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The Spirit and Science: Is the Endocrine System the Essence of Existence?

ABSTRACT

In this reflective opinion piece, the authors offer a unique insight into the connection between spirituality and science. A reading of the Shrimad Bhagvad Gita, through the eyes of an endocrinologist, uncovers unexpected corollaries and correlations between spirituality or religion on one hand, and science or rationale, on the other.

Keywords: Endocrinology, holistic health, hormone, integrative care, person-centered care, spiritual health

The Shrimad Bhagvad Gita is a celestial song, which offers answers to the challenges faced by us in routine life.¹ While the Gita relates a conversation between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, it's content is relevant to virtually every aspect of human life. We have shared the inspiration we have derived from this holy book in earlier communications.^{2,3}

INTROSPECTION

In this opinion piece, we explore some verses from the Gita. We invite our reader to assess them from a neutral viewpoint: do these statements represent 'the spirit', or do they describe the endocrine system and its hormones? Do they picturize both or one? Are both the same, or does one create another? We do not have answers to these rhetorical questions. Rather, we encourage our readers to expand their horizons of thought, develop insights into these interesting domains of "being", and translate them into action on the ground. This action, in the clinic, the ward, the intensive care unit and the public

health arena, should strengthen person-centered health care,^{4,5} integrating spiritual and emotional domains into our work.

INSIGHTS FROM THE GITA

"I shall speak to you at length about that which ought to be known, and knowing which one attains supreme Bliss..." (13:12)

[The importance of the subject]

"It has hands and feet on all sides, eyes, head and mouth in all directions, and ears all-round; for it stands pervading all in the universe." (13:13)

[The universality of endocrinology]

"Though perceiving all sense-objects, it is really speaking devoid of all senses. Nay, though unattached, it is the sustainer of all nonetheless; and though attribute less, it is the enjoyer of Gunas, the three modes of Prakriti." (13:14)

[The stimulation, secretion and strength of hormones]

"It exists without and within all beings, and inanimate creation as well. And by reason of its subtlety, it is incomprehensible; it is close at hand and stands afar too." (13:15)

[The vast spectrum: endocrine, paracrine, autocrine; hormones, pheromones]

"Though integral like space in it is undivided aspect, it appears divided as it were in all animate and inanimate beings...."(13:16)

[Holistic and reductionist approaches to endocrinology]

"...That godhead is knowledge itself, worth knowing worth attaining through real wisdom, and is particularly abiding in the heart of all." (13:17)

[The importance of education]

"Thus the truth of the Kshetra and the knowledge, as well as of the object worth knowing has being briefly discussed...." (13:18)

[An overview of the system]

"Prakriti and Purusha, know both these as beginning...." (13:19)

[The eternity of endocrinology]

"The Spirit dwelling in this body, is really the same as the Supreme. He has been spoken of as the Witness, the true guide, the Sustainer of all, the Experiencer..., the Overlord, and the Absolute as well." (13:22)

[Hormones work a witness, guide, sustainer, experience, overlord]

"He who know the Purusha (Spirit) and Prakriti (Nature) together with the Gunas,...." (13:23)

[The endocrinologist who understands mind, body and medicine; biopsychosocial health]

"Some by meditation behold the supreme Spirit... with the help of their refined and sharp intellect; others realize it through the discipline of knowledge; and still others through the discipline of Action, i.e., Karmayoga." (13:24)

[Person-centered learning]

"...whatever being, moving or unmoving, is born, know it as emanated through the union of Kshetra (Matter) and the Kshetrageya (Spirit)." (13:26)

[Mind-body union]

"He who sees that actions are performed in every way by nature Prakriti and the Self as the non-doer, he alone verily sees." (13:29)

[Neurohormonal coordination of life]

"...as one sun illumines this entire universe, so the one Atma (Spirit) illumines the whole Kshetra (Field)." (13:33)

[The hypothalamus-the seat of the spirit]

INTENTION

Chapter 13 of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is entitled "The yoga of discrimination between the field and the knower of the field". As medical professionals, we are aware that we do not know the entirety of our field. This humility actually helps us work harder to seek knowledge, in an effort to help our patients.

As the Gita says, (18:63), it is up to the reader to interpret the wisdom contained in its pages. These verses from the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita can be understood in multiple ways. They remind us of the importance of endocrinology in human life, the relationship between hormones and spiritual health, and the centrality of endocrine homeostasis in ensuring holistic health.

Hope you enjoyed reading this.

We invite our readers to share their thoughts and opinions about this, and other aspects of health.

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