

Text Series: Introduction to the Spiritual View of the World and of Man

Text No. 1: Reality from a Spiritual Perspective

1.1 About the term "spirituality"

Exercise

Think about when you had some kind of spiritual experience. What was different about this experience than in "normal" everyday reality?

The term "spiritual" comes from the term "spirit". For example, there is a German religious studies journal with the title "Spirita" - spirits.

The German word "Geist" has many translations in English: "mind", "spirit", "ghost" and "intellect". The Langenscheidt dictionary Pons mentions under the English term "spirit" among others:

- spirit in the sense of soul life
- spirit in contrast to the body ("the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak")
- spirit in the sense of a supernatural being
- Spirit in the sense of a leading personality ("spiritus rector")
- Spirit in the sense of courage, grit, verve, drive
- Spirit in the sense of a mood ("pioneer spirit")
- spirit as intention ("spirit or sense of the law", "spirit or intention of a holy scripture")
- Spirit as alcohol ("spiritual drinks")
- Spirit as a chemical substance ("ammonia spirit")

I think as a first approximation we can paraphrase the English "spiritual" or the German "spirituell" as "not physical".

Exercise

Think back again to your spiritual experience. From this experience, can you describe what was not physical in the usual sense?

Now, one might ask, why don't we use the German term "geistig". Indeed, one could do that. Only there is a long tradition of dispute in German philosophy between materialistic currents (from Ludwig Feuerbach to Karl Marx) and idealism (especially Hegel). This dispute goes back to the philosopher Descartes, who distinguished between "res cogitans" (= "thinking thing", i.e. mind) and "res extensa" (= "extended thing", i.e. measurable objects, matter or corporeality).

Furthermore, within the medieval philosophy and later in the dispute with the church, there were the concepts of "spirituality". The divine - and later everything ecclesiastical and clerical - was equated with the spiritual, the human or earthly with the material, physical. Catholic priests, for example, were and are called "clergy."

The everyday life of people was profaned, the religious was, so to speak, lifted out of everyday life and even removed from it. Physicality - e.g. sexuality - was put down as devilish and persecuted. The (Catholic) priests were desexualized and thus spiritualized (celibacy), sexuality strictly limited to marriage (at least in theory). Conversely, people who lived differently or advocated other concepts were made out to be in league with the devil; the Inquisition accused women (and also men!) burned as witches of sexual intercourse with the devil as the worst sin. Until today, many Christians over 60 suffer from a downright traumatization of sexuality by the Catholic Church, which the theologian and psychotherapist Eugen Drewermann has impressively elaborated.

In this philosophical tradition and spiritual-historical debate, the concept of spirit was used and distorted in such a specific way that today almost everyone either understands something else by it, or that people have such a one-sided understanding of what "spiritual" is that the term is simply no longer suitable for spirituality in the German-speaking world.

But also the English term "spiritual" and its German translation "spirituell" is of course not immune to such aberrations.

Thus, even today, people in the German-speaking world still confuse spiritualism - i.e. forms of communication with spiritual beings, such as table-turning - with spirituality.

I would now like to try to paraphrase "spirituality" in a positive way.

From a spiritual perspective, the human being is a mind-soul-body entity, with the emphasis or focus on the mental (spiritual) level.

Exercise

Think back again to your spiritual experience. Did you have a kind of spiritual-mental-bodily feeling of unity? Was it true that the center of gravity was not in the brain, so to speak, but elsewhere - e.g., elsewhere in the body, outside the body, or in a sense of connectedness with something beyond the body?

In the classical Original Christian understanding, man consisted of spirit (=spirit of God), soul and body. In the course of time, less and less distinction was made between soul and spirit, and man became a dual being of spirit/soul on the one hand and body on the other. With the advent of the natural sciences, interest focused more and more on the measurable, quantifiable, that is, on the physical-bodily side of man.

The spiritual-soul was suppressed and forgotten. Or rather: it was transferred from the conscious to the unconscious. The ethnologist Hans-Peter Dürr once said: "The witches and the ghosts were driven out through the door, but came in again through the window.

Since Freud and Jung at the latest, psychology has known that the human being consists of body and soul/mind, of the conscious and the unconscious.

Since more than 30 years there are increasingly also efforts in psychology to see the dual understanding of the human being as opposition soul/spirit on the one hand and body on the other hand again triadically, i.e. as spirit - soul - body.

Today, spiritual psychological understandings strive to turn this tripartite understanding into a holistic view of man again, with the center less on body and soul, but mainly on the mental-spiritual dimension.

From a spiritual perspective, human beings are interconnected beings, that is, a kind of transindividual and transhuman community of life that also includes all other living beings and ultimately all of creation.

Exercise

Reflect on whether and on what occasion you have had a deep sense of connection with other people, with other living beings, with nature, and so on.

In the course of time, the dimension reaching beyond the individual has also been added, for example with Jung the collective unconscious with the archetypes, or with Rupert Sheldrake the morphogenetic field. These approaches point out that human beings are not to be understood as isolated, purely individual beings separated from the others, but that - although each with his unique, specific individuality - they are all connected with each other. This "transcendent" (= "stepping out" or "transcending") dimension is becoming increasingly important today. Not only is every human being part of the collective humanity, every human being is also in a life community with other living beings such as plants and animals, with spiritual, i.e. non-material beings such as devas (nature spirits), angels, spirit beings (e.g. deceased), etc.

This connectedness exists on a spiritual level, which lies behind the physical-physical level.

1.2 On the concept of religion

Exercise

What do you associate with religion? What feelings arise in you when you think of religion - for example, religious experiences in your childhood?

All religions arose from the intention to answer the central questions of life for people - such as the question of meaning, the question of death and the question of what happens after death. The central concern of religion is to establish man's relationship to God, to the transcendent or to all that is. An important aspect of this is the invitation to reconciliation and peace.

But religions have concretized these concerns in very different ways. This can be seen, for example, in the way other religions are viewed. Prophetic religions - such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam - have tended to distance themselves from other religions, and in

extreme cases to exclude, devalue or even fight them. The American religious scholar Paul Knitter calls this attitude "exclusivist", i.e. "excluding". One consequence of this is a large number of schisms (religious divisions), but also disputes about the "right" succession that arise again and again.

Other religions, like e.g. Hinduism and partly Buddhism - but also e.g. the theology of Karl Rahner in Catholicism - have partly tried over centuries to take up and absorb other religious currents into themselves, or at least to grant them also salvific character. That is why today, for example, one speaks of the fact that there is not one Hinduism, but 1000 Hindustani schools and currents. Paul Knitter called this attitude "inclusivism", i.e. including or incorporating other religious currents into one's own religion. But even this is not without problems, because with the incorporation of a hitherto foreign religious current, this current was usually also reinterpreted, so that it fits into the larger religious world view.

Literature reference:

Paul F. Knitter: Ein Gott - viele Religionen. Gegen den Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums. München: Kösel Verlag 1988.

The great religions, however, have a very different understanding of what is called reality.

A religion usually contains (at least) three dimensions or aspects:

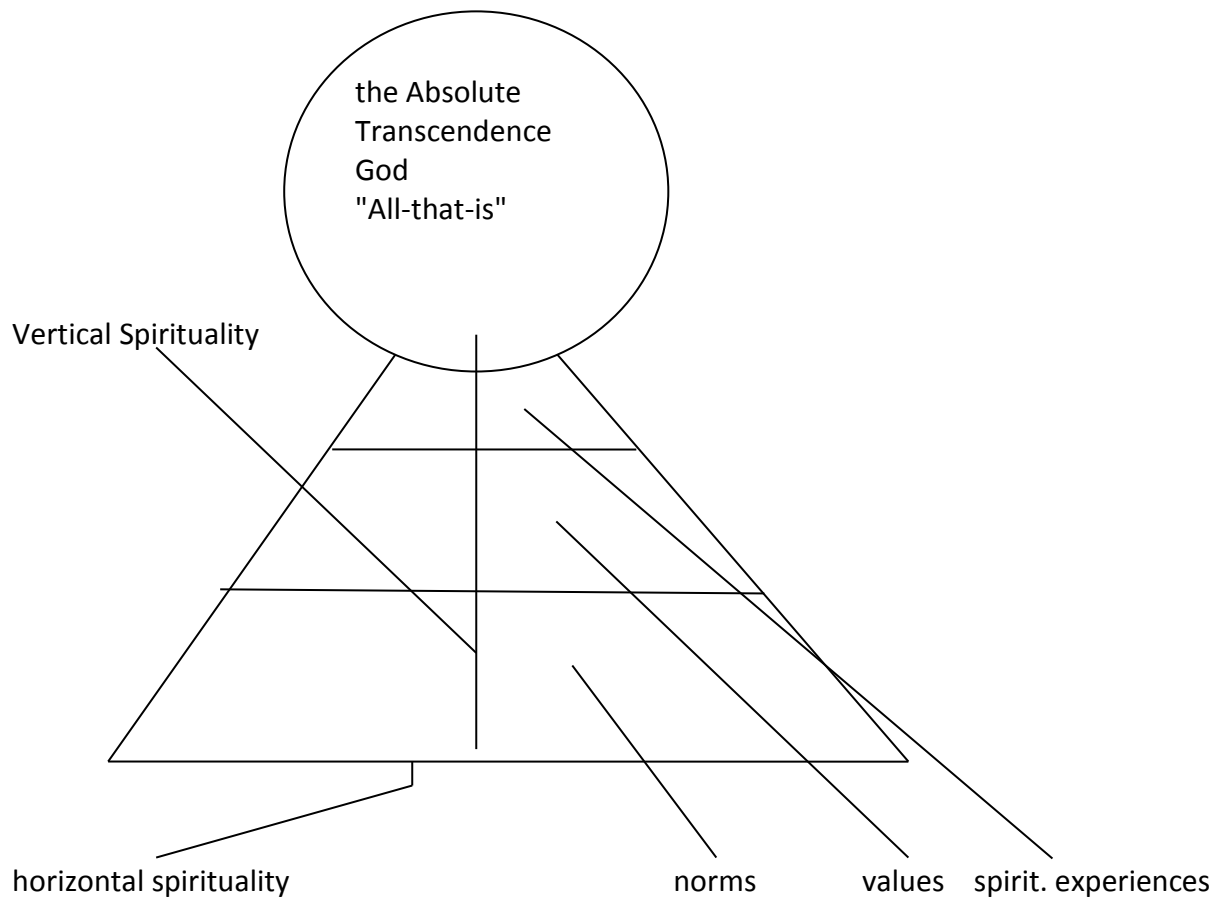
- Instructions and ideas about spirituality and its mediation (= vertical spirituality),
- a usually coherent system of values and norms (ethics), and
- a system of social forms of interaction, structures and rituals (= horizontal spirituality).

Exercise

Consider where you find these three dimensions in your religion, in your spiritual worldview. How does the vertical spirituality show itself, which central values and norms does it contain, how does the horizontal, social spirituality show itself?

But what does all this have to do with our question about the spiritual view of reality?

One can represent a religion or a religious system as a triangle opened upwards:



The further down you go in the religious triangle, the more concrete the statements become. The polar logic also increases downwards, but with it also the one-dimensionality. Towards the top, paradox increases - Mircea Eliade, the great American religious scholar, once spoke of the "divine paradox", medieval philosophy spoke of "Coincidentia oppositorum". Both terms point to the logical incomprehensibility of the divine, of the "all-that-is".

Exercise

Take any object and try to perceive the Divine in it. Try to focus your perception entirely on it - and perceive the object as a concrete expression of All That Is.

One could now arrange every religion, every religious system as such an open triangle around the divine, transcendent. Thereby they differ mainly in terms of horizontal spirituality (social norms, forms of interaction, rituals, etc.), they are somewhat less distant on the level of values, and in the divine, infinite they meet on the mystical-spiritual level.

By the way: for this reason the interreligious dialogue, if it remains only on the theological-philosophical-historical level, exhausts itself very quickly. The Hindu-Christian theologian Raimón Panikkar writes about this: "Certainly, creation, God, nirvana and the like are important concepts, but what is actually at stake in religion as well as in religious debate is something else: the true and real 'something' to which these and other concepts refer"

(Panikkar 1990:88).

Literature reference:

Raimón Panikkar: Der neue religiöse Weg. Im Dialog der Religionen leben. München: Kösel-Verlag 1990.

I would like to point out that this triangular scheme contains a crucial error: God, the Absolute or "All-that-is," is presented as outside religion. Strictly speaking, this is wrong: Actually, the Absolute or God - just "All-what-is" - should encompass everything that exists, thus also religion, every human being. At the same time God is also in every human being, in every being and in every object. In other words, everything that exists, that is, the entire creation, is based on the divine and is continuously kept alive and in existence by it. But apart from this limitation, the scheme is quite useful for our considerations.

But where is reality, the reality, to be located in this framework?

Our conceptions of reality usually move on the lowest level of the religious triangle.

1.2 What is reality in the social science view?

In contrast to ideas that "reality" is something that exists outside of us, as it were as a "thing in itself" - independent of observing humans - a number of scientists believe that reality exists only through and in the observation and cognition of objects and facts by humans.

Exercise

Notice what your attention is focused on at this moment. What is happening in your consciousness: What thoughts are running, what do you see, hear, feel right now, in this moment. Follow these processes for a moment - without intervening in it.

In other words: Without observing and recognizing, but also changing people, there would be objects and objects, but no coherent, meaningful reality. Reality is a social process, which is maintained by people, but also constantly changed. People communicate with each other by acting and interacting. Acting always involves people ascribing meanings and interpretations to objects and facts. "'Reality' refers ... To 'opinions' ... or ... to the meaning or value attributed to the phenomena in question" Watzlawick/Weakland/Fisch 1984:120). Thus, what is understood as reality is never detached from the process of cognition, from action, and from the worldviews that are applied in the process.

Literature reference:

Paul Watzlawick / John H. Weakland / Richard Fisch: Lösungen. Zur Theorie und Praxis menschlichen Wandels. Bern/Stuttgart/Wien: Hans Huber 1984.

"Real is what a sufficiently large number of people have agreed to call real" (Watzlawick/Weakland/Fisch 1984:120). In other words, the understanding of reality is always a consequence and expression - and sometimes a prerequisite - of shared beliefs and

conventions among a larger number of people. One could also say that reality is an incessant process of attributing meaning to perceptions of objects, facts, and phenomena.

Because every human action, every communication of people always happens within the framework of a physical, three-dimensional environment, **reality - and especially social reality - can be understood as an activity of people interacting in some way with the environment.**

Exercise

What social reality exists at this moment, in this group of people? What does it consist of - what interactions are taking place?

Seen in this way, every physical, bodily reality is always also a social reality. Or again expressed differently: social reality or reality is always (socially) constructed. This means that every reality we know or will ever know is always a socially constructed reality, and thus always

- a) an anthropocentric (i.e., a "human" or "humanized") reality,
- b) a provisional, potentially ever-changing reality, as well as
- c) a partial, that is, only fragmentary reality.

Ervin Goffman (1980:19ff) points out that reality is always a sequence of prior experiences, a chain of experience that does not break.

Literature reference:

Ervin Goffman: Rahmen-Analyse. Ein Versuch über die Organisation von Alltagserfahrungen. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch 1980 (Orig. New York 1974).

There is another, important side of reality: reality is not a homogeneous, uniform entity consisting of the same material, so to speak - like a block of steel: reality should rather be understood as "interconnected zones or layers of highly varying quality" (Berger 1980:50). The everyday reality of a European administrative employee is quite different from the reality of an Indian fakir or a mystic. Realities are not only different, they themselves encompass very different layers. There are, so to speak, more real and less real realities. This is shown, for example, by mystical or spiritual experiences, but also by analyses of hallucinogenic states, for example when taking drugs.

Exercise

Recall a dream that made a great impression on you. What did you feel was more real: the dream while you were dreaming it, or the everyday reality when you woke up again?

Even in our everyday reality there are different intensities of reality experience. It is well known, for example, that in dangerous situations we act with tremendously heightened senses, we feel time and events enormously intensely - indeed, sometimes time seems to stand still, so to speak.

Exercise

Recall an experience that you have had that was extremely intense - e.g. an encounter with a person, a dangerous situation, an extraordinary exam situation, an intense experience with nature, etc. What was different there than in normal everyday life?

Literature reference:

Peter Berger: Der Zwang zur Häresie. Religion in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft.
Frankfurt/Main: Fischer 1980.

1.4 How real is reality?

Let me start this chapter with four little stories:

Case study 1: The scratched windshields

In the 1950s, it was noticed in the USA that an increasing number of drivers said that their windshields were heavily scratched. People could not explain this phenomenon. There were two explanatory theories in the public mind: One said that the atomic bomb tests had caused a global, aggressive fallout that was to blame for the increasing number of scratched windshields. The other explanatory theory claimed that the scratched windshields were due to a new tar coating on American roads, pieces of which were hurled onto the windshield while driving.

When experts investigated the phenomenon, they found that the number of scratched windshields had not increased at all: by spreading the story, more and more people had simply leaned over the windshield from the outside and, as a result of the shorter distance, had simply noticed more scratches than before.

Source: Watzlawick 1976.

Literature reference:

Paul Watzlawick: Wie wirklich ist die Wirklichkeit? Wahn - Täuschung - Verstehen.
München/Zürich: Piper 1976.

Our second example also shows how subjective and fragile reality can be:

Case study 2: The kidnappings in French fashion stores.

In the 1960s, rumors circulated in various cities in France that women were being abducted from dressing rooms in fashion stores and sold to brothels abroad. When these rumors persisted, the police and the public prosecutor's office got involved and investigated the rumors.

Despite a great deal of effort, not a single case of kidnapping was found. The investigating authorities publicly and officially declared that there was no truth in these rumors. As a result, many people expressed the opinion that it was precisely the police and the prosecutor's office that were in cahoots with the kidnappers - but that the kidnappings were very much going on.

Source: Watzlawick 1976.

A completely different concept of reality is the subject of the following two stories:

Case study 3: Scientologists influence the weather - or believe they do.

In a conversation, a Scientologist told me with full conviction that Scientology enables people to mentally influence the weather once they reach a certain level of clarification. He claimed that he knew "advanced" Scientologists who undoubtedly could and did influence the weather. This ability, he said, was a logical consequence of the "clearing process" propagated by Scientology to become what is known as "clear," that is, to become a "cleared" personality.

Case Study 4: The Tickled Bug

An ethnologist once reported about a shamanistic ritual of a tribe in North America. Members of this tribe, who lived in a dry area, would have the following method for making it rain: The shaman looks for a specimen of a particular species of beetle. He turns the beetle on its back and tickles it with a blade of grass. After that, it begins to rain within half an hour.

What do these four stories have in common? All four examples are based on an understanding of reality that deviates from the generally accepted everyday reality. While the first two examples can be verified to a certain extent - on the basis of facts and figures (either it is true or it is not true), case examples 3 and 4 express an understanding of reality that cannot be verified empirically - or only with great difficulty. In all four examples, including the first two cases, there is a certain, minimal possibility that the reality represented in the story is true after all.

Exercise

Think about which realities - which cannot be proven empirically or by facts and figures - do you believe in? Do you believe in a lucky charm, in telepathy, in fate, in the "right moment"?

The problem lies in the fact that we are used to "seeing" certain contexts, "realities", and to consider them as "real". However, each social or socio-cultural context dictates what is to be considered "real", as "real", and what is not. For example, the Zande in Africa were convinced that their chicken poison oracle - in which a chicken is given a precisely prescribed amount of poison two to four times, which, depending on the situation, either kills the chicken or not, and the reaction of the chicken is taken as a measure of whether the person is telling the truth or not - expressed the truth (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1978: 181ff). And this - in Western eyes - uncertain procedure was used for important life decisions, among others, to determine why a woman had not become pregnant, before marrying a daughter, to find out if someone was bewitched or if someone was a witch, before a man married, before a long journey, in case of adultery, before a prince waged war, before someone took a European position, etc.

Literature reference:

E. E. Evans-Pritchard: Hexerei, Orakel und Magie bei den Zande. Frankfurt: Theorie Suhrkamp Verlag 1978.

Or another example: The disciples of Jesus were convinced that Jesus had appeared to them after his death - the Romans and Jews dismissed this as a fantasy. And although the disciples' conviction fundamentally shaped the way of thinking and feeling in Europe in the following two millennia, one would have to say that today's Western-Western way of thinking - and the understanding of reality associated with it - is probably much closer to that of the skeptical Romans and Jews than to that of the believing disciples.

In any case, the degree of plausibility for a certain logic or a certain "reality" cannot be determined objectively, at the most indirectly, at the "success" of a certain reality - for instance of technology or science. Only: Who says that there can not possibly be even more successful "realities" - could not magic be more "real" than the materialistic western occidental thinking? Hinduism, for example, assumes that everyday life is "maya", that is, "appearance", and that man must first pierce or dissolve all these layers of "appearance" in order to advance to true being, to the core of reality.

We can state: Every statement is made on the background of a reality assumed to be true - and is meaningful only on this background.

The German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1982:28/29) coined the concept of the language game in his late work "Philosophical Investigations". This consists, on the one hand, of language, that is, of what it expresses, or "speaks," and, on the other hand, of activities related to it. According to Wittgenstein, there are hundreds of language games:

"commanding, and acting according to commands -

Describing an object after looking at it, or after measurements -

Making an object according to a description (drawing) -

Reporting an event -

To make a conjecture about the event.

Making and testing a hypothesis

Presenting the results of an experiment through tables and diagrams - Making up a story; and reading it.

Inventing a story; and reading it -

Acting -

Sing a round dance -

Guessing riddles -

Making a joke; telling -

Solve an applied arithmetic problem -

Translating from one language to another -

Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying."

Literature reference:

Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophische Untersuchungen. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1982.

Exercise

Think about what "language games" you played today? Choose one of them: What was the point of this language game? Why did you play this language game?

Thus, every human activity, every interaction between people, can be understood as a language game. The reason why a certain language game is played, according to Wittgenstein, is that "this game (proves itself)..." (Wittgenstein 1972:62, quoted from Jäggi 1987:172).

Literature reference:

Christian J. Jäggi: Zum interreligiösen Dialog zwischen Christentum, Islam und Baha'itum. Frankfurt: Haag + Herchen 1987.

In other words: The meaning of the language game results from its playing. The "rules" of any language game are at the same time the game as soon as they are applied:

"Where is the connection made between the meaning of the words 'Let's play a game of chess!' and all the rules of the game? - Well, in the rulebook of the game, in the teaching of chess, in the daily practice of playing" (Wittgenstein 1982:126).

In other words, if there is no playing, i.e. interacting according to the rules, the reality in question - i.e. the language game in question - collapses. Or related to our question: the superficial everyday reality exists only as long as it is reproduced, i.e., as long as people keep creating it anew by their interactions and rules. This is why various social scientists have also said that meaning is generated through interaction.

Exercise

Can you give one or two examples in which a "language game" you were playing suddenly broke down? What happened in the process?

But all these considerations only lead to the fact that we can say tautologically, i.e. in the sense of a circular argument: We play the game by playing - or: The rules of the language game are the language game / the language game consists of the rules of the language game. Or: The sense of everyday reality is the everyday reality.

We all feel that such a statement is not satisfying: for we are interested in the reality behind the reality, that is, the deeper reality behind the language game. By way of example: Why does a chess player play chess - e.g. because it fascinates him, because he earns money with it, etc.? But exactly the question about the "deeper meaning" of reality cannot be answered by social science.

The question about the "true" or "real" reality cannot be answered on the logical-scientific level.

By the way, the described thinking leads to another problem: Because hundreds, even thousands of possibilities of interaction exist, the approach leads to a "social subjectivism" or "social relativism": Every action or interaction is ultimately conceivable and can happen sometime or somewhere. Reality in this sense is then only what two or more people do together over a certain time - the question of meaning is completely unimportant.

Hinduism has concluded from this already long time ago that the everyday reality is only "Maya", thus "appearance", "mirage" or "veil". Certain Hindu currents have seen this kind of reality as "lila", i.e. as "play" - long before Wittgenstein!

But what is reality in the eyes of the natural sciences?

1.5 Reality from the point of view of natural sciences: Space and time as constants

The classical natural sciences also have a clear conception of reality. Reality is space and time. If you try to define space, you will find that it is not so easy. Maybe you say: Space is where material, i.e. extended things exist or find "place". Space is, so to speak, the "juxtaposition" of objects.

Exercise

Close your eyes and try to perceive space. How did you feel space?

Physicists have said that space is "expansion". But we cannot perceive space directly - just like e.g. radioactivity - but only indirectly, via the objects contained in it.

Thus we can define space as follows: "Space is defined by the size and the distance of the objects contained in it. Space itself has no directly perceptible nature and in this sense is more an auxiliary concept than a 'thing'" (Starkmuth 2006:27).

Literature reference:

Jörg Starkmuth: Die Entstehung der Realität. Wie das Bewusstsein die Welt erschafft. Bonn: Eigenverlag 2006³.

Space can be specified by means of three vectors or coordinates, it is thus three-dimensional. In other words: We can move in space in three directions - every point in (Newtonian) space can be uniquely defined by three coordinate values.

Exercise

Imagine that you are at some point in space. Now try to imagine the universe from this point in three directions, i.e. up and down, to the left and to the right as well as in the third dimension, i.e. backwards. Continue this expansion in the three directions in your thoughts, as far as you can.

Unfortunately, the matter is even more complicated in practice: It is known, for example, that high masses in space - e.g. black holes - can "bend" space, space can "fold up", etc. Physicists and astrophysicists also argue whether space is infinite or not.

The physical time concept is similarly problematic: Exactly as in the space measurement with the length measure with the time duration a reference measure is taken, which we compare then with the "expired" time. A room measures so and so many meters, a duration of time amounts to so and so many hours. But in both cases is valid: We can perceive neither space nor time directly, like for example the light, the sound, the heat difference.

Exercise

Close your eyes and try to feel how long you have been sitting here in the room now and following my explanations? Now open your eyes and look at your watch: How much time passed according to your estimate and how much time has passed according to your watch?

However, this kind of space and time measurement only works if both dimensions are assumed to be constant. This is mostly true in everyday life, but only in our limited, immediate everyday life. For example, we know from the theory of relativity that for a space traveler who would fly out into space and return just below the speed of light, only a few years would pass, while in the meantime several hundred years would have passed on earth - the so-called time dilation. In the case of time, two further questions arise: First, is time infinite? Second, does time always move in the same direction, or can it also move backwards under certain conditions? Here, too, physicists do not agree.

Nevertheless, in everyday practice we assume that time moves constantly.

We see: Space and time are, so to speak, coordinate systems of our consciousness. Our whole way of thinking, feeling and living depends on the fact that actions take place geographically, i.e. spatially, and that actions take place temporally one after the other. If this were not so, then our entire way of life would become chaotic and could no longer be "reasonably" ordered or organized.

Everything would be simultaneous and in the same place, reality would be so multidimensional and polyvalent that no action could be assigned a certain meaning anymore, but every action would have a myriad of meanings. Thus communication would be impossible.

So again:

Space and time are auxiliary structures of the reality created by our consciousness - but they are not the reality itself.

The succession in time experienced by us actually consists in an infinite juxtaposition of innumerable events. The actual reality corresponds rather to Jung's law of synchronicity, whereby the synchronicity applies in the end to everything what exists and what is possible. Such a reality overtaxes our consciousness to such an extent that we - at least in everyday life - cannot manage without time and space construction.

Or in other words: The classical natural science can explain reality - thus space and time - only if it goes beyond its own and fundamental assumptions of constant space and constant time, thus leaves its original world view.

1.6 Reality from the point of view of religions

As we have seen, everyday knowledge (common sense) as well as the classical social sciences and the classical natural sciences cannot answer the question of reality satisfactorily. The question arises what reality is from a spiritual point of view.

With their life concepts and ethical-normative ideas, the different religions always convey a specific idea of reality. As a rule, religious views reach beyond everyday consciousness and include - openly or covertly - approaches to the divine, the transcendent. Religions claim to convey spirituality.

Exercise

Try to imagine the Divine - or God - as you believe it is. What image or symbol or feeling comes up in you?

The religions have answered the question of the absolute divine reality very differently.

Thus, at the center of the Koran is the concern that man should lead a life that corresponds to the order revealed by God. Islam means "devotion, surrender to God," and this is to be done in terms of a daily effort of devotion to God - the so-called "great jihad." But this struggle is an inward, spiritual one: "Fight for Allah's way, as it befits to fight for it. He has chosen you and has not imposed on you anything impossible in religion. He has given you the religion of your father Abraham, and has called you 'Muslims' before and now in this Book, so that the Messenger may be a witness against (and for) you, and you may be a witness against (and for) the rest of mankind. Therefore, establish prayer and give alms, and adhere firmly to Allah. He is your Lord. He is the best Lord and the best Protector" (23 Surah, verse 79).

Only later did this become the "little jihad," when Muslims defended the "ummah," the community of believers, at gunpoint, against Christian crusaders, among others.

"Whoever did evil shall just have his appropriate reward (the precisely measured punishment) for it. But he who did good, whether man or woman, and is otherwise a believer, shall enter Paradise and find therein provision in abundance" (40th Sura, verse 41).

The law - the Sharia - was supposed to help people live as God requires them to live, namely to do good and avoid evil. Over time, however, Sharia has increasingly taken on the role of very direct and rigid social control over believers - Islamist governments in particular use and abuse Sharia in the form of Sharia jurisdiction to bring people - and not just Muslims - into line. The very liberal and tolerant judicial practice common in classical Islam has recently been replaced in a number of countries by human rights abusing, brutal so-called "Sharia courts", with the thrust of anti-secularism. A very narrow interpretation of Islam increasingly prevailed.

Allah - i.e., God - is above reality: "To Allah belongs the dominion over heaven and earth, he forgives whom he wills and punishes whom he wills; for Allah is conciliatory and merciful" (48th sura, verse 15). The earthly daily life is only an illusory reality: "Know: Earthly life is only

a game, a dalliance. The splendor, the search for glory and the desire for the increase of riches and children are like the plants, nourished by rain, whose growth delights the countryman, but which then wither and, as you see, wither and finally become withered stubble (dust). In that life, those who pursue only earthly things will receive severe punishment. But those who renounce it: reconciliation with Allah and His pleasure. The earthly life is only an accumulation of deceptions. Make haste in vying to obtain reconciliation from your Lord, and strive for Paradise, whose expanse is as great as the expanse of the heavens and the earth, which is promised to those who believe in Allah and His Messenger" (57th Sura, verse 21/22). So the real reality is not the earthly life, but the reconciliation with God, his benevolence.

Exercise

Now try to imagine how you move - e.g. in your life process - towards the divine - imagine yourself as part of this movement. Be aware of what is happening.

In Christianity the idea of the kingdom of God was in the center: "Eu-angelion", i.e. the good news, meant nothing else than that the kingdom of God (= the royal rule of God) is already there (other translations say: "the kingdom of God is near"). Although the kingdom of God idea was (mis)understood eschatologically again and again, i.e. in the sense of an expected end time of mankind - also by the apostles! -, the kingdom of God actually means the other, transcendent reality, the divine, which is always already there, in us and everywhere. In the parables Jesus tried again and again to break through the dual everyday thinking in order to point to the reality or the kingdom of God, the divine paradox.

Love for God is the most important commandment: "One of them, a teacher of the law, wanted to trap Jesus and asked him, 'Teacher, which is the most important commandment of the law?' Jesus answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your will, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and most important commandment" (Matth. 22, verse 35 - 38).

Exercise

Imagine that you are made entirely of love for the Divine. Imagine love for God as the force between you and the Divine, Transcendent. What do you feel?

The Sermon on the Mount also emphasizes the importance of God - as a super-reality, so to speak: "All who expect nothing from God and nothing from themselves may rejoice, for they will live with him in the new world. All who suffer from the misery of the world may rejoice, for God will take away their burden. ... Let all rejoice who ardently wait for God's will to be done; for God will satisfy their longing. ... Let all who are pure in heart rejoice, for they will see God" (Matth. 5, verse 3-8). The kingdom of God - which is visible to all with a pure heart - is the true reality, not everyday life.

Christian theologian Paul Tillich has suggested that the word "God" be understood as "depth," that absolute subjectivity which can be identified neither with subject nor with object and yet includes both (cf. Wilber 1987:90).

Literature reference:

Ken Wilber: Das Spektrum des Bewusstseins. Ein metapsychologisches Modell des Bewusstseins und der Disziplinen, die es erforschen. Bern/München/Wien: Scherz Verlag 1987.

According to the Sermon on the Mount, however, the kingdom of God works in the physical, material world: Whoever does no violence will possess the earth (Matt. 5, verse 5), whoever is merciful will enjoy God's mercy (Matt. 5, verse 7), whoever makes peace will be a child of God (Matt. 5, verse 9).

In the history of Christianity, however, as is well known, the Kingdom of God idea was abused to enforce the total power control of the church. The "holy" Inquisition murdered thousands of women and men because they were allegedly in league with the devil. It is not without poignancy that before his election, the future Pope Benedict XVI was, of all things, the head of the successor organization to the Inquisition, namely the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Roman Catholic Church. Fortunately, the process of secularization has broken the power of the Catholic Church - and thus helped human rights and democracy to break through. However - and this is the other side of the coin - many people have also lost their roots in Christian spirituality and mysticism. The society in which we live is no longer Christian, but secular. In the canton of Basel, for example, the largest religious group today is the group of non-denominational people.

Hinduism also knows the absolute reality, the reality behind the everyday reality. Shankara (1981:59f) wrote: "There is a reality consisting of itself, which is the basis of our ego consciousness. This reality is the spectator of the three states of our consciousness and is different from the five physical sheaths.

This reality is the knower in all states of consciousness, the state of waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep. It is aware of the presence or absence of the thinking organ as well as its functions. It is the Atman.

This reality sees everything in its own light. No one can see it. It gives insight to the thinking organ and the mind, but no one enlightens it.

This reality pervades the universe, but nothing pervades it. It alone shines. The universe shines in the reflection of her light.

Her presence causes the activity of the body, the senses, the thinking organ and intellect as if they obeyed her command. Her essence is eternal consciousness. She knows everything from the thought to the body. It knows joy and sorrow and all objects of sense perception. It knows everything objectively, just as a human being knows about the objective existence of a jar.

This is the Atman, the Supreme Being, the Ancient One. Never does his experience of infinite joy end. Always it is the same. He is consciousness itself".

Literature reference:

Shankara: Das Kleinod der Unterscheidung. Bern: Barth 1981.

The Indian cosmology knows as central term for the cosmic primeval ground - or the other reality - "brahman". This term is derived from the Sanskrit root brih (= to grow, to expand) and originally denoted a transcendent world ground or a universal divine power, later also the

highest principle of reality, the Absolute, behind and above all deities - and other living beings (Bischof 2002:27). Later, Brahman was understood to be identical with the entire manifested universe. Still later scriptures saw Brahman as identical with man's innermost self, the Atman. The identity Atman = Brahman is central to the Upanishads and Vedanta literature.

Literature reference:

Marco Bischof: Tachyonen Orgonenergie Skalarwellen. Feinstoffliche Felder zwischen Mythos und Wissenschaft. Aarau: AT-Verlag 2002.

Exercise

Imagine Brahman - the infinite horizon of being, or the Divine. Imagine Atman as your innermost, divine core - and try to merge Atman, your innermost core - and Brahman.

In India's Hindu environment, many living Hindu traditions have been preserved. However, the religiously based caste system still keeps tens of thousands of untouchables in poverty and dependence, and forces thousands of Indian women to commit suicide or to early death (widow burnings). Moreover, hundreds of thousands of Hindu fundamentalists are miles away from the interreligious tolerance advocated - e.g. by Gandhi. Furthermore, the theory of karma and reincarnation, besides a deep feeling of compassion, has led many people to a hard-heartedness: So in the style: it is his or her own fault if he or she is not well, if he or she is sick or poor, after all he or she has caused it himself - either in this or in a previous life.

Zen Buddhism also knows two realities. D. T. Suzuki wrote about the two ways of knowing: "Prajñā transcends Vijñāna. In the world of the senses and the intellect, we make use of Vijñāna cognition; it has a basic dualism attached to it, namely that of the seeing and the seen, which are in opposition to each other. In Prajñā-recognition, this distinction does not occur; the seen and the sighted are identical; the sighted is the seen, and the seen is the sighted" (quoted from Wilber 1987:48).

Exercise

Read the following koan: "When Horse Master Baso becomes Horse Master Baso, Zen becomes Zen. What is true Zen? When you become yourselves." Let this koan sink in, try to grasp it.

In Zen Buddhism, there is a long tradition of so-called koans, short stories that were told to students to help them overcome dual, logical thinking and enter satori. A Roshi - Zen master - was asked by a student, "Here is a cherry tree in blossom and there is a river flowing. From where should I enter satori?" The answer was, "Just from there." Another Zen master asked his student, "When you clap two hands together, a sound is heard. What happens when you slap one hand together?"

But Japan, too, despite Zen Buddhism, is struggling with the same problematic consequences of secularization as Europe, though secularization in Japan has been even more rapid and imposed from the outside, a consequence of the post-World War II American occupation of

Japan. Despite great economic successes, many residents of Japan suffer from the consequences of secularization and from cultural-religious loss of identity.

Chinese philosophy also has a central concept, the "Dao" (Tao). It is to be understood as the cosmic primal ground or the cosmic matrix. It has been described as "the dark primordial womb," as "the birth-giver of heaven and earth," as the "still and incorporeal one," and as the one who "works without effort" (Bishop 2002:25). Western authors have paraphrased the Dao as "the undifferentiated field of unity from which things appear by spontaneous, uncaused emergence."

Exercise

Try to imagine the Divine, the other, real reality as the primordial womb, as the birthing woman. What happens?

As is well known, however, even Taoism could not prevent China from being completely and militantly secularized after 1949, so comprehensively that religion - especially under Mao - was not only banned but also massively persecuted for decades.

These examples show two things: On the one hand, practically all big - and also smaller - religions know another, more real primordial reality, which is superior and superior to the physical-physical reality of our everyday life, but which we cannot perceive directly due to our polar thinking.

On the other hand, the above examples also show that the great religions have been frighteningly unsuccessful in one of their central tasks, namely the mediation of reconciliation and peace between people. One of the decisive reasons for this is the fact that the mediation of spirituality and access to the transcendent, the divine, has been increasingly marginalized and even forgotten.

Already 20 years ago, in various publications on fundamentalism, I argued that the most effective strategy against religious violence and fundamentalism is the mediation of spirituality and the promotion of interreligious dialogue (cf. Jäggi/Krieger 1991).

Literature reference:

Christian J. Jäggi/David J. Krieger: Fundamentalismus. Ein Phänomen der Gegenwart. Zürich: Orell Füssli 1991.

1.7 Reality in the View of Quantum Physics

As we have seen, most religions know a distinction in some form between this world and the hereafter, where this world is understood as the everyday reality, the hereafter either as the reality after death or as the reality behind the everyday reality.

But this gross distinction is a great simplification. In truth, there are a huge number of levels of reality, all of which are different from one another. In Hinduism and especially in

Buddhism, the different levels of reality and levels of reality have been broken down to the last.

We are interested here in the principle: From the newer physics it is known that the smallest matter particles can be divided more and more until they finally lose their physical properties.

Exercise

Imagine an atom consisting of a nucleus and an electron orbiting the nucleus. Now go to the nucleus of the atom, which consists of protons and neutrons. Choose a proton and imagine it. Imagine that the proton is made up of smaller particles again, and so on. You will find that you can only imagine this if you imagine the atom, electron and proton enlarged again and again.

Every atom consists to a predominant part of space as well as of energy. The particle physics has found always new and smaller particles, but at the same time one has found out that these particles do not exist objectively, so to speak, in themselves, but that their existence depends among other things on the expectations of the researchers - and they are found or not depending on it. There are even scientists who claim that these particles are only created by the expectations of the observer. This observer effect was in complete contrast to the thinking of classical - Newtonian - physics, which assumed that all observed laws of nature and physical reality existed completely independently of the observer.

Also, physical phenomena can take contradictory forms: Light can appear either as a particle or as a wave, with their respective characteristics, but never as both at the same time. Of an electron, one can only say either something about its velocity or something about its position, but one can never simultaneously determine the exact direction of motion and the velocity.

Physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, in their research on electrons, theorized that an electron was not a defined entity, but existed only as a potential, the sum of all possibilities, until it was observed or measured by us, thereby committing it to a particular state. When we finished observing or measuring it, the electron would return to the ether of all possibilities (McTaggart 2003:155).

Literature reference:

Lynne McTaggart: Das Nullpunktfeld. Auf der Suche nach der kosmischen Urenergie. München: Goldmann 2003.

Thus, as soon as the finest physical reality is to be observed, measured or quantified, it dissolves under our eyes, so to speak.

The physicist Nick Herbert explained that he sometimes had the impression that behind the world "a highly mysterious and constantly flowing quantum soup" was hiding (quoted from Talbot 1992:46). But as soon as he turns around and tries to perceive it, his gaze immediately freezes it and transforms it back into ordinary reality. Similar to the legendary King Midas, who could never feel how silk feels, because immediately everything he touched turned into gold, humans could not grasp the true structure of quantum reality - that is, the reality behind reality, because everything we touch turns into matter (Talbot 1992:46).

Literature reference:

Michael Talbot: Das holographische Universum. Die Welt in neuer Dimension. München: Droemer Knaur 1992.

But why is quantum physics so crucial for our understanding of reality?

Subatomic particles always have wave character as long as they are not observed. But as soon as an observer appears, they take on particle character. This is true for all subatomic particles: for light, gamma rays, radio waves and X-rays. It is now an indisputable fact that quanta manifest themselves as particles only when we observe them. For example, as long as an electron is not observed, it is always a wave. Many physicists today assume that subatomic phenomena always have both wave character and particle character.

In quantum physics there are several interpretations of this fact. While some - e.g. Niels Bohrs said that electrons only become existent when they assume particle character, i.e. when they are observed, other physicists - so David Bohm - were of the opinion that there is a kind of field below the quanta. Bohm called this hypothetical field quantum potential and put forward the thesis that this penetrates the whole space just like gravity. But unlike gravity, which depends on the mass of bodies, the quantum field was equally effective and equally strong everywhere. Drawing on his plasma research, Bohm envisioned the quantum field as a continuously self-regenerating medium that performed a kind of coordinated motion, much like a ballet. He pointed out that "such a closed quantum activity is closer to the organized functional unity of the parts of a living being than to that unity which comes about by the assembly of the parts of a machine" (quoted from Talbot 1992:52).

Another aspect is interesting for our question: In the early 1960s, various scientists - such as Karl Pribram and others - who had been working on questions of quantum physics wondered the following: If the human observer could put an electron in a certain state, to what extent did it affect physical reality? The observer effect suggested that the material, physical world emerged from a kind of primordial soup - the zero-point field - only if a living consciousness was involved (McTaggart 2003:158). Could it be that the physical world existed only through us and our perception?

Exercise

Imagine a kind of three-dimensional field or fluid, which encompasses everything that is - including ourselves -, the entire space and continues in all directions, i.e. is unlimited.

This leads to three interesting conclusions:

First, there exists an infinite, eternal field or zero-point field that encompasses everything that exists. The so-called zero-point-field exists everywhere and in every time. According to modern physicists, every area of space is filled with different fields consisting of waves of different lengths. Each wave and each field contains energy. Physicists have calculated that because of the existing fields and waves, every cubic centimeter in space contains more energy than the total energy of all matter in the universe as we know it (cf. Talbot 1992:62).

This energy is "freely" available - and it can be assumed that this energy continuously replenishes itself, due to the different energy potentials lower energy potentials tend to absorb energy from higher energy potentials.

Secondly: Consciousness of every kind is a never stopping creative process, which again and again creates new realities. Thereby the free energy - so to say the potential for the creative power - is omnipresent and inexhaustible. This free energy - I will later put forward the thesis that this free energy is identical with universal love - is activated by creation processes. Time - or more exactly: space-time - arises just by this uninterrupted act of creation of consciousness on the most different levels: On the level of atoms and molecules, of minerals, of plants, of animals, of human beings, of more developed spiritual beings, etc.

Thirdly: If this should be so, also space and time would have to be a product of our - and all other creative - consciousness in the end. Time and space are functions of consciousness - and creation arises in a space-time structure. Consciousness - any consciousness - continues to evolve toward the Divine; Teilhard de Chardin called this goal point of evolution or "phylogenesis" the point Omega. This point Omega is a mathematical limit towards which everything is running, but which is never completely reached. It is the point from which everything started and towards which everything moves. So Jesus could also say: "Before Abraham was, I am" (Joh. 8., Vers 58).

The Bohmian interpretation of the quantum theory contained still another, surprising conclusion. In our everyday reality, all things occupy very specific places. According to Bohm's interpretation of quantum physics, it follows that locality - that is, place - ceases to exist at the level below the quanta, in the quantum field. All points become equal to all other points in space - and vice versa: nothing is separate from or independent of the other anymore. Physicists refer to this as "non-locality". "Since the quantum potential fills all space, all particles are indeed 'non-locally' connected. The picture of reality that Bohm developed no longer corresponded to a state in which subatomic particles shoot independently through the void of space, but to one in which all things are components of an interconnected web and embedded in a space as real and diverse as the matter that moves through it" (Talbot 1992:54; translated from German by Deepl).

Exercise

Imagine yourself as a node in a huge, three-dimensional web. Your node - yourself - is connected to hundreds of other nodes, and to thousands indirectly through other nodes. All nodes are other people, animals, plants, objects - everything that is. Can you feel the sense of belonging?

Maybe this approach could also explain paranormal abilities like clairvoyance, clairaudience, telepathy, out-of-body-experiences, bilocation, remote viewing and so on. People with these abilities - by the way - abilities which are potentially inherent in all human beings, but which only a few people have developed. People with such abilities are able to access the zero-point-field and to make its implicit information explicit, or in other words: to express it in everyday reality.

Physicist Ervin Laszlo has proposed an interesting explanation for time phenomena that deviate from the common notion of a uniform, linear flow of time. The motion of subatomic particles causes secondary fields that interact with the zero-point field. These secondary fields are called "scalar waves". Unlike Hertzian waves, these are not transverse waves, but longitudinal waves. The scalar waves travel much faster than the speed of light, and penetrate any matter, whether gaseous, liquid or solid. Laszlo held that scalar waves can encode information from space and time into a timeless, spaceless quantum shorthand of interference patterns. "In Laszlo's model, this deepest level of the zero-point field - the mother of all fields - contains the ultimate holographic blueprint of the world for all time, past and future" (McTaggart 2003:259). People who have visions of the past or the future tap into this information.

To take time out of the "equation" of reality, we must also take out separateness, as Robert Jahn suggested: "Pure energy, as it exists at the quantum level, knows neither time nor space, but exists as an infinite continuum of fluctuating charges. In a sense, we are time and space. When we bring energy into consciousness through the act of perception, we create separate objects that exist in space through a measurable continuum. By creating time and space, we create our own separateness" (McTaggart 2003:259).

It is most interesting that almost all religious and spiritual paths of experience repeatedly emphasize that we are not separate from other people, objects, or God. The experience of this all-connectedness is a profound mystical experience - and known in virtually all religions.

If it is true that consciousness - or more precisely, a certain kind of consciousness in an enlightened state - operates at the frequencies of the quantum level, it is outside of space and time, which would mean that potentially all humans have theoretical access to the information of the past, present, and future: "If humans are capable of influencing quantum events, then it follows that we are equally capable of influencing events or moments outside of the present" (McTaggart 2003:260).

Moreover, this would also explain the law of synchronicity discovered by C.G. Jung.

Furthermore, according to William Braud, this gives rise to another intriguing idea: "Time-delayed human intention somehow affects the possibilities of an event leading to a particular outcome, and it affects best what Braud liked to call 'seeding moments' - the first moment of a chain of events. Thus, if these principles were applied to physical and mental health, it might mean that we could use the zero-point field to direct influences 'backward' in time, and thus subsequently alter pivotal moments or initial situations that later develop into full-blown problems or diseases" (McTaggart 2003:261). Thus, Braud suggested that spontaneous healings - such as at Lourdes - were possible because the causes of the disease were acted upon at the zero-point field level, and thus the disease simply disappeared at the physical level.

Ken Wilber (1987:52) rightly writes: "... the problem is that we are literally addicted to dualistic cognition". The problem is also a problem of language, indeed of communication in general: language - and also our verbal and non-verbal communication - is a method of dual reality. That is why every mystic faces the problem that he can only point to the non-dual

reality with his utterances. As long as there is speaking, we stick to the dual reality. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger has spoken of a necessary "leap into the abyss": Only when I can let go of dual reality - and thus of language, science and philosophy - when I dare to take the leap into absolute being, into real reality, does anything happen. But you can't talk about it anymore - you have to experience it.

1.8 Reality from a spiritual point of view

Let's summarize what we have heard so far:

Our everyday reality is an illusory reality, the true reality lies "behind" it: what we recognize with our senses is illusory.

There are no separate objects, living beings or events - everything is connected with everything.

Bohm (cf. Talbot 1992:57) has called this reality "behind," this deeper level of reality "implicate" or "veiled" order, which is not local nor temporal. Or, in other words, it is infinite in space and time.

In contrast, Bohm calls our everyday reality "explicit" or "revealed" order, which is structured by space and time coordinates.

Here, the uninterrupted inflow from the implicate order keeps the explicit order going. Seen in this way, the quantum as a wave would be the implicate order and as a particle the explicit order.

The deeper implicate order is holographic - and thus non-local - in structure; behind the universe, so to speak, there is a "holomotion" that is non-local and non-temporal.

Our everyday reality is thus an illusion, which we regard as real, while we feel the actual reality behind it as illusion.

All things, objects and living beings are in truth one - and not separate from each other.

Spiritual and mystical paths or schools try in principle nothing else than to reverse our point of view: We are to learn to experience implicit reality as the actual reality, explicit reality as illusory reality.

It is about looking through the polar structure of the external illusory reality, so to speak, and directing the center of our attention, our consciousness to the timeless and placeless, all-encompassing reality. The goal is to experience the "Unio mystica", i.e. the connection with all that is - the connection with the divine, transcendent.

Spiritual and quantum-physical views agree on this: the division into "animate" and "inanimate" is nonsensical, because on the deeper level of reality everything is life: life is in

energy, in space, in time and in everything that is. This attitude - formerly disparagingly called "animism" - expresses a deeply spiritual attitude and view.