

Anthropocosmic Vision The Light of Dharma in all Wisdom Traditions

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An attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity,
can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in
the abolition of happiness too.

The crisis world found itself in as it swung on the hinge of the 20th century is located in something deeper than particular ways of organizing political systems and economies. In different ways, the East and the West were going through a single common crisis whose cause was the spiritual condition of the modern world. That condition is characterized by a loss—the loss of religious certainties and of transcendence with its larger horizons. The nature of that loss is strange but ultimately quite logical. When, with the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything, meaning began to ebb and the stature of humanity to diminish. The world lost its human dimension, and we began to lose control of it. In the words of F. Schuon:

The world is miserable because men live beneath themselves; the error of modern man is that he wants to reform the world without having either the will or the power to reform man, and this flagrant contradiction, this attempt to make a better world on the basis of a worsened humanity, can only end in the very abolition of what is human, and consequently in the abolition of happiness too. Reforming man means binding him again to Heaven, reestablishing the broken link; it means tearing him away from the reign of the passions, from the cult of matter, quantity and cunning, and reintegrating him into the world of the spirit and serenity...¹

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This is exactly what *Dharma* is all about.

If anything characterizes the modern era, it is a loss of faith in transcendence, in God as an objective reality. It is the age of eclipse of transcendence. No socio-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized Modernity. Transcendence means that there is another reality, symbolized by *Dharma* that is more real, more powerful, and better than this mundane order. The eclipse of transcendence impacted our way of looking at the world, that is, forming a worldview? Whatever transpires in other domains of life— politics, living standards, environmental conditions, interpersonal relationships, the arts— was ultimately dependent on our presiding world view in which the light of *Dharma* has been eclipsed to a large extent. Modern Westerners, forsaking clear thinking, allowed themselves to become so obsessed with life's material underpinnings that they had written science a blank cheque; a blank cheque for science's claims concerning what constituted Reality, knowledge and justified belief. We continue to honour science for what it tells us about nature or the natural order/natural world, but as that is not all that exists, science cannot provide us with a worldview— not a valid one. The most it can show us is half of the world, the half where normative and intrinsic values, existential and ultimate meanings, teleologies, qualities, immaterial realities, and beings that are superior to us do not appear; *Dharmic* principles are marginalized and relegated to the status of beliefs that belonged to the “childhood” of the human race.

“**Awakening the Light of Dharma: How to Uphold Dharma in the World Today**”, was yet another initiative of the GWIP to bring the *Dharmic* principles to the forefront and, possibly, make it a part of the modern discourse. In what follows I want to make a redress; redress for the absence from the discourse of the *Dharmic* principles as expounded in the Wisdom Traditions or enduring faiths of the world other than Hinduism and Buddhism. When I received the vision statement and, later on, the detailed program of the congregation, my initial impression was that Hinduism and Buddhism were being given a privileged position in having the notion which I have termed as The “Anthropocosmic Vision” of *Dharma*; as if the other Wisdom Traditions or world religions somehow lacked this perspective on reality. It would be the burden of my remarks that this is not the case. The deficiency that I hope to supply to some extent through these remarks. I would like to start with Hinduism.

Yesterday Sraddhalu Ji did a marvelous job of explaining the concept of *Dharma* from the Hindu perspective and no one can surpass or even equal his eloquence in this regard. But, no, wait, there is someone who can, let me seek the help of this superior authority which says:

Hinduism

As a spider sends forth and draws in its threads, as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair grow on the body and the head of a living person, so from the Imperishable here arises the universe. (*Mūndāka Upanishad* I.i.7).

I am the birth of this cosmos:	/	Its dissolution also.
I am he who causes:	/	No other beside me.
Upon me, these worlds are held	/	Like pearls strung on a thread.
I am the essence of the waters,	/	The shining of the sun and the moon,
Om in all the Vedas,	/	The word that is God.
It is I who resound in the ether	/	And am potent in man,
I am the sacred smell of the earth,	/	The light of the fire
Life of all lives,	/	Austerity of ascetics..
You must know that whatever belongs to the states of sattwa		
	/	Rajas and tamas proceed from me.
They are contained in me,	/	But I am not in them....

(Bhagavat Gīta)

Buddhism

جو ہے بیدار انساں میں وہ گہری نیند سوتا ہے
شجر میں، پھول میں، حیواں میں، پتھر میں، ستارے میں

That which is awake in the humans, is in slumber deep
In trees, flowers, animals, minerals and stars ²

(Iqbal)

* * *

....the ultimate ground of all experience, a rationally directed creative will which we have found reasons to describe as an ego. In order to emphasize the individuality of the Ultimate Ego the Qur'an gives Him the proper name of Allah, and further defines Him as...³

Say: He, God, is One God, the Self-Sufficient Besought of all,⁴

He begets not, nor is begotten,
And there is none like unto Him.

(Qur'ān, 112: 1-4)

* * *

There is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, un compounded; and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, un compounded, no escape could be shown here for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.

But because there is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, un compounded, therefore an escape can be shown for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.'

(Gawtama the Buddha—Udāna, 80-81)⁵

The Unborn

In terms of time, then, the 'unborn' and the 'not become' can be understood to refer to a reality or essence which, being above and beyond the temporal condition, is perforce the origin of that condition; it is from this 'not become' that all becoming originates. This unnamed degree of reality thus has an explicit resonance with the way in which *Allāh* is described in 112:3, as being unbegotten; and one might discern an implicit relationship with certain dimensions of the divine reality, in particular.

Al-Samad and Dharma

The Islamic distinction between the oneness of God's Essence and the multiplicity of creation evokes the Buddhist distinction between the oneness of the un compounded and the multiplicity of the compounded. This conceptual similarity is further reinforced by the meaning of the term *Samad*: in addition to being positively described as that which is eternally self-sufficient, and that which is sought by all else, it is also apophatically referred to as 'that which is not empty or hollow' (*ajwaf*).⁶ This immediately brings to mind the fundamental Buddhist belief that the *Dharma*, as such, is alone 'full', all other *dharmas* are 'empty', empty that is, of 'self-being' (*svabhāva*). Indeed, one of the most fundamental propositions common to all schools of Mahayana Buddhism is the 'emptiness' of all specific '*dharmas*': 'selfless are all *dharmas*, they have not the character of living beings, they are without a soul, without a personality.'⁷

In other words, as applied to any existent entity, the word '*dharma*' implies an emptiness deprived of suchness, whereas the *Dharma* as such is absolute Suchness. Relative *dharmas* cannot sustain themselves; they

depend entirely for their existence on a range of other *dharmas*, nothing in existence being free from dependence upon an indefinite series of factors, all of which are interdependent, and at the same time totally dependent upon the *Dharma* as such, which alone is ‘full’ of Itself. The *Dharma* has no ‘hollowness’ or emptiness within it, but rather, just as in the case of *al-Samad*, it is that to which all ‘empty’ things resort in order to be filled with being, a being which, however, never ceases to be that of the Absolute; it does not become a property or defining quality of the relative things, which are all fatally marked by impermanence and unreality, even while they are endowed with existence.

In Buddhist texts the *Dharma* is stressed as the ultimate Essence of all things or their ultimate Suchness (*tathatā*); but to avoid any possible reification of this Essence, either in thought or in language, the Suchness is in turn identified with the Void (*Shūnya*).

All this also resonates deeply with the following simple statement by the Buddha, which figures in the very first chapter of the *Dhammapada*:

Those who think the unreal is, and think the Real is not,
they shall never reach the Truth, lost in the path of wrong
thought.

But those who know the Real is, and know the unreal is not,
they shall indeed reach the Truth, safe on the path of right
thought.⁸

This statement echoes the first testimony of Islam, understood metaphysically or epistemologically, rather than simply theologically. It also echoes the verse of the Qur’ān: There is no compulsion in religion. Indeed the right way has been made distinct from error. So whoever rejects [lit. ‘disbelieves’: *yakfur*] the false gods and believes in God, he has truly held tight to the firmest of handles, which can never break (2: 256).

Zoroastrianism

In Zoroastrianism earth is itself seen as part of the hierarchy of angels so central to Zoroastrianism. “We are celebrating this liturgy in honour of the earth which is an angel”. And as H Corbin has observed “We have to capture here the phenomenon of the Earth as an angelophany”.

Judaism

In Judaism the Divine Reality or *Ein-şof* (in Arabic *Aḥad*) is also present in God's creation. According to Zohar the process of creation involves the nexus between the archetypal realities and the outer world: "the process of creation, too, has taken place on two planes, one above and one below, and for that reason the Torah begins with the letter "beth" the numerical of which is equal to two. The lower occurrence corresponds to the higher; one produced the upper world (of the *Sefiroth*), the other the nether world (of the visible creation).

Christianity

Because all *lógoi* exist in the Logos and have their unity in Him, and the Logos is incarnated in the *lógoi*, the Christian can contemplate the Logos in the *lógoi*. "The *lógoi* of intelligible beings may be understood as the blood of the Logos and the *lógoi* of the sensible things as the flesh of the Logos....". The Logos is not only incarnated in the flesh in Christ but also in the *lógoi* of all things (svadharna of Hinduism may not have been lost on the audience). Western Christianity was far from being bereft of the similar vision and exposition of the Divine Roots of nature, and for it I allow some poetry to make the point:

I am the supreme fiery force
That kindles every spark of life
That I have breathed on will never die,
I order the cycle of things in being;
Hovering round in sublime flight,
Wisdom lends it rhythmic beauty.

I am the divine fiery life
Blazing over the full-ripened grain
I gleam in the reflection of the waters
I burn in the sun and moon and stars
In the breeze I have secret life
Animating all things and lending them cohesion.

I am life in all its abundance
For I was not released from the Rock of the Ages
Nor did I bud from a branch
Nor spring from man's begetting

In me is the root of life
 Spirit is the root which buds in the word
 And God is the intelligible spirit

Islam

In its root, the existence of the cosmos is tied to the Being who is Necessary through Himself. Hence each part of the cosmos is tied to every other part, and each is an interconnecting link on a chain. When man begins to consider the science of the cosmos, he is taken from one thing to another because of the interrelationships. But in fact, this only happens in the science of the Folk of Allah. Their science does not follow the canon of those of the learned who know only the outward appearances of phenomena. The canon of the Folk of Allah ties together all parts of the cosmos, so they are taken from one thing to another, even if the scholar of outward appearances sees no relationship. This is knowledge of God....

He who knows the Koran and realizes it will know the science of the Folk of Allah. He will know that their science does not enter into limited chapters, nor does it follow the canon of logic, nor can it be weighed by any scale. It is the scale of all scales. (III 200.26)

Most people work contrary to this direct tasting [of the divine things]. That is why their speech is not tied together. He who considers their speech looks for a root to which all their words go back, but he does not find it. But each part of our speech is interrelated with the other parts, since it is one entity, while these things I say are its differentiation. A person will know what I am saying if he knows the interconnection of the verses of the Koran.

Ibn ‘Arabī *Futuḥāt* (II 548.15)

* * *

“**Like pearls do we live** and move and have our being in the perpetual flow of Divine life.”⁹

(Iqbal)

* * *

The world, in all its details, from the mechanical movement of what we call the atom of matter to the free movement of thought in the human ego, is the self-revelation of the "Great I am"¹⁰ (Iqbal)

* * *

Throughout the entire gamut of being runs the gradually rising note of egohood until it reaches its perfection in man. That is why the Qur'an declares the Ultimate Ego to be "nearer to man than his own neck-vein."¹¹ (Iqbal)

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فارغ از اندوه و آزاد از طلب	حب ذاروزے کہ پیش از روز و شب
حکم غیریت بکلی محو بود	متحد بودیم با شاہ وجود
جملہ را از خود، بخود، بیرون نمود	ناگہاں در جنبش آمد بحر جود
رسم و آئین دوئی آغاز شد	واجب و ممکن ز ہم ممتاز شد

جای

Celebrate the "Day" when before all day and night / Devoid of all grief and free of desire

We were one with the Lord of Being / the property of "Otherness" was entirely obliterated

All at once the Ocean of generosity rose into outpouring and effusion
Manifested everything out of Itself, by Itself

The Necessary Being and Possible existents became differentiated from each other

Thus began the rule and canon of duality

* * *

نگہ پیدا کر اے غافل تجلی عین فطرت ہے کہ اپنی موج سے بیگانہ رہ سکتا نہیں دریا

Secure some insight, O heedless soul, self-disclosure (or manifestation)
rises from the depths of the Divine Nature

Because the sea can not remain indifferent to its waves¹² (Iqbal)

* * *

God radiates. It is in the nature of the Good to wish to communicate itself, and it is for this reason that God created the world and man; this is the whole mystery of Maya.

(Frithjof Schuon)

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The Shahādah (of Islam– *Lā ilāha illa Allāh*) refers to Tawhīd, to the Consciousness of Oneness, therefore to the theme of unique and transcendent Reality and to that of pure and immanent Ipseity, because it expresses both the unicity or exclusivity of the Principle, and its totality or inclusivity.

(Frithjof Schuon)

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While talking about Buddhism mention was made of the cardinal concept of Al-Ṣamad which corresponds to the Buddhist idea of Dharma, that is, the Dharma, as such, which alone is ‘full’, all other dharmas are ‘empty’, empty that is, of ‘self-being’ (*svabhāva*). It is now time to reflect on the Islamic exposition of the svadharmā, (the *sharī‘ah* of each order of existence, or in Buddhist terms, the dharmas of things, “the laws of nature”), how the prototype of all existence in the Divine Order (the *Lawḥ Mahfūz*), the Holy Ground, descend to the lower levels of existence and finally to the world of nature. The order of nature, therefore reflects and issues from the order that exists in the Divine Realm.

The central idea of Islam is the principle of *Tawhīd*, which really should be translated as ‘integrating Oneness’ rather than simply as ‘unity’–integrating Oneness, that makes One, realises One. And this Oneness is to be understood not just on the level of the Divine; that there is one God as opposed to many gods. It is also to be understood on the level of Reality. There is one Reality that encompasses all that is, penetrates all that is. We are moving from a theological conception of unity to an ontological conception of unity, not just a question of one God, but one Being, one Reality.

The roots of this perception, the conception could easily be discerned from one of the most important sayings of the Prophet called *hadith of the hidden Treasure* where God speaks in the first person: ‘I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known so I created’. The hidden treasure loving

to be known becomes this entire cosmos. And the Qur'anic verses that most explicitly refer to this manifestation of this hidden treasure are ones which talk about God being the First and the Last, the *awwal* and the *ākhir*, the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, the outwardly manifest and the inwardly hidden. So, this outwardly manifest aspect of God, the *ẓāhir* aspect of God is the one that has given risen to the most fruitful speculations and reflections because it is clear to most people using their intellect that God must be the origin of all things. The Divine Reality must be the end of all things; the Divine Reality is hidden within all things. An all-encompassing Divine Reality, which, likewise, is organic and this is what the meaning of *Tawhid* is all about; the interconnectedness of all phenomena in this Oneness of divine Reality.

The environmental crisis could not have happened in a universe fashioned by the Qur'anic view of nature, this is an incontrovertible fact. We could not conceive of a small group of scientists breaking away from a community of believers who had instilled into them the sense of the holiness of virgin nature. And this holiness is not just an abstract holiness. It was a concrete one. The Qur'an dominated the thinking and the being of the Muslims as it still does for the overwhelming majority at least, if not all, of Muslims today.

A very telling remark is encountered in some of the traditional writings. It is often said there are two Qur'ans: The Qur'an *tadwīnī* and The Qur'an *takwīnī*, i.e. Word made Book and Word made Nature, or in other words, the signs, the manifestation of the Principle that appears in the form of a Book and as the natural realm in the macrocosm. When the Qur'an tells us '*in min shay'in illa yusabbihu bi-hamdihi*': There is no thing which does not hymn the praise of the Lord. It is easy for the outsiders to point to this and say this is a sort of philosophical abstract ideal. It becomes very concrete as soon as you see that in so many of the other verses we are told specifically about the phenomena of nature and we have this remarkable verse, which tells us, sort of a rhetorical question: 'Do you not see (*alam tara ana Allaha yusabiḥu lahu*) that everything that is in the heavens and the earth praises God?' And then, just as you think that this may be an abstract philosophical idea that everything by virtue of its existence praises its creator, the Qur'an tells us about the birds, a graphic image of the birds in flight. Then you have to read it, when you are reciting these words, in such a way that it makes it onomatopoeic: '*wa 'l-ṭayru ṣāfātin, kullun qad*

'*alima ṣalātahū wa tasbīḥah*' 'And the birds in flight, each one knows its prayer and its mode of praise.

So you cannot get away with any abstract philosophical idea. You have the metaphysics of it expressed and then the concrete image of it, the birds being the most wonderful example to be given here and symbolic of the higher spiritual states. The birds, whose very flight indicates the defying of gravity, therefore, something supernatural. The birds that can sing—and what sound is more moving to us human beings than bird-song amongst the sounds of animate creatures? The birds are a wonderful image, wonderful symbols given to us, of the prayer and glorification of nature.

To sum up, God is not only the creator of the cosmos, *ex nihilo*, from nothing. The Divine creativity also inhabits the cosmos, as it were *in principio*, in the principle, and not just 'in the beginning'. There is nothing that evades this principle. The divine Name *Al-Muḥīt* is, among other divine Names and Qualities, the one that indicate this most explicitly. It is: *that which encompasses*. *Muḥīt* also means the 'environment'. The perfect submission of the order of nature to its *dharma* is a lesson for man to submit himself perfectly to that norm which is *his dharma* and which is none other than the quest for enlightenment. So when we talk about the environmental crisis, we talk about a crisis that afflicts the very nature of the content of this divine environment, the environment which is, implicitly divine.

It might appear as paradoxical, but virgin nature, that grand work of sacred art created by the Supreme Artisan, also manifests the beauty of the Eternal Realm through its forms and rhythms, through the grace that flows from her and the subtle metaphysical message imprinted upon the pages of cosmic reality. One usually thinks of nature only as the abode of change bound in the clutches of time, and indeed that is what it is if viewed scientifically and from the point of view of natural philosophy, the word *natura* itself being the Latin equivalent to the Greek *physis*, which means that which is born and enters into the domain of change. But there is not only nature as *natura naturata* but also as *natura naturans*, to use the medieval Scholastic distinction between "created" and "creating" nature. An eternal reality shines through the very forms and processes of change which we identify with nature, a reality to which modern science is totally impervious. This reality was, however, the very foundation of the

traditional cosmologies and sciences of nature. It also remained and still remains the vivid background for the daily experience of nature by traditional man, who perceives, thanks to tradition, the permanent forms reflected upon the surface of that flowing river of time in which man cannot ever put his finger in the same water twice.

Everyone talks today of the danger of war, over population or the pollution of air, water and soil. But usually the same people who discern these obvious problems speak of the necessity of further 'development'. In other words they wish to remove the problems brought about by the destruction of the equilibrium between man and nature through further conquest and domination of nature. Few would be willing to admit that the acutest social and technical problems facing mankind today come not from so called 'under development' but from 'over development'. Few are willing to look reality in the face and accept the fact that there is no peace possible in human society as long as the attitude toward nature and the whole natural environment is one based on aggression, violence and exploitation. Furthermore, there is little realization of the fact that in order to gain this peace with nature there must be peace with the spiritual order. To be at peace with the Earth one must be at Peace with Heaven.

The Qur'an helps each and every one of us to see the inalienable relationship between human responsibility and cosmic wellbeing, however large the consequences of the past actions of humanity be writ on the cosmic scale. The Qur'an never lets you stray into hopelessness, or despair, because the more you see the 'signs' of the end of the world, the more you train your focus on what you, individually, must do about your world: the signs rebound upon yourself.

And so it is on that note of optimism based on realism of where we stand that I will finish and just add that this note of the invocation and its relationship to the natural world is not, by any means, confined within Islam. It is something that is found in all of the traditions and, in a sense, it is an expression of the truth that the whole of creation is the utterance of God, the word of God, the Name of God. The Name is always an expression of the Named. So when the human being within the world utters the divine Name, that human being is integrating himself within the divine Nature and thereby the whole of creation participates in that re-integration. And that's the meaning that Platonic philosophy brings home

so clearly, and is found expressed also in all the major spiritual traditions of the world: the microcosm is a small world. When correctly understood, this means that when you correct yourself, this actions has repercussions that ripple throughout the whole universe.

This is expressed most beautifully by a great sage Ramana Maharshi, when one of his disciples came to him and said ‘I am trying to realise myself in accordance with your teachings, but what about the world, how can I improve the state of the world?’ And the Ramana looked at his disciple and said: ‘You are the world.’

ENDNOTES

- 1 F. Schuon, *Understanding Islam*, reprinted, Suhail Academy, Lahore, 2004, pp. 26.
- 2 This is statement of Lord Buddha which Muhammad Iqbal, the poet-Philosopher, rendered into Urdu verse.
- 3 M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, IAP, Lahore, 1987, pp. 50.
- 4 This rather wordy translation of the single Arabic word (which is one of the Names of God) *al-Samad* is given by Martin Lings (*The Holy Qur’ān—Translations of Selected Verses*, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute & The Islamic Texts Society, 2007), p.200. Lings’ translation does full justice to the two fundamental connotations of the name: al-Samad is absolutely self-sufficient, on the one hand, and, for this very reason, is eternally besought by all other beings, on the other. See al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī’s, classical dictionary of Qur’ānic terms, *Mu’jam mufradāt alfāz al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), p.294.
- 5 *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages*, eds. E. Conze, I.B. Horner, D. Snelgrove, A. Waley (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1954), p.95.
- 6 *Mu’jam mufradāt*, op. cit., p.94.
- 7 *Diamond Sutra*, cited in E. Conze, *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), p.59.
- 8 *The Dhammapada—The Path of Perfection* (tr. Juan Mascaró) (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1983), I, 11-12.
- 9 Underlying the human self and animating it is a reservoir of being that never dies, is never exhausted, and is unrestricted in consciousness and bliss. This infinite center of every life, this hidden self, is no less than the Godhead. Body, personality, and this infinite center—a human self is not completely accounted for until all three are noted. That was not only Iqbal’s fundamental position, as reflected in this quatrain, but the shared “anthropocosmic” vision of all wisdom traditions of the world.
- 10 This is reference to Qur’an, 20: 14. The statement continues: “Every atom of Divine energy, however low in the scale of existence, is an ego. But there are degrees in the expression of egohood.” (M. Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, IAP, Lahore, 1987, pp. 57-58.)
- 11 Qur’an, 50: 16. Underlying the human self and animating it is a reservoir of being that never dies, is never exhausted, and is unrestricted in consciousness and bliss.

This infinite center of every life, this hidden self, is no less than the Godhead. Body, personality, and this infinite center– a human self is not completely accounted for until all three are noted. That was not only Iqbal’s fundamental position, as reflected in this quatrain, but the shared “anthropocosmic” vision of all wisdom traditions of the world.

- 12 Muhammad Iqbal, *Bāl i Jibrīl*, in *Kulliyāt i Iqbāl* (Collected Poetical Works=CPW), Urdu, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore, 1994, p. 359/35.

Abstract

This article shares the Dharmic principles which have been eclipsed to a large extent. It is a loss of faith in the transcendence, in God as an objective reality. No social-cultural environment in the pre-Modern times had turned its back on Transcendence in the systematic way that characterized Modernity. The loss of religious certainties and of transcendence with its larger horizons. The nature of the loss is strange but ultimately quite logical. With the inauguration of the scientific worldview, human beings started considering themselves the bearers of the highest meaning in the world and the measure of everything. The article shares wisdom traditions or world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Keyword: Dharma, transcendence, scientific worldview, wisdom traditions.