

Chapter 6

The Yoga of the *Bhagavad Gita*: Spirituality, Meditation, and the Rise of a New Scientific Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the fact that śraddhā (truth-force or heart force; love-in-action, self-reliance, faith-in-oneself, and also enthusiasm) may be said to represent the key noticeable outcome of spirituality, yoga, and meditation, and also that śraddhā can be seen as the main category to bridge the gap between science and spirituality. Being itself the truth-force that is common to scientists (atheists or not) and people of different faiths, śraddhā represents a conceptual category that helps us to explain how science evolves shifting from one paradigm to another.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores a series of thoughts on meditation, spirituality, and science in a manner that does not necessarily equal a journal article. It takes advantage of a wider space for reflection on broad topics and a license to be less systematic. For a start, it considers the current discussion brought by Adluri and Bagchee (2014a, 2014b) about the concept of science suitable to the humanities and introduces a discourse on method. Then, it addresses the candidate proposed by Turci (2015) to fulfill the role of a new scientific paradigm, capable of bridging the gap between science and spirituality. It suggests that the *Bhagavad Gītā* (referred to below as *Gītā*) provides the grounds for such a paradigm when it introduces the art and science of meditation. Ultimately, it shows that this new paradigm can be understood and translated in Western grounds as soon as one realizes that *śraddhā* (truth-force or heart force; love-in-action, self-reliance, faith-in-oneself, and also enthusiasm) accounts for the unity of the *Gītā* as well as for the two following corollaries of Turci's (2007) Ph. D. dissertation "*Śraddhā in the Bhagavad Gītā*:" (*Bhagwad Gita* = the Song of the Lord, Circa 200 B.C.).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3254-6.ch006

- (1) the fact that *śraddhā* may be said to represent the key noticeable outcome of spirituality, yoga, and meditation, and also;
- (2) that *śraddhā* can be seen as the main conceptual category to bridge the gap between science and spirituality.

The discussion about the centrality of *śraddhā* in the *Gītā* adds to the discussion, for instance, how powerful technology available today used to investigate brain imaging, can provide enough data to explain the material and/or spiritual nature of all human experiences. On the one hand, scientists are trying to show that brain chemistry and the functioning of neurotransmitters through all neural networks can explain our spiritual feelings. Their underlying hypothesis is mostly based on the belief that in explaining the operations of the brain one will find proof for the non-existence of the soul. Since the results of Newberg and d'Aquili (2008) many researchers have argued that all experiences attributed to the soul represent nothing but consequences of the way the brain operates. On the other hand, however, unless one believes that the brain produces the reality of this universe, one can never assign to the brain's fantasy what may be out there in some metaphysical realm. Furthermore, it is not difficult to find in our days a researcher of the brain discussing areas that are activated during meditation. There has been a continuous and broad effort by scientists around the world to solve the mysteries involved in what one perceives as a religious experience. Increasing scientific evidence indicates that yoga and meditation are useful in mental health, bringing a combination of mental alertness with physiological rest (Kumar et al., 2010; Dentico et al., 2018).

The *Gītā* summarises the entire philosophy of the *Vedas* (Circa 1500-1200 B.C.) and the *Upaniṣads* (Circa 800-300 B.C.). The text, as it is well known, is an episode in the *Mahābhārata* when the climactic battle is about to begin. There, the protagonist, Arjuna, learns from Krishna the ancestral and lost science of pure yoga and meditation. In the first chapter Arjuna is without *śraddhā* (*aśraddadhāna*); in the tenth, he acquires *brahmavidyā*; and finally, in the seventeenth, he is fully endowed with pure *śraddhā*. In the *Gītā* *śraddhā* is ground in spirituality, meditation, wisdom, and science. Turci (2007) discusses how *śraddhā* appears in order with the Vedic usage and opens the person to contact with the soul-force, which drives the whole universe. Being itself the truth-force that is common to scientists (atheists or not) and people of different faiths, *śraddhā* represents a conceptual category that helps us to explain how science evolves shifting from one paradigm to another. The work of Turci (2015) shows that the ability to recognize truth and the laws of nature comes from *śraddhā*. The Latin term “*credere*”, which is usually rendered by the English term “creed”, can be traced back to the same Sanskrit root as the term “*śraddhā*” (Smith, 1979). Their etymology suggests the general meaning of “to place one's heart on”. Both terms are rooted in the primitive Indo-European term “*kred-dhe*”. Furthermore, their metaphorical sense of “putting one's heart on” suggest that they do not relate to any creed in particular, but to that truth-force which lies beyond all beliefs.

The philosophical category defined by the term “*śraddhā*” helps us to develop a deeper understanding of the kind of experience people have, when they state that their “spiritual” experiences make them lose their sense of “I” and “feel” one with the Absolute. Through the lenses of *śraddhā*, we are able to understand the outcome of experiences such as the Buddha's enlightenment, Gandhi's display of truth-force (which he called *satyāgraha*), and the wholehearted speech of Martin Luther King, “I have a dream”. They all can be said to represent more than a flash parietal lobe quieting down. Even when, in terms of brain stimulation, the superficial enthusiasm involved in these processes can be artificially reproduced in laboratories, the real outcome of them, *śraddhā*, cannot. *Śraddhā* can be scientifically measured only

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