

## Intellect, Materialist, Religious, Spiritual

The words that make the title of this article are commonly used to describe people or things, without the user giving much thought to what they mean, or if the usage is appropriate. For example, a common opinion is that “highly educated people” are Intellectuals who are mainly interested in material things. It is assumed that intellectuals only use logic and deduction to guide their actions. Conversely, many automatically think that people who are uneducated, religious, or spiritual are less materialistic and don't use as much logic or deduction to guide their daily lives.

One of the points of this piece is that these simple assumptions are found not to be true when we take a closer look at the people who are described in this way. For example, not all intellectuals are materialists, and not all religious people are spiritual. We also see that some spiritual groups use religious methods and tactics, and, when necessary, both use logic and deductive reasoning to guide or determine their actions.

Another point explored in this piece is how the misuse or understanding of the meaning of these words shape our perceptions, and the effect this could have on our Spiritual development. That is the inner core of the human being.

To help make our points clearer, let's start by establishing an understanding of the meaning of these words.

### Preliminaries – definitions, meanings and concepts

- 1) The **intellect** is the part of the mind that we use for thinking, understanding, and processing abstract ideas that may lie beyond our immediate basic five senses. For example, a sound coming from a device next to your bed wakes you up from sleep. Your memory recall and the sound in your ear are combined by your mind into knowledge that it is time for you to wake up and get ready for something. Another example, you have been out in nature, and the experience of its majesty triggers emotions within you. Emotions that you are trying to explain or understand. Here again, your mind is trying to process experience into knowledge or understanding. In these examples, we have simply used the popular expression Mind for what is technically called the Intellect.

The intellectual process can also be triggered by curiosity, which may then lead you to do research. From your research you may come up with your own theories or suppositions to explain what triggered your curiosity. Some people may stop at that, and decide that their theory is fact. Others may test their theory against more observations because they want to gain concrete knowledge about their curiosity. This curiosity does not necessarily have to be triggered by the instinct for survival or for the accumulation of things.

- 2) Being **spiritual** starts with a deep inner sensing that there must be a purpose to all that we see around us. And that the entire universe, including our lives, must be part of a master plan or grand design. This serves as the impetus for the search for meaning in life and existence, beyond what we can see or formulate with our mind. Since this search extends beyond the physical senses, it needs to be conducted with an inner part of our being that some call the Spirit, soul, or psyche. The purpose of the search is first to establish a connection to the beyond using the spirit (psyche), and through this, hopefully, gain knowledge or insight into the higher meaning and purpose of life, and how to find one's place or role in the grand scheme. The knowledge usually involves learning about the

overriding principles that govern life and existence here on earth as well as the beyond, and how to align our life and being with these principles.

- 3) **Religion** has as its objective the advancement of the inner essence in man to a non-physical existence, or what many call the other world. Unlike the spiritual path, religion has set beliefs and behaviors that are prescribed by the leaders of the religion to guide adherents to the sacred goal. These rules, beliefs, and behaviors are usually based on interpretations of the founder's teachings by the leading minds of the religion, and these then become codified as the articles of Faith to which all members must ascribe, in order to remain in good standing. Religions also have their holy books written by important figures who are accorded unquestionable "spiritual" or moral authority over their adherents. Religion also tends to put focus on the afterlife, and less on the here and now, or on personal growth to acquire a better understanding of one's purpose in life.
- 4) **Materialism** has two different meanings and features:
  - (1) *the philosophical*: the idea that everything in the world is made of matter and that everything that happens is caused by interactions between matter
  - (2) *the attitudinal*: this refers to someone's strong desire to get, or accumulate material things and money, often at the price of intellectual or spiritual values.

From these definitions we can already see how the common ways of putting people into groups might not be correct. Clearly, Attitudinal Materialism is a big part of modern society, as shown by our way of life that emphasizes acquiring things and the pursuit of image. This materialistic tendency cuts across all groups. All you have to do is look at what drives many people today. This is true of the educated and uneducated people, as well as the religious and the spiritual.

Although Philosophical materialism doesn't focus on material acquisition, its practitioners value recognition, respect and image, which are material pursuits too.

Philosophical materialism's assertions that reality is mainly physical, and that people can only perceive what is physical or matter-based is now being challenged by new findings in quantum physics and bio-psychology. These discoveries are broadening our ideas about what space and time are, and how they work. As a result, there is a new term called "**Quantum Spirituality**" that is trying to find connections between spiritual ideas and the very abstract and difficult to understand parts of quantum mechanics. These changes are allowing scientists to study things that were once thought to be the domain of religion or spirituality. Examples of these parallels are:

- 1) *The observer effect*: The idea that watching a subatomic particle can change how it behaves; thus, showing how awareness can change the world.
- 2) *Quantum entanglement*: Suggests that the idea of spiritual "interconnectedness" or "oneness" is reflected in the theory of quantum entanglement, which states *that, two separated subatomic particles will automatically recognize each other's state and remain connected, no matter how far apart they may be*. Some see this as a scientific explanation for how souls can communicate instantly or send information or feelings to each other across the universe.

From this, we can see that intellectual activity no longer rules out interest in things that can't be seen. Even spirituality advocates a personal recognition which involves use of the mind, and the

articles of faith of religion are developed largely by the human mind (intellect). Also, everyone needs material things to survive on earth. Therefore, in the strict sense of the word, this description should be applied only to the attitude, i.e. someone's strong desire to get, or accumulate material things and money. And here too, we can see this attitude exhibited to different degrees across the various groups.

## **Putting it together**

### **How our understanding and application of these words affect our lives**

Now let us see how these important words and concepts affect our awareness, goals and outlook on life.

Clearly, Materialism is the most limiting of these ideas because it narrows your thoughts, desires, and goals to what is attainable here on Earth.

Religion may talk about the other-world, but unquestioning dogma always gets in the way of self-realization. This means that no one can grow personally to achieve a deeper knowledge of life, and of themselves through religion. Also, when the symbolic purpose of rituals is not understood, performing or partaking in them only gives the false impression of movement towards a spiritual goal.

Intellectualism requires people to do their own research and to use logic and reason to draw conclusions that could lead to personal discoveries. However, this discovery, as stated earlier, is generally limited to the physical world. So regardless of whether it helps to bring improvements to human earthly lives and conditions, it still limits one's perception and thinking to the material world, to the exclusion of the inner core of man, that is, the Spirit.

Spirituality, as we have said, is about the search for meaning and interconnected relationships in life, as well as the search for the purpose of life and existence. The first step on this journey is to understand the Spiritual Laws or Principles that govern existence. Having learned them, you must endeavor to see and understand their actions for yourself, in order to fully accept them. But, to get there, you have to learn how to connect what you see, to the workings of these Laws. Without doubt, this step requires you to use your mind, i.e. deductive thinking and reasoning to help you see how the Spiritual Laws also work in the physical world. Only this recognition, or seeing, can give you the personal conviction that can lead to a better understanding of your life and the world.

### **The role of the intellect in our lives**

From this, it is clear that the mind/intellect is engaged in everything people do. Its role within the groups that we are discussing can be summarized as follows:

Clearly, the intellect plays the leading and only role in materialism. All the steps and processes needed for this are controlled by the brain/mind. Even the motivation behind attitudinal materialism stems from the need to survive, or to acquire more material wants and desires.

The role of the intellect in religion is seen in the complicated ideas and structures that are used to create and defend theology, dogma, and rituals. In this case, the search for something beyond the material may have sparked the initial intellectual action, but to keep up with changes in society, faiths have to keep going back to the intellect to amend their teachings. Meanwhile, the flock's view is limited to the intellectual thinking of the doctrine or the rituals that they hold onto. In time,

rituals become superstitions that can lead one into believing that they are still on the path towards the sacred. What is observed here applies to all religions, from the simplest to the most complex. Support for this assertion comes from the fact that shamans and priests of many indigenous religions have had to "redesign" themselves to stay relevant in societies that were taken over by an invading culture and belief. The role that the intellect plays in this is seldom recognized or appreciated.

### **Motivation - the driving force behind all activities**

There is no doubt that the intellect plays the primary role in the fields of philosophy and science. But the way a scientist or philosopher thinks about life affects the conclusions or hypotheses they come up with. For example, Stephen Hawkins, who can rightly be described as a philosophical materialist, did not believe in life after death. But he felt that life should have more meaning because death is inevitable, therefore *"we have this one life to appreciate the grand design of the universe."* His motivation is shown in his work which reflected a care about nature and humanity. By contrast, Herbert Spencer, the scientist who coined the phrase "survival of the fittest", used a biological idea to support a type of social Darwinism. He supported the thought that the "fittest" (now often seen as the rich and powerful) would naturally dominate. This kind of thinking has without doubt contributed to modern man's unchecked need to "conquer" nature, other people, and all living things on earth. This could raise questions about the motivation for his theory, for the critical thinker,

If we apply the same critical thinking to religion, spiritual and materialism, we find that motivation determines the different directions of activity within the same group. For example, in religion, we find those who are motivated by a desire to help humanity. Through their service, these people live the kind of life that we describe as saintly. While the motivation for others is to attain to an afterlife of heavenly idle bliss, and such people lay emphasis on rituals and dogma. Among the spiritual are those who are motivated by the desire to acquire knowledge to control the unseen forces of nature, while others want to gain insight into the future by communing with the otherworld. The different motivations of the attitudinal materialist should be clear enough not to need elaborating here.

The bottom line is that all human actions are driven by motivation. This is true for you, and for me. The challenge for many of us is to be conscious, or, rather, to be honest with ourselves about our motivation before or while we are carrying out our actions. For example, are we giving to charity because we also want to show that we are good people? Is our involvement in humanitarian, religious or spiritual activities partially, or totally motivated by self-projection?

Motivation also plays a critical but often unadmitted, or unrecognized role in who we admire and wish to emulate, or make our hero. Is it because we admire their nature, or is it because we wish to gain something by identifying with them. Regardless, the decision to admire a person ties you to their thinking and attitudes. It also influences your own goals and aspirations.

### **Final Words**

Hopefully from the foregoing, you can see that the brain or intellect itself is not, colloquially speaking, "the bad guy", as many people assume. What is critical is the quality of the motivation that decides the creative output from the mind/intellect. So, while the mind is the tool, its output is always based on your inner conscious or unconscious drive, that is, your desire or motivation! But, no matter the motivation, the output is always the result of your intellectual effort.

It is for this reason that we have been warned in many sacred books not to get too involved with intellectual activities. However, a key part of that warning is either left out, or misunderstood. The full warning is for us not to rely too much on the product of our own thinking, i.e., completely on the intellect, to guide our understanding of the world, or our way of life. Instead, we are reminded to seek input and enlightenment from higher realms; to guide our thinking and the actions we carry out with our mind/brain.

Many people have taken the truncated warning too literally, and, without developing the inner discernment, do not pay attention to the motivation behind their thoughts or activities, especially when they believe that they are on a religious or spiritual path. The same is true of motivations behind scientific and other material or humanist endeavors.

Unknown to us, this ignorance about motivation, affects our lives and impacts our spiritual growth in many ways.

The age-old warning is repeated again, but more clearly in this quote from The Grail Message by Abdrushin.

*“You are free to decide, but you are then irrevocably subject to the consequences of your thoughts, of your volition! You yourselves create these consequences, and that is why I exhort you: Keep the hearth of your thoughts pure, you will sow peace and earn happiness!”*

Abdrushin - In The Light of Truth (*The Grail Message*)

It is revealed again here, that the first and most critical step is to become aware of your inner motivation (volition) that drives your thoughts (brain/intellectual activity). But more important you must try to keep the connection with the higher realms in order to keep your motivations pure (hearth of your thoughts) so that your actions (the output of your intellectual activity) will sow peace and happiness. This applies, regardless of whether your goal is material, intellectual, religious or spiritual!