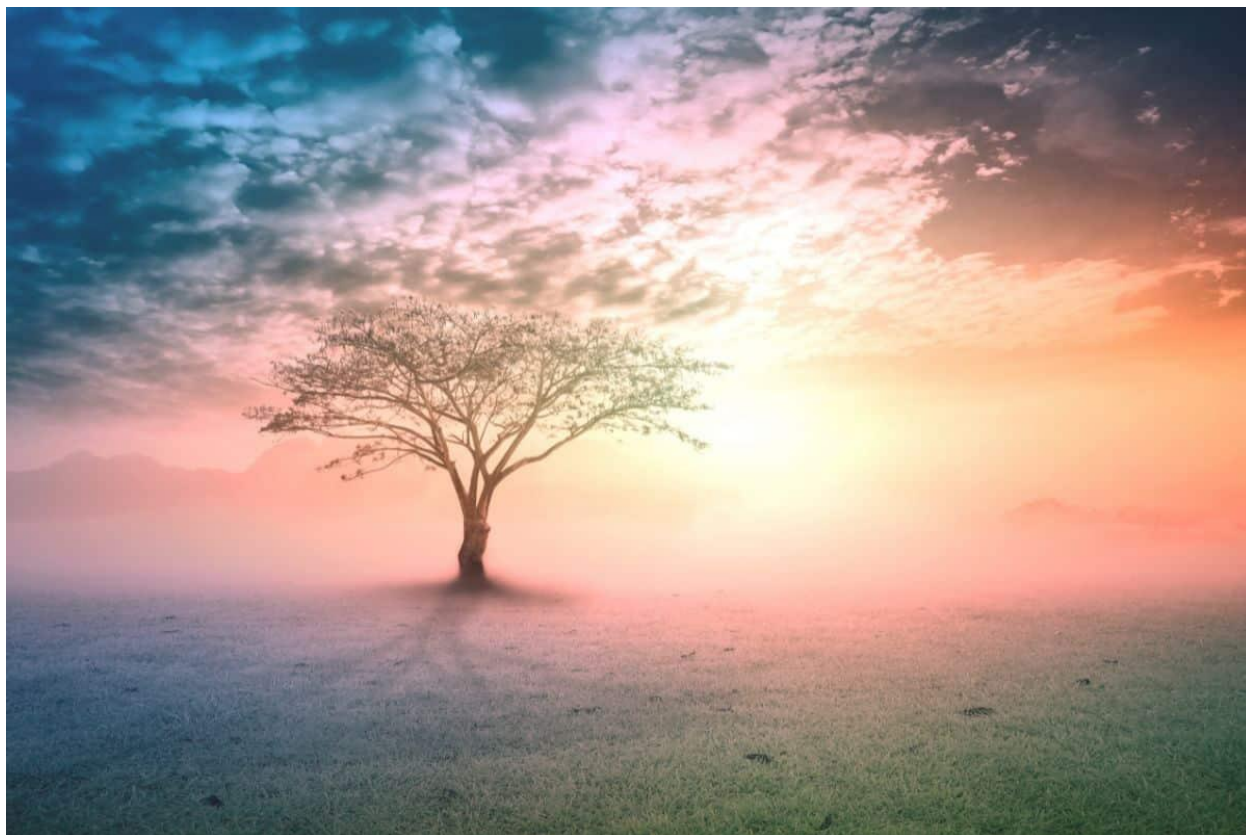




## What is the witness of consciousness?

BY [PATRICE KRYSZTOFIAK](#)

Consciousness, from a spiritual perspective, can be defined as the experiential self-awareness of an individual. It provides an automatic analysis of everything we experience, perceiving the world through our physical senses and mental cognition. However, there is a deeper feature to our consciousness, a vantage point from which each thought, emotion, and sensation is observed. This is often referred to as the ‘witness of consciousness,’ the underlying observer beyond our experienced thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations.

### The ‘Witness of Consciousness’: An Observer Beyond the Self

The witness of consciousness is described as an observation standpoint beyond our cognitive processes. It is a non-judgmental and objective observer of our thoughts, emotions, and experiences, untouched by personal biases or emotional inclination. From a spiritual standpoint, while the mind churns incessantly in its constant stream of thoughts, the witness consciousness remains in a state of serene detachment.

The concept of the witness of consciousness echoes across Eastern and Western philosophical and spiritual traditions alike. In Eastern traditions, such as **Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism**, the principle is often referred to as the ‘inner observer,’ ‘mindfulness,’ or ‘pure awareness.’ Conversely, in Western traditions, under the realm of phenomenology and existentialism, a similar concept is called ‘transcendental ego’ or ‘pre-reflective consciousness.’

## Realization of ‘Witness Consciousness’

Becoming aware of this pure form of consciousness can be an enlightening and transformative experience. It offers a unique glimpse of our real nature beyond our personal identity, our thoughts, and our emotions. It allows us to detach ourselves from emotions or thoughts that otherwise accumulate stress, pain, and unhappiness. And most importantly, it grants us the opportunity to approach life from a more objective standpoint, enhancing our clarity, understanding, and compassion.

This realization of the observer within us doesn’t come quickly or easily. It is not a matter of intellectual understanding but a deeply personal and profound experience often achieved through practices like meditation, **mindfulness exercises**, contemplative prayer, and other spiritual disciplines.

## The Witness of Consciousness and Spirituality

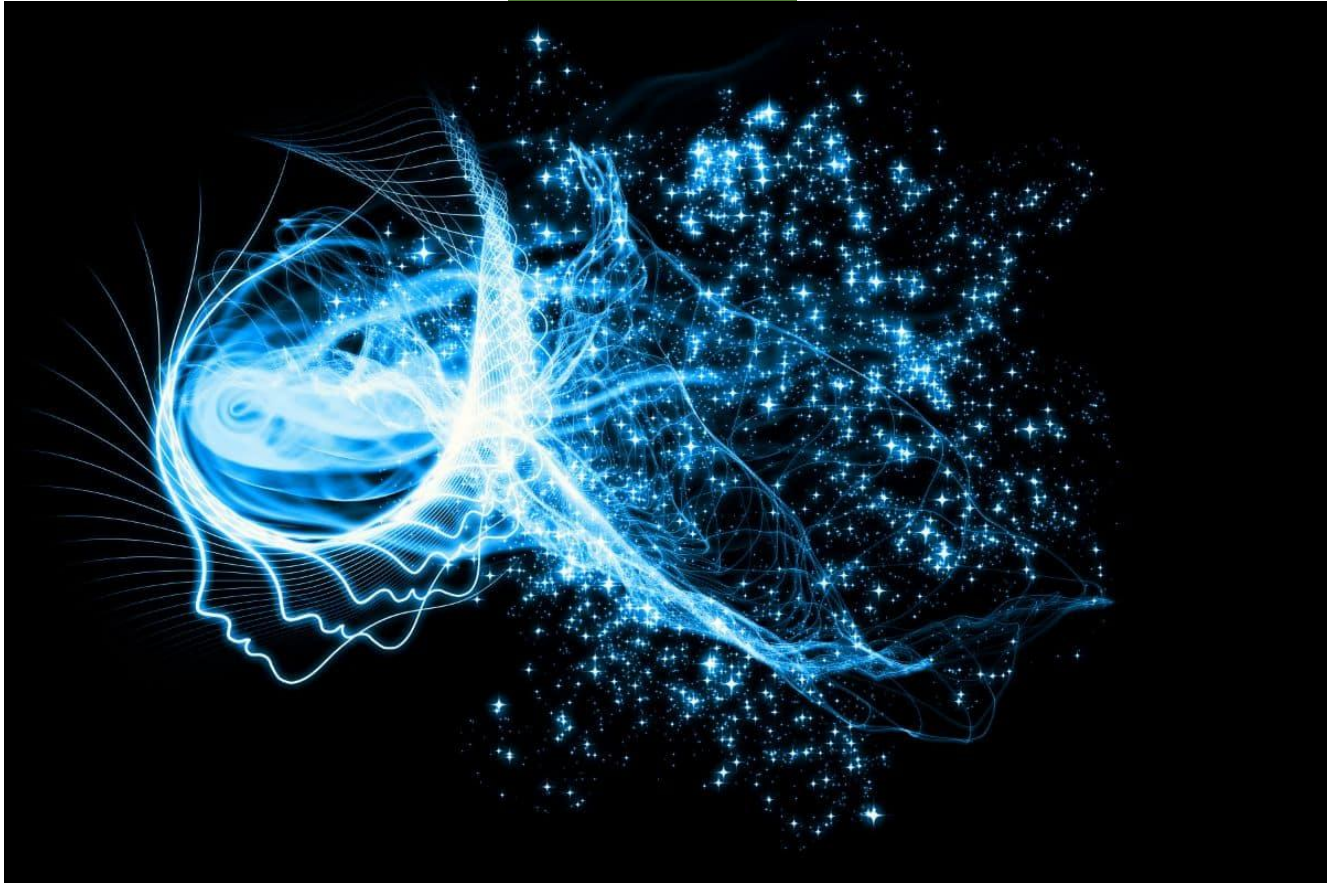
Bringing attention to the witness consciousness is the cornerstone of many spiritual practices and disciplines. Spirituality, particularly mindfulness and meditation, often cultivates this awareness by **encouraging practitioners to observe their thoughts and feelings without passing judgments or becoming engulfed in them**. As individuals become more attuned to this witnessing perspective, they develop an enhanced knowledge and acceptance of the self, uncoiling their inherently interconnected relationship with the world around them.

The **realization of the witness consciousness propels** us beyond the constraints of individualistic perception of ‘self’ and helps us understand our spiritual connectivity with the universe. It discloses a perspective where we are no longer isolated entities but part of an interconnected web of life and consciousness.

In conclusion, the witness of consciousness is a profound concept suggesting an underlying continuity in our mental states. It suggests a vantage point that remains consistently serene amidst the turmoil of thoughts, emotions, and sensory experiences. Awakening to this perspective has been the spiritual pursuit of sages, monks, and mystics across various cultures and epochs, holding potentials of profound personal transformation and insights into the nature of self and consciousness.

# What is the meaning of planes of existence?

BY PATRICE KRYSZTOFIK



Spirituality can be defined as a broad concept with room for many perspectives. It generally involves a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves and typically involves a search for meaning in life. It can be linked to religion but also transcends it to touch upon deeply personal, subjective experiences. One such concept heavily intertwined with spirituality is the idea of different ‘Planes of Existence.’

The concept of planes of existence is **a central theme in many metaphysical and spiritual philosophies**. It postulates that there are numerous levels of reality, each with its own set of laws and principles. They exist simultaneously yet in parallel to each other, offering a graduated view of life and the universe beyond the tangible physical realm.

## Understanding the Planes of Existence

The planes of existence are stacked in hierarchical or dimensional orders. Different traditions and religions have different names and numbers for these planes, but they typically range from three to twelve, with seven being the most commonly cited number.

The physical plane, where humans exist, is usually considered the most dense. As one moves up the planes or dimensions, the energy or vibrational frequency is said to become increasingly refined and less physically bound.

These planes aren't located in geographical locations but are thought to co-exist alongside our physical reality. They are said to exist as vibrational frequencies, dimensional realities or conscious states which can sometimes be accessed through altered states of consciousness, spiritual practices, or at certain moments like near-death experiences.

## The Meaning and Implications of Planes of Existence

Understanding the notion of different planes of existence gives us an insight into the infinite possibilities of life and beyond. It provides a context for understanding phenomena like spirits, angelic beings, and afterlife experiences that are not typically explained by mainstream science.

The concept also challenges our perception of reality and encourages us to look beyond the physical world. It is meant to inspire us to explore our spiritual capacities – the ability to perceive, interact with, and potentially influence other dimensions of reality.

Each plane is considered a step towards a higher state of consciousness and spiritual evolution. They can be understood as stages of spiritual development, each offering different lessons and challenges.

In some philosophies, it's believed that souls ascend through these planes over many lifetimes, with each incarnation serving as a classroom for the soul's growth. It provides comfort and answers to those grappling with existential questions regarding the purpose of life and the mystery of death.

## Incorporating the Planes of Existence into Spiritual Practice

Integrating the concept of planes of existence into one's spiritual practice involves cultivating an [expanded awareness](#) of these multiple dimensions of reality. Practices such as **meditation**, **lucid dreaming**, **out-of-body experiences**, **remote viewing**, and other forms of consciousness exploration can be pathways to exploring these realms.

The planes of existence offer a model for understanding not only our place in the cosmos but also serve as a metaphysical roadmap to navigate our spiritual journey. It helps us make sense of our experiences, the universe, and even phenomena unrecognized by mainstream science, serving as a reminder that **there is always more to reality than meets the eye**. Still, as with all spiritual concepts, personal experience, exploration, and interpretation are paramount.



# What are the stages of the dark night of the soul?

BY PATRICE KRYSZTOFIAK



The term “Dark Night of the Soul” is a phrase used in spirituality and mysticism, meant to describe a phase in one’s personal spiritual journey that involves a deep sense of loneliness and desolation. This concept is derived from a 16th-century poem of the same name by the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross. The Dark Night refers to moments of **spiritual dryness** where one feels a disconnect from the Higher Power they believe in, be it God, the Universe, or any other form of divine.

There are several stages associated with the Dark Night of the Soul. Each of them tests an individual’s faith and connection to the divine source, leading to profound transformations.

## The First Stage: Awakening

The first stage of this spiritual journey is the awakening. Awakening is the realization that there exists a reality beyond what one perceives through the five senses. This is often triggered by challenging life situations where one begins to question their existence, the purpose of life, and their connection to the divine. It could also emerge after an intense spiritual experience that makes the individual realize that there is more to our existence than what meets the eye.

## The Second Stage: Purgation

The second stage of the Dark Night of the Soul is **purgation or purification**. This stage is about realizing one's imperfections, weaknesses, and misconceptions about oneself and the world. It is the stage of spiritual cleansing where the individual begins to detach from material ambitions and pursuits, as they no longer offer the fulfilment they once did. The person begins to feel a void and experiences an immense sense of loss, which leads to the feeling of emptiness, and experience an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and fear. This stage often prompts individuals to seek **spiritual guidance** or to engage in **spiritual practices like meditation, prayer, or contemplation**.

## The Third Stage: Illumination

The third stage is illumination. In this stage, individuals begin to see through the illusions of their ego-centered life and acquire spiritual wisdom and insight. They develop a new understanding of themselves and the world around them. This stage is usually characterized by an increase in episodes of **synchronicity, visions, significant dreams and deep moments of introspection**. Despite these moments of enlightenment, they still feel a sense of spiritual dryness or discontent.



## The Fourth Stage: The Dark Night

The Dark Night is the fourth stage, where the seeker feels abandoned by the divine presence. This stage is characterized by intense feelings of despair, isolation, and a sense of meaninglessness in life.

*During the Dark Night, individuals must rely on their faith and hold on to the hope of divine presence, even if they don't feel it.*

## The Final Stage: Union

The final stage of the journey, **union**, is also the most peaceful part of the Dark Night of the Soul. This stage symbolizes the unity of the self with the divine. This union with the divine engenders a sense of peace, serenity, and a profound understanding of one's place in the universe. The individual emerges stronger, more serene, and fundamentally transformed.

Each stage of the Dark Night of the soul brings about different challenges, trials, and tribulations. But these stages are also catalysts for profound spiritual growth and transformation. The journey through the Dark Night of the soul is a necessary part of one's spiritual journey towards self-realization and a deepened relationship with the divine.



PATRICE KRYSZTOFIAK

Patrice Krysztofiaak is what you would call a medical intuitive (you may also have heard of the terms Medical Medium or Medical empath for people like him). He can access past stored negative emotions and energies and clear the blocks that they generated



# **We Are the Universe Observing Itself: The Role of Sentient Beings**

[MICHAEL CORTHELL](#)



**Eyes are portals—windows to the soul where the universe peers out, experiencing its vast self through every sentient being. In each gaze lies a unique reflection, a channel through which consciousness explores its boundless existence.**



The idea that “the universe sees and explores itself through sentient beings, each one a unique portal” presents a profound perspective on the nature of consciousness and existence. Within this view, each living being is seen not merely as an isolated individual but as an essential part of a greater whole, embodying a unique aspect of the universe's boundless awareness.

*“Each sentient being acts as a unique portal, allowing the universe to explore and understand itself. Through our thoughts, emotions, and experiences, we contribute to a larger cosmic consciousness. This interconnectedness reminds us of our value and responsibility within the universe, fostering compassion and unity across all life.”*

This approach, often associated with the philosophical concept of universal consciousness, suggests that each of us serves as a channel through which the universe perceives, experiences, and understands itself.

## **Sentient Beings as Expressions of Universal Consciousness**

From this perspective, sentient beings are seen as distinct expressions of a universal consciousness—a single, all-encompassing awareness that transcends individual identities. Every creature, whether human, animal, or other life forms, represents a unique facet of this greater consciousness. Each sentient being is a point of focus, allowing the universe to observe and explore itself through countless, diverse perspectives. In this sense, consciousness is not just a personal trait but a shared quality, connecting all life in a web of interdependent awareness.

This view challenges traditional perceptions of individualism, which often emphasize separation over interconnectedness. Instead, it suggests that our thoughts, feelings, and experiences are not merely personal but contribute to a much larger, universal understanding. By experiencing life from a myriad of angles, the universe gains insight into its own nature, continuously expanding and evolving through the lives of sentient beings.

## **The Role of Self-Awareness in Existence**

One of the most intriguing aspects of this idea is the role of self-awareness. Self-awareness is the capacity to reflect upon our own thoughts, emotions, and existence. It allows us to contemplate our actions, understand our place in the world, and recognize the impact we have on others. From the perspective of universal consciousness, self-awareness is not just a byproduct of human evolution but a central aspect of existence itself.

In this framework, the self-aware mind is viewed as a vital channel through which the universe can witness its own complexities and intricacies. Each moment of insight or personal growth is not only significant for the individual but also adds to the universe's self-knowledge. Our individual journey toward understanding and self-fulfillment contributes to the collective awareness, affirming that consciousness is a communal, interconnected phenomenon. Thus, every person's self-discovery and every insight adds a thread to the tapestry of universal consciousness.

## **Each Being as a Unique Portal**

Viewing each being as a unique portal underscores the inherent value of diversity within the universe. No two beings are exactly alike, and this diversity is what enables the universe to see itself from countless angles. Each individual, with their unique thoughts, emotions, experiences, and perceptions, offers a distinct perspective that enriches the universe's self-exploration. Through these varied viewpoints, the universe perceives itself in different forms, embodying both the personal and the collective, the singular and the universal.

This concept encourages us to value and appreciate our own individuality, as well as the unique qualities of others. It reminds us that every life, no matter how different, contributes something irreplaceable to the whole. Rather than competing with or alienating each other, we are encouraged to embrace and celebrate our differences, recognizing that they are essential to the universe's exploration of itself.

## **Interconnectedness and Compassion**

Acknowledging that all sentient beings are interconnected in their role as portals for universal awareness naturally fosters a sense of compassion and empathy. When we understand that every individual is part of the same universal consciousness, our actions toward others take on greater significance. By harming another being, we are in a sense harming an expression of the same awareness that exists within us. Conversely, when we act with kindness and compassion, we enrich the collective consciousness, creating a ripple effect that extends beyond our immediate selves.

This interconnectedness also invites us to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. Recognizing that all sentient beings play a role in the universe's self-exploration encourages us to respect and protect all forms of life. It highlights the importance of cultivating a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others, not only because they are deserving of respect but also because they are integral parts of the larger consciousness to which we all belong.

## **Personal Growth as Part of a Universal Journey**

Understanding ourselves as portals of universal consciousness gives deeper meaning to our personal journeys. Our moments of self-discovery, growth, and enlightenment are not isolated events but part of a broader, universal process. Each time we learn something new, gain insight, or overcome a challenge, we contribute to the universe's understanding of itself. Our lives, with all their complexities and challenges, serve as experiences that shape and expand the universal consciousness.

This perspective encourages us to pursue personal growth not just for our own sake but as a way of contributing to a larger purpose. By striving to understand ourselves more fully, cultivating compassion, and nurturing our connections with others, we align ourselves with the universe's self-exploration. In this way, our individual paths to self-awareness are integrated into a collective journey, where each step forward benefits both the individual and the whole.



## Conclusion: Embracing Our Role in the Universe

The idea that “the universe sees and explores itself through sentient beings, each one a unique portal” invites us to consider ourselves as essential parts of a greater whole. By embracing this perspective, we can cultivate a deeper sense of purpose, compassion, and unity. We are not isolated fragments but interconnected expressions of a vast, universal awareness, each contributing something irreplaceable to the collective experience.

In acknowledging our role as portals of the universe, we recognize that every thought, emotion, and action holds significance beyond our personal lives. Through self-awareness, we enrich the universe’s self-exploration, bringing greater understanding, empathy, and unity to existence itself. By living consciously and compassionately, we honor our role as unique expressions of universal consciousness, adding our voices to the universe’s ongoing journey of self-discovery.

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## Resources

- "The Universal Consciousness" by Theosophy World  
[Read more here](#)
- "The Role of Self-Awareness in Conscious Evolution" by IONS  
(Institute of Noetic Sciences)

## Consciousness

The state of being aware, either of something external or internal. In sentient beings, it is the concomitant of thoughts, feelings and sensations. The word “consciousness” is ordinarily associated with common waking consciousness. But the latter is only one type of consciousness. The difficulty in defining what really is consciousness has long been recognized by the early pioneers of psychology, such as William James and Sigmund Freud. James wrote in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*:

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question, — for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness.

Today, various modes of consciousness other than normal waking consciousness are recognized, such as dream state, dreamless sleep, hypnosis, hypnagogic state, drug-induced state, mystical states, enlightenment, intuition, and other forms of supramental states.

With the advent of behaviorism, consciousness took a back seat and its existence was even questioned. Behaviorism considers as valid only those which can be observed and measured. Hence such things as intentions, consciousness, thoughts, and similar subjective experiences were not given as much validity as observable behavior.

Eastern religions and philosophies distinguish between consciousness and vehicles of consciousness. Thus *purusa* as pure consciousness perceives through *prakṛti*, or material essence. This is a view shared by theosophical writers. Thus, Helena P. BLAVATSKY wrote: “While Consciousness is not a thing *per se*, Mind is distinctly — in its Manvantaric functions at least — an Entity” (CW X:325).

In theosophy, consciousness is derived from two primordial principles: the spiritual principle, and the material vehicles through which such a principle acts. They are equivalent to Parama-Purusa and Mulaprakṛti. *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett* states:

The one and chief attribute of the universal spiritual principle — the unconscious but ever active life-giver — is to expand and shed; that of the universal material principle to gather in and fecundate. Unconscious and non-existing when separated, they become consciousness and life when brought together. (*ML*, p. 118)

Thus, apart from Absolute Consciousness, which Blavatsky considers as unconsciousness, consciousness implies limitations and qualifications. It needs an object to be conscious of, and an entity to be conscious of the object (*SD* I:56).

Prior to the manifestation of the cosmos, the primordial state of consciousness is called *chidakasa*, consciousness in *akasa* or primordial space. Its emergence is in seven degrees. The first is coeval with the first and second unmanifested Logoi. At this stage it is still latent. Then when manifestation or differentiation occurs, the latent consciousness becomes MAHAT, or COSMIC IDEATION (CW X:360). What follows are the manifestations of consciousness in the lower planes of nature.

Consciousness in human and sentient beings results from the perceptive faculties awakened in the different levels or planes of nature. A stone has consciousness on its own level, but not of a kind that human beings are capable of.

Everything in the Universe, throughout all its kingdoms, is CONSCIOUS: *i.e.*, endowed with a consciousness of its own kind and on its own plane of perception. We men must remember that because *we* do not perceive any signs — which we can recognise — of consciousness, say, in stones, we have no right to say that *no consciousness exists there*. There is no such thing as either “dead” or “blind” matter, as there is no “Blind” or “Unconscious” Law. (SD I:274)

In human beings, there are seven states of consciousness corresponding to the different principles, from physical body to *Atma* (see HUMAN CONSTITUTION). Blavatsky states that the special organ of consciousness in living people is the brain, located in the aura of the pineal gland. At variance with the common assumption that consciousness can only perceive one object at a time, she states that human consciousness can simultaneously “receive no less than seven distinct impressions, and even pass them into memory” (CW XIII:28).

V.H.C.

## **THE INTERCONNECTED NATURE OF REALITY**

**Noetic Sciences reveal a deeper understanding of our inner worlds, our shared reality, and the interconnectedness of all sentient things**

### **Defining Noetic Sciences**



**no•et•ic:** From the Greek *noēsis/ noētikos*, meaning inner wisdom, direct knowing, intuition, or implicit understanding.

The way we understand ourselves and our world is always evolving. From instinct to intuition to intellect, part of being human is using multiple ways to gather and utilize information. Noetic sciences are one of many frameworks we can use to engage with our daily reality.

On his way back to Earth after his pioneering moonwalk, Apollo 14 astronaut and IONS founder Dr. Edgar Mitchell had the profound experience of feeling interconnected to everything he was observing from the window of his space capsule: the stars, the moon, our blue planet, and the vastness of the cosmos. He realized quickly that in order to explain such an extraordinary experience (and others like it), there would need to be a rapprochement between the scientific and spiritual interpretations of reality.

As a scientist and visionary, Dr. Mitchell saw a need to reconcile his training as an engineer and astrophysicist with the wisdom of the ages to transcend the limitations of what he saw as an outdated materialist worldview. A new framework would be needed: one that could help explain the unexplainable—and spark transformation.

He called this framework the *noetic sciences*.

*[Noetic refers to] states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority... William James, philosopher*

## **Bridging Science and Spirituality**

For millennia, science has governed the exploration and discovery of our inner, personal worlds as well as the world outside of ourselves. In the past one hundred years alone, the powerful tools of science have driven tremendous advances including doubling our lifespan, dramatically improving our quality of life, and birthing a technological age beyond our wildest dreams, taking humans to the moon and soon, beyond.

**sci•ence:** Systems of acquiring knowledge that use observation, experimentation, and replication to describe and explain natural phenomena.

Even with these advances, science has not yet revealed *everything* about how reality works, and humanity's promise – to ourselves, to each, and to the planet – has not been fully realized.

While science observes and experiments in our largely physical world, spiritual wisdom practices on the other hand allow us to explore, describe, and express some of the deepest mysteries of being human. How we can overcome our baser instincts. Practices for making love and compassion central orienting principles in our lives.

These two ways — of gaining knowledge through scientific exploration and of gaining deep knowing through direct experience — have generally remained separate. Some people value science. Others value spirituality and direct experience. IONS values both. It is time to bring

them back together — allowing each to inform one another, weakening neither, but rather strengthening our overall understanding of reality.

**Our premise:** at the nexus of inner knowing (*noetics*) and outer investigation (*science*), we will discover entirely new ways of being and of doing that uplift humanity and advance thriving for all.

**no•et•ic sci•ences:** A multidisciplinary field of study that brings objective scientific tools and techniques together with subjective inner knowing to study the nature of reality.

*The day science begins to study non-physical phenomena, it will make more progress in one decade than in all the previous centuries of its existence.* Nikola Tesla, Inventor and Futurist  
Now more than ever, humanity is facing vitally important questions that will directly affect our individual and collective realities. Our future demands that we explore our inner space with the same rigor and ingenuity as we explore our outer world. Our technology must increasingly be infused with the wisdom that comes from personal inquiry, and the lens of science must be applied to the further reaches of human potential. This, for the survival and thriving of humanity and our planet, is one of the most important endeavors of our time.

### **Noetic Experiences: The Leading Edge of Human Possibility**

Despite humanity's ever-expanding knowledge about our physical world, there remains a gap in our understanding when it comes to consciousness. How does it arise from a physical system? Is it limited to our brain? How do I explain my experiences, from aha! to awe, that I know to be true, yet don't fit any current scientific explanation?

Have you ever had a hunch, intuition, or gut feeling that seemed to come out of nowhere? How about an insight on a project you've been hard at work on that suddenly comes to you in a dream? Or you've thought of a dear friend or loved one, and they instantly called or texted?

While it may be easy to chalk up these occurrences to mere coincidence, the greatest thinkers, scientists, philosophers, and artists report that such noetic experiences have been central to their process as well as their great works of art and scientific and cultural breakthroughs.