

## **Understanding Spiritual Intelligence (SI)**

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### **Abstract:**

Spiritual Intelligence (SI) is one of the multiple intelligences that humans possess. Emotional intelligence along with the concept of IQ has been reviewed and understood to a great extent but it is Spiritual Intelligence that needs wider attention and focus. Moreover SI has shown to impact well being in personal as well as work front. This paper aims to deliver a short understanding and communication towards the concept of Spiritual Intelligence.

Key words: Spiritual Intelligence, Positive Psychology.

### **Introduction :**

The word spiritual in itself brings about strong connotations. The key characteristics of spirituality in mature and competent people are evidenced by the depth and quality of their moral and ethical choices. These include concern for others and for what is right and just according to universal principals. All people have their inborn spiritual capacities (Wolman, 2001) that give meaning and purpose to life. From Gardner's definition of intelligence, it can be understood that it is the capacity to solve problems that are valued in one or more cultural settings. Emmons (2000) recommended spirituality as an element of intelligence because it predicts functioning and adaptation and offers capabilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals. Zohar and Marshall (2000) define Spiritual Intelligence as intelligence which people use to address and solve problems of meaning and value and place their actions in a manner to live their life meaningfully. Spiritual intelligence is important to assist a person in finding the deepest and innermost resources from which the capacity to care, the power to tolerate and adapt is obtained (George, 2006). In workplace, spiritual intelligence helps workers in the context of relationships and aligns personal values with a clear sense of purpose that demonstrate a high level of integrity in work (Tee et al. 2011).

Spirituality has been found to be helpful in influencing attitude (Weber, 1958) and shaping human experience, meaning and behavior (Kripner & Welch, 1992; Zohar & Marshall, 2004). Research has also shown that there is a relationship between both; people with higher level of spirituality have healthier, happier and more productive lives at work (Tischler, 2002). It has also been examined that a significant relationship exists between spiritual intelligence and mental health (Emmons, 2000; Nobel, 2000; West, 2004; Shabani, 2011), personality, rehabilitation, cognitive processes, social phenomena and physical health (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Piedmont, 2001; Taylor, Amenta & Highfield, 1995), motivation (Tee, Anantharaman, Yoon, 2011), leadership (Howard, 2002; Amram, 2009) and work performance (Alexander, 1993). In the

nursing profession spiritual intelligence helps nurse's well-being and happiness (Yang, 2006; Yang, 2007; Faribos, Fatemeh and Hamidreze, 2010).

Cynthia S.G. Wigglesworth defines Spiritual Intelligence as “The ability to act with Wisdom and Compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace (equanimity), regardless of the circumstances. Spiritual intelligence is an innate human intelligence that is readily made available to us if we are willing to ask for it and practice it.”

Spiritual Intelligence is a cumulative product of many other essential virtues. According to Amram and Dryer (2007) there are five domains of Spiritual Intelligence; namely: Consciousness, Transcendence, Grace, Meaning and Truth. A spiritually consciousness person has the ability to lift one's conscious self, can capture intuitive occurrences and combine various points of view together in mundane functioning as well. Transcendence reflects the capacity to align oneself with the sacred and surpass the ego within self by enhancing relatedness and experiencing holism that facilitates functioning. The domain of Grace in spiritually intelligent people denotes the love towards life which draws inspiration from anything beautiful; it is the joy that is present in each passing moment which also enhances functioning as well as well-being. Meaning reflects the capacity to absorb meaning in life; under this domain of spiritual intelligence one links daily activities and situations to values and interprets those situations in ways that strengthens functioning and well-being even in the face of pain. Truth refers to the ability to be aware, to love and face the truth (no matter how difficult), showing reception of the event, humbleness and trust that boosts functioning in day to day activities and also well-being.

According to Weber (1958) spirituality is helpful in influencing positive attitude. It also shapes experiences, enhances meaning and modifies behavior (Kripner & Welch, 1992; Zohar & Marshall, 2004). Research indicates that there is a relationship between spirituality and physical health. People with high levels of spirituality have been reported to have a healthy, happy and more fruitful life at work (Tischler, 2002). Many researchers have reported the presence of a significant relationship spiritual intelligence and mental health (Emmons, 2000; Nobel, 2000; West, 2004; Shabani, 2011). A significant relationship between Spiritual intelligence is also seen with rehabilitation of difficult patients, cognition and their social functioning (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Piedmont, 2001; Taylor, Amenta & Highfield, 1995). Motivation, leadership, and better performance at work is also related to Spiritual intelligence (Tee, Anantharaman & Yoon, 2011; Howard, 2002; Amram, 2009; Alexander, 1993). Yang et.al, (2006) have asserted that well-being and happiness is boosted by the presence of spiritual intelligence among nurses, in the profession of nursing.

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Spiritual Intelligence is a newer area of research in comparison to Emotional Intelligence and Mental Intelligence (IQ), but it has a contribution to the work place setting. Various leadership styles, the nuances of organizational climate of a workplace as well the culture and politics in the workplace prosper when the staff is intelligent, emotionally as well as spiritually.

Zohar (2000) in her book *Spiritual Intelligence: The Ultimate Intelligence* defines Spiritual Intelligence (SI) also known as Spiritual Quotient (SQ) as the intelligence with which one addresses and solves problems of meaning and value, the intelligence with which one places one's actions and one's lives in a wider, richer, meaning giving context, the intelligence with which one can assess that one course of action or one life path which is more meaningful than the other. SQ is the necessary foundation for the effective functioning of both IQ and EQ. The nature of humans is essentially spiritual because it is driven by fundamental questions, like 'what is the purpose of our birth', 'why do we need to move on?' etc.

Humans have a tendency to see lives in a larger meaning giving context, whether it is for family, for self or even for the workplace. Spiritual intelligence is required to visualize possibilities, to dream, to aspire and to rise back in life. It is notable how EQ differs from SQ. In words of Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence allows one to judge what situation one is in and then behave appropriately *within* it, allowing the situation to guide one. SQ operates out of the brain's centre, from the brain's neurological unifying functions, it integrates all intelligences. SQ makes one fully intellectual, emotional and spiritual. "SQ is viewed as a dialogue between reason and emotion, between mind and body. It is a catalyst for unifying growth and transformation." (Zohar, 2000).

### **Spiritual Intelligence and Religion**

There exists no mandatory connection between formal religion and being spiritual. For some SQ may be an expression of formal religion but being a follower of a formal religion does not guarantee high SQ. Atheists have reported to have had high SQ than followers of formal religion. Studies done by Gordon Allport (1950) in his book 'The Individual and his Religion' showed that people have more spiritual experiences outside the confines of mainstream religious institutions than within them. Formal religion is an extrinsic process generally inherited or chosen; a set of rules and beliefs. More like a top-down process. As described by Zohar and Marshall (2002) SQ is an internal, innate ability of the human brain and psyche, drawing its deepest resources from the heart of the universe itself. 'SQ is soul's intelligence'. It is the intelligence with which one heals, with which one makes oneself whole. SQ has the capacity to make religion possible (or even necessary) but SQ does not depend upon religion.

### **Spiritual Intelligence and the Brain**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Michael Persinger and V.S. Ramachandran at the University of California carried out research on the existence of God Spot in the human brain. This built in spiritual centre is located among the neural networks of the temporal lobes of the brain. PET

scans revealed that these areas lit up whenever the subjects were exposed to conversations on spirituality and spiritual matter. As mentioned in Danah Zohar's book *Spiritual Intelligence : the Ultimate Intelligence* and directly quoted,

*"These vary with cultures, Westerners responding to mention of 'God', Buddhists and others responding to symbols meaningful to them. Such temporal lobe activity has been linked for years to the mystical visions of epileptics and people who take LSD. Ramachandran's work is the first to show it active in normal people. The 'God spot' does not prove the existence of God, but it does show that the brain has evolved to ask 'ultimate questions', to have and to use a sensitivity to wider meaning and value. Second, the work of Austrian neurologist Wolf Singer in the 1990s on 'the binding problem' shows that there is a neural process in the brain devoted to unifying and giving meaning to our experience – a neural process that literally 'binds' our experiences together. Before Singer's work on unifying, synchronous neural oscillations across the whole brain, neurologists and cognitive scientists only recognized two forms of brain neural organization. One of these forms, serial neural connections, is the basis of our IQ. Serially connected neural tracts allow the brain to follow rules, to think logically and rationally, step-by-step. In the second form, neural network organization, bundles of up to a hundred thousand neurones are connected in haphazard fashion to other massive bundles. These neural networks are the basis of EQ, our emotion-driven, pattern-recognizing, habit-building intelligence. Both serial and parallel computers exist and have different abilities, but neither kind can operate with meaning. No existing computer can ask 'Why?' Singer's work on unifying neural oscillations offers the first hint of a third kind of thinking, unitive thinking, and an accompanying third mode of intelligence, SQ, that can deal with such questions. Third, as a development of Singer's work, Rodolfo Llinas's mid-1990s work on sleeping and waking consciousness and the binding of cognitive events in the brain has been greatly enhanced by new MEG (magneto-encephalographic) technology allowing whole-skull studies of the brain's oscillating electrical fields and their associated magnetic fields. Fourth, Harvard neurologist and biological anthropologist Terrence Deacon has recently published new work on the origins of human language (*The Symbolic Species*, 1997). Deacon shows that language is a uniquely human, essentially symbolic, meaning-centred activity that co-evolved with rapid development in the brain's frontal lobes. Neither existing computers nor even higher apes (with rare and limited exception) can use language, because they lack the frontal lobe facility for dealing with meaning. This book will show that Deacon's whole research programme for the evolution of symbolic imagination and its consequent role in brain and social evolution underpins the intelligence faculty we are calling SQ." ( Zohar, 2008. p. 96-102).*

People experiencing spirituality (affiliated to formal religion) reported feelings of profound meaning, deep insight, a sense of great well-being, euphoria, or an over arching sense of unity in all things. Although this type of experience seldom has specific religious content, many studies link it to a greater capacity for creativity, and a sense of guiding supernatural presence. Those from agnostic or atheistic backgrounds reported experiences of extra-sensory perception, such as telepathy or precognition, or experiences of being in an altered state of consciousness, such as

hovering above their own body during an operation or after an accident – so-called out-of-the-body experiences (Zohar,2002). Both experiences report increased temporal lobe or ‘God spot’ activity in the brain. It is also reported that schizophrenic and manic depressive patients see visions, hear voices, feel presences and receive instructions about tasks they are expected to carry out. Increased temporal lobe or ‘God spot’ activity is a feature of this kind of mental disorder. Some researchers suggest that all such experiences are a sign of incipient madness. Psychologists who specialize in studying links between spiritual experience and mental illness disagree. Ramachandran (1997) for example, has reported that mentally healthy people show increased temporal lobe activity when exposed to spiritual words or topics. Researchers also assert that there are important differences between the experiences of normal people and those of the mentally ill. Mike Jackson (1997) in his doctoral research concluded that there are similarities between the experiences of psychotic patients and normal people. He observes that, “In general, the descriptions offered by the clinical group (the psychotic patients) were more disturbing, negative, and bizarre both in the way they were expressed, and in their content. Unlike the mentally healthy people, the psychotics had difficulty integrating their spiritual experiences into their everyday lives, and therefore found it hard to make lasting, positive use of them. There was also a distinction between the types of experience most common to psychotic patients and to normal people” (Jackson,1997). A study of 115 university students in Australia also found no correlation between mystical experience and introversion, neuroticism or psychoticism.

Spiritual intelligence now is the most highly regarded values of the human nature. It is spirituality that makes one human, urging us to question the fundamentals of our existence. Different cultural systems, be it collectivistic or individualistic view it differently emphasizing on the values that are definite to them. For any leader or manager of an organization, being spiritually coherent is essential.

Spiritual intelligence has also been stated as one of the potential Psychological Capital for human functioning (Luthans et al., 2007), others being Hope, Optimism, Resilience and Self Efficacy. In any period of crisis, it is natural and functional for mental hardship to occur. Spiritually intelligent people have the ability to display better coping mechanism. The recent lockdown amidst the COVID 19 pandemic provided a platform for people to introspect their own actions. As per the understanding of Spiritual Intelligence, people with higher SQ are in a better position to cope and deal with the crisis, both at work and also at home.

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