education of the World

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Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc.
(<http://spiritualeducation.org>)

Executive Summary

Spiritual Heritage Education Network Inc. (SHEN, Est. 2000) exists to explore possible resolutions for some of the grave human problems of global proportions. After over twenty years of study and research in spiritual and scientific heritage of humanity, we have concluded, like many others, that spiritual wisdom of all major religions of the world agree on the unity underlying existence. The core finding of modern science is no different from that of the core wisdom of spirituality. According to both, there is one invisible essence underlying the entirety of existence.

At first glance, an invisible reality causing a universe 92 billion light years across appears ridiculous. Rationality is bounded by sense experience; if something is not within sense experience, its acceptance is irrational. Prevalent systems of education are bounded by rationality in spite of Einstein's energy-mass equivalence. Matter has mass while energy has none. While forms of energy are within sense experience, energy in itself is not. Einstein has established that truth cannot be limited by rationality.

How did Einstein discover energy-mass equivalence? He was a theoretical physicist. He focused 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 is from spirit outside the reach of our organs of perception. This process of discovery is termed contemplation; it is seeing the truth with the "eye" of the mind not that of the body when it is situated outside the reach of the latter.

The concept of an invisible truth of both science and spirituality, being an abstraction of the highest order, is not commonly understood. Many of us are completely unaware of it. At the same time, there is no fact 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 as I, I

treat you the same as if ‘you’ are ‘I’. Therefore, undoubtedly contemplative education leading to an inner experience of the invisible truth underlying all existence will help us resolve existential issues of global proportions 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 at its various levels of formal and informal discourse. We expect such a re-envisioning of education to create a culture of peace, harmony, health, wellness, and respect for all existence. It can unify all existence into a planetary family. Taking care of the shared family abode will be a natural outcome.

Our current educational systems are primarily in the domain of rationality defined by sense perception. Seemingly infinite perceptible universe cannot be the result of anything finite. Neither can it come out of nothing. Its source is an infinitesimal and yet infinite mystery and it will always remain so. Yet this mystery lends itself to experience with the eye of a contemplative mind. Contemplative education reaches beyond rationality of sense perception without denying it. It lends itself to critical thought and analysis yet reaches beyond differentiation to holistic integration. It is 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 whole world views.

Contemplative learning develops the ability of choose to *be* more rather than have more, like rational learning does.

Statement of the Proposal

Background Thinking

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

The current system primarily of rational education, with rationality being defined as the immediate logic developing from everyday sense experience, does not have the capacity of addressing serious problems of global scale faced by humanity today. Beginning with common everyday sense perception, science expands the scope of rationality with the developments 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. Scientific method thus pushes rationality of sense experience to its limit.

Common everyday rationality limits us to the bounds of the finite and the differentiable while the method of scientific rationality finally 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 to explore the reality underlying the obvious. They learnt to cultivate sharpness of senses with undisturbed attention and careful observations of nature and its phenomenon in an inner ambience of calm to make progress in their exploration which, like that of modern science, was time consuming and incremental. They too finally arrived at the ultimate truth of the existence of the universe of finiteness and

differentiability in itself lies beyond finiteness and differentiability.

Science limited its scope to matter while the scope of spiritual exploration of our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers included the entire universal of sense perception, whether inanimate or animate. Material science calls the ultimate reality of inanimate matter as energy while spiritual science of our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers calls its ultimate reality of the animate and inanimate as spirit.

In material science we proceed from our everyday sense experience and its immediate logic. If we follow it rigorously and ceaselessly expanding its reach with instrumentation and mathematical logic, we continuously and progress incrementally from subtlety to subtlety to 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 by critical and logical thinking, mathematical or otherwise. Thus, modern material science finds that all gases, liquids and solids, sounds and other wave forms flow from energy. Science is silent on mind and consciousness characterizing the animate because it considers these topics being incorporeal and 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 expanding its reach with calm, care and attention to detail of observation of mind, matter and natural phenomena, we continuously and progress incrementally from subtlety to subtlety to 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 by the eye of the mind. Thus, ancient spiritual science finds that all gases, liquids and

solids, sounds and other wave forms 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 wave forms flowing from energy comprise 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 as a unity of energy and consciousness.

According to spiritual science, both animate and the inanimate, comprise a body on the exterior the behaviour of which is run by a conscious mind in the interior. Our language calls the inanimate as mindless and their behaviour as specific laws of nature. Thus, the difference between the animate and the inanimate is only semantic. To the extent 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 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 she/he has arrived at the point of discontinuity.

The method of modern science differs from the contemplative method of ancient spirituality only in its addition of external resources to the latter which depends primarily on the inner resources of the explorer; external resources used in the former include replicable empirical measurements while the internal resources of the latter are careful, attentive and calm mind. The methods thus differ only in the resources and tools of exploration rather than 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.

Although our sages, seers, prophets, philosophers and 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 of it and brought it within the domain of their personal experience to live their lives with the feelings of unity in diversity.

We think that the primary reason underlying the current situation is human condition. It seeks easier answers to hard existential questions than having to seek and find. Where there is a demand, there is supply to satisfy it. Our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers having sought and experienced how their discovery of a unity in diversity transformed their life. Out of compassion, they started sharing to re-form the populace in their in their immediate locations. That gave rise to organized religion. The difficulty, not difficulty but impossibility, of talking about the unseen, as it is, gave rise to an appeal to acceptance on religious authority as an easier answer. Systems of belief offering easy answers to deep existential questions fail to transform as seeking and finding does. The former, however, cause to develop the feeling of a limiting identity to cherish and defend, while the latter brings the unseen unity in diversity within the domain of personal experience to live lives of harmony with the environment.

We are of an opinion that 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.

Use where appropriate

, we proceed from the ultimate finding of our sages, seers, prophets and philosophers written in our scriptures to the effect that the universe and all its beings ultimately result from an unseen reality called spirit, an indivisible union of consciousness and energy. We reflect and contemplate upon it to validate it in our everyday experience.

The ultimate truth arrived at by our science of modernity and spirituality of antiquity is relational. Our bodies on the exterior resulting from energy 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 spiritual beings and therefore one at the core of our beings.

Rational learning limits our mind to a reductionism of our specific sense perception depriving us of an experience of our ultimate reality. Reductionist knowledge is characterised by the exclusivity of separation while holistic by its inclusiveness. 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 inclusiveness of our substratum.

The proposal examines the unique characteristics of contemplative education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity to contrast it with the prevalent rational education. It is not a choice between the rational and the contemplative, we need a judicial blend of both because it the rational when pushed to its boundaries that leads to the contemplative. The 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 good governance but also contributed creative ideas in various disciplines of knowledge for the common good and 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 the opposites with causative relationships.

Three major problems facing the world today are: (1) Intolerance and bigotry based upon differences of any kind such faith, caste, creed, race, colour, gender, gender orientation, etc., (2) Mindless exploitation of natural resources of the planet, and (3) An epidemic of self-caused degenerative diseases of the body and the mind. With rational education, these problems seem to be intractable while they are compliant if addressed with contemplative learning; setting the stage for solving one with contemplative education sets up the stage for addressing the others as well.

Prevalent rational education leads us to intellectual growth within the bounds of rationality but education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity must get us beyond sense perception which merely analyses, fragments, divides, classifies and organizes to lead student to a 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 former worldview is reductionist and exclusive while the latter 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. Primary objective of contemplative learning is to form, re-form and transform one's self while mere learning primarily aims to develop understanding of the mind. We will dwell on the differences a later section.

There are two types of content in education to cultivate harmony: (1) Conceptual content aiming 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. No doubt, the former, to some extent, moulds our minds, but the latter is 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 then take charge of our behaviour rather than 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 of belonging, meaning, energy and purpose.

Education is empowerment. A narrowly empowered person is likely to use his/her power for narrow selfish or divisive reasons. On the other hand, a broadly empowered person is likely to use his 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 in preschool, primary, presecondary, secondary and postsecondary levels.

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

Nature of Contemplative Education to Cultivate Unity in Diversity

Rational Learning

We see diversity everyday 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 alphabet which our tongue uses to synthesize speech.

If A represents John, B represents Joan, C represents the tree outside that window, 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 as 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 individuals 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 unavailable for perception by natural means. Yet, it is not a 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, 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 approached him 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 a wisdom Einstein shared in this message! When we contemplatively experience the oneness of our ultimate reality, Einstein's "optical delusion" of diverse beings in the universe separate from the rest disappears. The "optical delusion" lasts as long as its reality is unknown; when that comes to light the illusion disappears. It is like the reality of a dream which disappears the instant we wake up.

Lots of people learn science; everybody knows that she/he has a material body and every grade twelve 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 an experience of our physical eyes nor the eye of our mind. Einstein personally with the eye of his mind experienced that energy is the common ground of all of us. We call that discovery because no physicist before him formally announced it. He credibly described his experience in his research paper. Our physics teacher learnt it in his teachers and taught us. For us, it is just a piece of information we gathered with our ears, even if our teacher was an excellent communicator and he explained it well. 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? Just 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 they both are two parts of creation (nature). Body is corporeal (sense perceptible matter) and mind not. The fact of the matter is that 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 possibilities of inspiring others.

Discoveries like Einstein's comprise our spiritual and scientific heritage. Through our five senses of cognition, there is a constant onslaught of the optical delusion of our consciousness. It is not overcome simply with intellectual learning or acceptance on faith of the principle of unity underlying diversity. 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 a leaning is called contemplative learning.

Isn't all research, scientific or otherwise, not 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. Definite objects are limited, their underlying truth is of limited importance. Anything definite is in the domain of sense perception and its truth can be established with empirical observation using technological instruments.

When the object being explored is the entirety of universe of sense perception, its underlying cause is not a definite thing in the domain of sense perception. No scientific instrument can once for all empirically verify anything which 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, which is not a thing at all, relates all that exists into one planetary

family. As such it is hugely meaningful. The process to learn it to be useful in 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: (1) Gathering information through sense perception in a teaching-learning process and from observation of existence, (2) Reflective revisiting of information gathered by the senses to process it into knowledge and understanding, and (3) Further processing of the collected information and the resulting understanding in periods of focused one pointed contemplation lifelong until nothing new emerges and complete assimilation 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 merely an empty cliché.

Conscious Sense Perception

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 indicated boundaries. When I look at Jim, I see his profile, he is so tall, he is across, 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 of 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

Next state of consciousness is reflective. In this state, when we return to the information we gather with our senses to make *sense*

of it. In reflective state of consciousness, we begin to find similarities, relate and connect. 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, it is not 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 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, organisation and classification imposed out our senses. We start seeing what lies beyond the limits of rationality. In the reflective 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. We are truly reflective we get the new found discovery of non-duality of Jim, Jane and Ahmed past mere knowing to the level of heart feeling in order to 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 contemplative education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity must get us beyond analytical cognition, classification and organization leading the student to a total integration of 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 cut it when it comes to resolve the problem of intolerance, bigotry and identity based hatred. If it did, there should be no lack of tolerance of differences in the so called educated world; bigotry and discrimination based upon race, colour, religion, gender, gender orientation, etc. should have 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 by overthrowing the party in power rather than working together for the national good.

The reason underlying intolerance and bigotry is fear. Fear of survival and fear of losing our identity pay major roles; then there is anxiety of not getting what we want and of getting what we don't want. Anxiety also is fear; the difference is only of intensity.

Fear is not only psychological but it also is physiological. Body responds to fear and anxiety by running our automatic survival functions run at a fast pace. Higher the intensity of fear and a sense of helplessness in addressing its causes, higher the frequencies of breath and heart pulsation and lower is 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 a one of the two major reasons of our physical and mental suffering while infection by external organisms is another.

The subject of unity in diversity handles it psychologically. If we understand unity, we are one and there is no one of who 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 in unity in diversity.

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

Thus, contemplative education to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity deals psychologically with fear with personal experience of unity in diversity as the truth of existence eliminating the need of fear. It deals physiologically with it by dispelling fear with the elicitation of calm which slows the speed of the autonomic survival functions of the body such as breathing, heart rate etc. while accelerating digestion. Calm prevents and reverses senescence.

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

The Truth, Paradoxes and Contemplative Learning

If we look an object of sense perception and explore its immediate cause. First we think of its immediate cause. The immediate cause may be obvious or hidden in which case it may need some searching. Having identified the immediate cause, we may be curious of the cause of that 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 explore 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 it is 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 or, paradoxes, ultimacy of causation etc. It also does not entertain indefinite ideas of purpose and meaning of life, unconditional love and compassion etc. Learning promoted by the prevalent educational rational education does not access such notions either which are included in contemplative education. We can say that contemplative education is more comprehensive than its rational counterpart which is a part of the former.

Another way of characterization of 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 A and B, 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 go back to the Vedic period. The Vedas present six schools of thought and one those, called Yoga, is of the nature of applied science or technology while the other five present perspectives of 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 practiced. That land came to be known as India.

Voltaire (1694–1778) regarded the Vedas to be exceptional, “The Veda was the most precious gift for which the West had ever been indebted to the East.” Rigveda manuscripts 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 the 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. 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 नमह॥

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 year 1 AD, India has been the topmost economy constituting 35 to 40% of the GDP of the world (2,000 Years of Economic History in One Chart, 2017), (Wikipedia, The Economy of India).

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

Raimon Panikkar, a Jesuit priest, theologian and a proponent of interreligious dialogue for peace, regards the Vedas as “One of the most stupendous manifestations of the Spirit”, the Vedic Epiphany as belonging to “the heritage of mankind”, the deepest function of which is 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 origination of the universe. Sanskrit Nasadiya means “not the non-existent” 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 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): 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 manifested 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, without a doubt, 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 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 the top priority, vocational skills can easily be learnt 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.

Broad based educational model promoted by Humboldt came to be known as 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. German idea of *bildung* corresponds to the Humboldtian model of education. 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 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 with the experience we gain with our senses. This natural consciousness defines our ego identity. Self-cultivation often involves painful alienation from it. 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” must be disseminated to such an extent that the “concept of mankind” takes on a great and dignified form in each individual. However, 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 (Humboldt).

European Bildung Network (European Bildung Network) defines it 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”. German word bildung is used because there is no English word involving as many aspects of the inner formation and transformation.

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

The opening words an article entitled *This Is How Scandinavia Got Great: The power of educating the whole person* by David Brooks of the New York Times (Brooks, 2020) are, “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 credits their transformation to an educational initiative of the Nordic leaders of 19th 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 very basic right of every child to have twelve years of broad based education. Thereafter, he 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 them to become a doctor or an engineer. After a broad based education of 12 years, they may choose to become whatever they may wish to. For this to take effect, civil society must prepare itself, people must educate themselves and governments must be pressurized not to allow any institution to take students for specialization before twelve years of broad based education.

There is no education with a base broader than education to cultivate unity in diversity of existence. It also conforms to the models of bildung and the 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 notions of *unity in diversity* challenging them for a lifelong hunger for reflective learning and self-culture which leads to wisdom, self-realization and the realization of our Selfhood in all existence (Talwar S. , The Common Ground, 2019).

Having sown the seeds of unity in diversity in preschool and primary school levels, we must follow up with suitable cultivation of them in presecondary, secondary and postsecondary levels. We must continue to widen the sense of belonging of the student to assume responsibility of not only “me” but also of “we”, family, community, village, county, province and country, and finally the planet.

University level research is needed to refine and find new ways of communicating of meaningful ideas to transform lives with

unlearning of minimalist and reductionist worldviews developing naturally from ongoing onslaught of human senses that divide and with deep learning of all-inclusive holistic ones that harmonize and unite through 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 well-being of a population, instead the usual Gross Domestic product (GDP) as the goal of the government of Bhutan (Gross National Happiness). In 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution do 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 been publishing a world happiness report in order to define a new economic paradigm based upon well-being and happiness. It has been published annually with the exception of 2014.

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.

Having seen the opening paragraph, let us see how the concluding paragraph states categorically that, besides good and trustworthy governance, a culture of community and unity amongst the citizenry are prime most determinants of happiness of a country:

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 taking seriously research on institutional and cultural determinants of citizen happiness is the first step in starting an evidence-based journey towards fulfilling that goal.

On a 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 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 the governance not be likewise?

The scope of contemplative learning to cultivate the feelings of unity in diversity is not limited only to building unity of human communities, but it also extends to the feelings of unity in diversity at 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 to 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 the dawn of mental calm and with the disappearance of mental stress prevents and reverses a multitude of physical and mental diseases.

How fundamental the role of stress in physical and mental health is, can be understood by referring to the work of Elizabeth Blackburn, a Nobel Prize winning cell biologist (Blackburn, The science of cells that never get old, 2017), (Blackburn & Epel, The Telomere Effect: A Revolutionary Approach to Living Younger, Healthier, Longer, 2018). Stress leads to the onset of senescence, a kind of cellular aging and senility which leads to aging at the level of our physical body on the exterior and mind in its interiority. Senescence robs cells of their ability to regenerate. As a result we begin losing our health span and enter disease span leading to the end of life.

Cells are the building blocks of our body and mind. Onset of senescence is like our own building blocks turning against us.

Concluding Remark

Prevalent systems of education highlight the rational approach of learning. We envisage education to push rationality beyond its boundaries of finiteness and differentiability to the infinite and non-differentiable. The latter being the truth underlying the existence of the former, education only of the domain of the finiteness and differentiable deprives us the truth of this domain.

Diversity exists; that is a truth. And unity exists; that too is a truth. The former exists because of the existence of latter; the former is visible while the latter 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 a full, harmonious, healthy and creative lives.

Thus, contemplative education to cultivate lived feelings of unity in diversity helps humanity with the cultivation of health, harmony and happiness resolving many problems of global scale we face today without the imposition of uniformity whatsoever. The advantages to be gained with its judicial institution at different levels of our educational systems far outweighs any financial and social costs involved.

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