

## Conscious Faith

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Is intelligent faith an oxymoron?

People who I love dearly fall on both sides of the current argument of belief vs unbelief in any sort of transcendent reality. Another equally loved group are totally fed up, refusing either to ally themselves or get caught in the crossfire of the pundits. The increasing polarization is distressing, since truth seems to be the first casualty of conflict, lying as it often does, somewhere between the trenches.

Whether or not we take a position, at the end of the day we all need to come to terms with our most basic beliefs. In doing that, we may happen to identify with a group, but our highest and most permanent allegiance is to the truth itself.

If faith in anything higher than ourselves is to survive, it needs to be tolerant, intelligent and willing to listen. “No superstitions, no absurd legends, none of those dogmas which insult reason and nature”, to quote Voltaire.

Abdu'l-Bahá wrote, “All religions teach that we must do good, that we must be generous, sincere, truthful, law-abiding, and faithful; all this is reasonable, and logically the only way in which humanity can progress.” He also wrote that science and religion must agree. Since the Bahá'í concept of God is “the unknowable Essence” manifested through various Messengers, it has no qualms about advocating questioning and humility. “How can a man believe to be a fact that which science has proved to be impossible? If he believes in spite of his reason, it is rather ignorant superstition than faith. The true principles of all religions are in conformity with the teachings of science.”

There are times it seems to make sense to just limit ourselves to science. But, as holocaust survivor Victor Frankl noted in *Man's Search for Meaning*: “The spiritual dimension cannot be ignored, for it is what makes us human.”

Noted atheist Sam Harris, wrote in his new book *Waking Up* of a transformative experience of his own, in which “love, compassion and joy in the joy of others extended without limit.” This sudden understanding of spirituality had less the character of an emotion than that of an insight into the nature of the universe. “It was as if having glimpsed the properties of one set of parallel lines, I suddenly understood what must be common to them all.”

With one of the world's most renowned atheists advocating a solid belief in spirituality, we're clearly approaching a new paradigm.

Scientific exploration of the nature of consciousness may provide this new way of understanding the universe. Defined as awareness of both external and internal reality, consciousness has been called the most familiar and most mysterious aspect of our lives.

Philosopher and cognitive scientist, [David Chalmers](#), who calls himself a “scientific materialist”, postulates two radical ideas in his [TED talk on consciousness](#): that it is fundamental, and that it might be universal, in the sense of applying to all things (animal, vegetable, mineral) to a greater or lesser degree,

down to the most elementary particles. For many of us, that definition sounds suspiciously like the definition of spirit.

In a [Huffington Post article](#), Deepak Chopra notes that “In Western science and philosophy, consciousness is strictly a by-product of brain activity... On the other hand, in Eastern philosophy, consciousness is primary, the fundamental basis for reality.” His book and PBS appearance, [The Future of God](#), explore the topic.

Theoretical nuclear physicist, [Amit Goswami](#), sees the integration of science and spirituality as entirely logical and natural. He notes that, according to quantum physics, objects are not things but possibilities, with observation affecting the outcome. In a talk on [upward vs downward causation](#), he proposes, “Suppose consciousness is the ground of being; ...everything is made of consciousness.” This, then, is the basis of our interconnectedness, our essential oneness.

Goswami refutes the false dichotomy between science vs religion in an [interview with Suzie Daggett](#): “Mystics, contrary to religionists, are always saying that reality is not two things — God and the world — but one thing, consciousness. ...The problem with science has always been that most scientists believe that science must be done within a different monistic framework, one based on the primacy of matter. And then, quantum physics showed us that we must change that myopic prejudice of scientists, otherwise we cannot comprehend quantum physics.”

The new paradigm of consciousness as the ground of all being, he says “resolves many other paradoxes of the old paradigm”. That sounds like good sound progress to me.