

Ancient Wisdom...A Paradigm Shift for Modern Management

Swami Satya Vedanta

Osho Nisarga Foundation, Dharamshala & Former Chancellor, Osho Multiversity, Pune

Abstract

Corporations, educators, bureaucrats and all those who carry a heavy workload around the world are increasingly questioning the same paradigms of efficiency, goal achievement, control and analysis, hierarchy and authority for finding more human and wisdom oriented strategies. It is now being recognized that the mind management or the self management is central to managerial qualities and responsibilities. Wisdom from the ancient sources can be of immense help in gaining the required clarity for experiencing the joy of management. A New Manager with the help of wisdom and meditation can release blocked physical and emotional energy allowing one to attain greater health, inner peace and professional success.

If one can spend money to learn tennis or golf from a renowned coach, why can't he pay it to someone who shows him the techniques of yoga, meditation, or such spiritual methods that help him experience peace, joy, and creativity?

The problem is in the perception that spirituality is possible only through poverty. As such, though, spirituality has nothing to do either with poverty or affluence. It is a part of that hierarchy of needs – what Abraham Maslow calls the need for self-actualization. It is a reflection of the fact that even after having satisfied one's material and psychological needs one still feels certain emptiness. A human is essentially an unfinished product, incomplete. Spirituality opens up avenues to bring a completion, a sort of closure to one's evolutionary growth. It is a journey that leads to actualizing one's hidden potential.

More we become aware of our basic paradigms, our perceptions, our insights which sustain our worldview, the more we take responsibility for those paradigms – examine, experiment with them for the larger individual and collective good. In human life 'being' affects our 'seeing'; what we see shows what we are; what we see, and what we are, affects what we do. Wisdom consists of life sustaining principles of awareness; they are the laws we need to follow to exist, to live, and to grow—materially and spiritually. They often gather dust, often disappear. They need to be brought out of oblivion.

Good many futurists, social scientists as well as visionary enlightened beings have shared their view that the world is in the midst of a transformation. They point out a shift in global

consciousness unparalleled in the history of mankind.

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One outstanding reality of our present day world, however, is that all things, all technologies, all information, all teachings are available but we don't know exactly their right significance, their place in our overall system of life. In the midst of all that is available to us there is also a total disorder – externally as well as internally. Of course, the external disorder is a reflection of our internal disorder, of our chaotic state of mind. Mind and world are two sides of the same coin, they are not separate.

Obviously, there is a need to reinvent ourselves in order to be responsive to the massive changes occurring all around us. Never before has change been happening so fast; never before have there been so many people on the earth, and never has the whole globe been so totally interconnected. Never have we had so much information and material wealth. Also,

never have we had so many, extremely complex problems – ecological destruction, economic instability, terrorism, AIDS, stress etc. – and so many challenges. The human society today is being subjected to too much change in too short a time. In fact, the changes are such that several of them happening in different areas of our endeavour and at the same time. As Alvin Toffler (1970) puts it so candidly, we are suffering from “the disease of change.”

The interesting fact is that, a vast majority of people, worldwide, have yet to grasp the real implications and consequences of this accelerating change. The phenomenally growing change – technological, political, social – today in the world is terribly upsetting our inner world. It is adversely affecting our inner balance and equilibrium. It is making us feel helpless, incapable of experiencing and explaining life around us. And the challenge is, with the growing change outside we have to constantly keep on adapting to it inwardly – with clarity and sanity.

It is this challenge which requires us to search and anchor oneself; seek one's roots in the insights, teachings, pointers and pathways we may collectively call as “ancient wisdom” so that we may know and understand the true meaning of life and living. We are witnessing an ever widening gap between material progress and spiritual wisdom; between technological power and universal wellbeing. This is the basic issue. One thing is clear, as the contemporary mystic Osho explains: “Wisdom is not knowledge. Knowledge is borrowed; it can be gathered from a library. The heavier the load of knowledge, the more ignorant one becomes. Wisdom comes from the heart; it is the voice of the inner world.” (Osho, 1977)

The choice before us was never as clear in the past as it is today: whether to give in blindly and totally to the transient world of business and economy, and industrial output, or to bring in a balance by valuing the eternal, experiencing the everlasting, the non-disposable, the non-returnable. So when we talk about “ancient wisdom”, the emphasis need not be necessarily on the word “ancient.” Ancient wisdom actually stands for truths that are universal, timeless.

These truths may have been discovered or realized in the past, but they are always contemporary – because, they are never old or new, or they are both old and new simultaneously. Again and again these truths in various forms, at various times, in various shifts of emphasis are rediscovered and restated.

For example, take the truth of Love as a major operating principle in the world – specially, at the human level. It is an enduring, a sustaining truth, and hence an eternal truth. Regardless of how much the world changes, this truth shall survive; because, it provides the very cosmological, the very existential nexus.

So regardless of the accelerating changes – whether the changing paradigms in science, in social systems, in the behavioural and attitudinal patterns, or whatever, this truth has and will remain changeless; it defines our world and our Life. As Osho points out, “If love becomes your style of life, it will change the quality, not the quantity. Logic works in the world of quantity, and love transforms the quality of your being. That is the only phenomenon which changes the quality of your being, nothing else can do it. Love is a magic, love is the ultimate alchemy. And it is only through love that man has attained to the ultimate heights and the ultimate depths together.” (Osho, 1984)

It is now apparent that, “management” is not just going through and applying same ideas, same concepts. It no longer means merely finding old answers for new problems. Rather, now it means finding new answers for all problems. It is evident that, “quick-fix” mentality keeps us away from the overall reality and we remain tied down more to the conventional/traditional approaches. It must be recognized that many of today's problems are outcome of yesterday's solutions. Also, many of today's solutions may become tomorrow's problems. Since we are required to show results – fast, instantly, we apply the same old ideas and applications to find “solutions.” Our common fallacy is that we believe problems emerge from some external sources; but in fact, they are our creations, they are byproducts of our own thinking patterns and our actions. So there is no one out there to blame for. As pointed out by Fred Kofman and Peter Senge (1995), “Today's primary threats are all endogenous, the byproducts of our own actions. There is no enemy out there to blame. As Pogo says, “We have met the enemy and they is us.”

This does not, however, in any way mean we need to feel guilty or punish ourselves; what it simply means is that we will have to see, feel, and act differently. For example, it is said, “Honesty is the best policy.” This may show management giving value to honesty as a “policy” which implies it is essentially “policy” oriented and not people oriented. But realistically, a policy is for people, not people for following a policy. Honesty is not the best “policy”; it cannot and should not be a “policy”. Since policy can be changed, one can assume honesty can also be easily replaced by dishonesty. What one needs to recognize is that, honesty is the best “quality”, an inner quality which can be part of second nature and cannot be changed or replaced. Inner quality or qualities are inculcated through inner growth, through a conscious and sincere effort, through earnest desire and commitment.

So, the very existential realities confronting us now are propelling to seek alternative values such as: cooperation vs cut-throat competition; quality of life and relationship; oneness of humanity; social justice; caring for each other; and above all, spiritualization of the individual and the society – free from orthodox, stifling institutionalized religion.

There is now a widespread recognition of a changing worldview. Hence, the present

corporate world needs to acknowledge two significant realities: Affirmation of inner wisdom, intuition, inner clarity. We need to be rational, scientific, and materially progressive but we also need to learn and live spiritual values. The enlightened mystic Osho makes it clear when he says:

“It is a must for humanity's survival. I am trying to create a great synthesis: the synthesis between Zorba the Greek and Gautam the Buddha, the synthesis between materialism and spiritualism. I am trying to create a spiritual materialism. These two things have always remained separate, antagonistic to each other. And because of their antagonism man has remained schizophrenic, because man is both body and soul.” (Osho, 1982)

“The greatest thing that is happening -- which will be understood only later on -- is the meeting of science and religion, is the meeting of East and West, is the meeting of materialism and spiritualism, is the meeting of the outer and the inner, is the meeting of the extrovert and the introvert. But that is happening right now. It will grow in the future...” (Osho, 1980)

Interconnectedness, becoming increasingly aware that we may compete, but we are still part of one Whole, one Unity. And therefore, no one “wins” unless we all do. Beyond Capitalism and Socialism, the experts are suggesting a “Third Way”. It is a concept, a worldview, of Materialism, which is replaced by a worldview of Relationships. Materialism is based on the idea: we are all parts, competing with each other for our selfish interest. While Relationships envisage: we are parts, but connected, interrelated, cooperating with all other parts in the interest of the Whole. This is an organic view. According to Quantum Physics there is some evidence for the view that the Universe is one organic whole. We are not individuals separate from the rest of existence but inseparable elements of the Universe.

Although we may be parts, but we carry the Wholeness within us – we live as One, as Whole in a world of Wholes, Wholes within Wholes. So instead of trying to “put the pieces”, the separate parts together and make the Whole, we need to recognize the world is already Whole. The separation exists because of our faulty perception. This is the message of Isha Upanishad:

*Om Purnamadah Purnamidam
Purnat Purnamudachyate, Purnasya Purnamadaya
Purnameva Vashishyate, Om shantihi, shantihi, shantihi*

Om ! That Divine is whole and complete. This world too is whole and complete. From the complete whole only, the other complete whole emerges. Even after removing one complete whole from the other complete whole, still the complete whole remains unaltered and undisturbed.

As the famous scientist, Schrodinger, observes: “The sum total of consciousness is one.” Hence, if indeed, the purpose of spirituality is wholeness, healing, holistic; and if indeed we wish to heal nations, races, societies, we will have to disassociate certain age old ideas from the traditional perceptions and values. And further, as Arthur Koestler says, somewhere in our evolutionary process, humans have developed a “hardware fault.” Somewhere, he says, our brains have become “mis-wired.” But the issue is even deeper. We have actually been suffering from a software problem – our conditioning, a bug in our ways of thinking and acting. It is a problem where the mind has gone haywire

What we really need today is: trans-national, trans-denominational, trans-sectarian, trans-cultural spirituality – purely transformative. The issue is, do we have the will to change? We prefer to work through the same mindset. The spiritual option before us is to make a resolve to give up our egos, our conditionings, and our resistance to change. This outer shift in paradigm is possible only when there is a shift in the inner paradigm. Spirituality in the new paradigm does not imply religion but rather the power of wisdom, compassion, joy, and a non-judgmental approach to reality.

Jack Welch of General Electric (GE) in his interview to the Harvard Business Review talks about the paradigm shift in these words: “Ten years from now, we want magazines to write about GE as a place where people have the freedom to be creative, a place that brings out the best in everybody – an open, fair place where people have a sense that what they do matters, and where that sense of accomplishment is rewarded in both, the pocketbook, and the soul.” (Quoted from Renesch, 1992). What he is implying is the recognition of, how Peter Drucker puts it, the “human factor.” Often the importance of management is emphasised but the manager is forgotten. Conventionally, management is seen and evaluated on the profit making basis; however, according to a report given by Stanford Research Institute, the essence of tomorrow's economy will be an “emphasis upon the inner as well as the material needs of individuals and groups.” (Tofler, 1970).

So the emerging manager or the managerial leadership will need to go through the Paradigm Shift – we can see it as an evolutionary phenomenon. The very significance of ancient wisdom for modern management can become clear by taking a look at what a paradigm is and what is a paradigm shift. The word “paradigm” comes from the Greek; it was originally a scientific term which is now being commonly used to mean a model, a theory, a perception or a frame of reference. A paradigm is a conceptual framework that holds all the elements of our experience together and creates a coherent picture of reality – it is a world view. Our world view implies a way of knowing. It is our overall perspective through which we see and interpret the world.

So, a paradigm implies a twofold meaning: first, a model of something; for example, the

world. Secondly, it means an invisible structure; for example, a system of values, thinking, perception or insight through which we view the world. A paradigm shift brings about a one hundred and eighty degrees turn; it totally changes the way we see and do things.

Briefly, for instance, Ptolemy and the Bible mention that Earth is the centre and all planets revolve around it. However, Copernicus and later Galileo, based on their research and observation, created a paradigm shift by placing Sun in the centre and not the Earth. Suddenly all our assumptions changed and a new vision and understanding came to take place. Similarly, as against the traditional system of monarchy, in America a new government, a constitutionally formed government was created which was, as Lincoln said, of the people, by the people, and for the people.

So essentially, paradigms are the life sustaining principles. They are the laws, as the Vedas mention – *rita*. We need to follow the law to live, function and grow. These principles, these laws often gather dust, often even disappear. And then at a certain time they are brought out from the oblivion by the sages, the visionaries, or the enlightened Masters. In the Bhagavad Gita, for instance, Lord Krishna mentions his incarnation was for the purpose of reinstatement of dharma – the Law – of the basic paradigm. He is not talking about dharma in the sense of an institutional religion. He precisely means reinstatement of the paradigm that sustains, upholds and nourishes life.

We must recognize these laws, these paradigms and bring them into a harmonious relationship with us. We are at such a challenging moment that we must bring a paradigm shift or else we may lose the very fabric of life leading it to its disintegration. As we progress in the direction of horizontal growth through business and industry, through science and technology, we must also work even more diligently toward our vertical growth. In fact, the vertical growth alone can give meaning and sustainability to our horizontal growth. Ancient wisdom has always kept the vertical growth as a paramount dimension of human existence.

The New Manager will need to go through the paradigm shift – we can see it as an evolutionary process. A movement in the process of matter to mind; mind to the individual and individual to the human spirit or consciousness will bring about a revolutionary change. The transient world of Business, the Economy and the Industry output has brought us to a point where the New Manager will need to look for experiencing and valuing the eternal, the sustainable, and the universal.

It all depends on our Intention. Intentions continuously guide our actions which in return affect the world around us. So for spiritual empowerment we need 'Intention' – clear, unambiguous intention to move from the transient to the eternal, from *maya* to *moksha*. We need spiritual empowerment to deal with the world of *maya* – effectively, judiciously, and

creatively.

Basically, spiritual empowerment means a state of Awareness. If the observer, the witness, the *sakshin*, watches one's thoughts, emotions and actions it will empower the person's business, industry, his or her work, in fact the life as a whole in achieving higher levels of growth and productivity. Hence, essentially, Intention is Awareness...Awareness is Intention. The Zen approach gives us a significant insight in this regard. According to Zen, the issue is not about trying to change but about “watching what happens when you change.”

Economists are now pointing out the “economics of sanity” (Tofler, 1970). And, one of the definitions of sanity is the ability to distinguish real from the unreal. A special spiritual empowerment is required for gaining sanity. Hence, the sage (the *rishi*) of the Upanishad prays: Lead me from unreal to Real (*asato ma sadgamaya*). Sanity is also the light of spirituality; hence the sage prays: Lead me from darkness to light (*tamaso ma jyotirgamaya*).

Among so many wisdom-insights contained in the Bhagavad Gita, a few are immensely relevant for learning how a spiritual approach can be of great value in a managerial work responsibility. Through a wider perspective of Yoga, for example, Krishna defines work as: yoga is pursuit of excellence (*yogaha karmasu kaushalam*) (Gita II-50). It explains Yoga in action by emphasising maintaining inner balance, the quality of equanimity (*samatvam yoga uchyayte*) (Gita II-48). It further elaborates the yogic spirit behind work as: capacity to remain rooted on your own self while interacting with the world (GitaII-53).

These insights of the Gita now seem to be echoed by management experts in the West. They call it: “personal mastery.” As Peter M. Senge (1990) explains the term, “Mastery might suggest gaining dominance over people or things. But mastery can also mean a special level of proficiency...Personal mastery suggests a special level of proficiency in every aspect of life – personal and professional. (The Fifth Discipline, p.7, 142) Thus personal mastery is seen as a “discipline” which shows: continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision; focusing our energies; developing patience; and seeing reality objectively or non-judgmentally. (Ibid.p.7).

As we look for the insights and inspiration given by the enlightened masters for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of management, their focus is on Awareness. Buddha says: be aware and be a lamp unto yourself (*appa deepo bhava*). While Mahavira reminds of one who is not asleep or unaware (*asutta muni*); and Osho points out at “self-remembrance. “ (*bodh/jagaran*). Upanishads ask us not to be satisfied with the trivial; one's true happiness is in embracing the Vast, the Total (*bhumaiva sukham, naalpe sukhamasti*).

There are distinct benefits of spiritual input to management. Conventionally, work

productivity is seen and evaluated in terms of output. Though, the fact is, work and productivity needs to be seen in terms of 'input' – what is being used, applied, implemented. In computer language, garbage in is garbage out. Hence, without a sane, aware, scientific and committed input we shall fail to see the desired output, productivity.

If indeed managerial and business or industry related output requires continued improvement, if it has to stand the test of time, quality and growth, then, besides technical skills, information and knowledge, what is most crucial today is the spiritual sense and a spiritual base to function from. Here I do not mean spirituality as following religious commandments, or institutionally established norms and rituals. As discussed and mentioned before, spirituality is a state of Awareness; it implies a sense of totality with commitment. Spirituality is a manifestation not of the mind but of conscious awareness.

For the purpose of enhancing the overall quality of management, I present a fivefold spiritual input. We may call it: yoga of creative spirituality:

Observation: It is said, we don't see things as they are, we see them as we are. Hence what is required is a keen, open, clear and an un-prejudiced eye for seeing things, realities as they are and not as they should be or as we expect them to be. This I would call: Preksha Yoga: Yoga of Seeing Reality.

Imagination: Finding creative solutions with courage. Keeping all options open, being flexible in order to experiment with a sense of searching. It implies looking for new answers rather than depending on the readymade answers. I would call it: Srijan Yoga: Yoga of Creativity.

Communication: Being non-ambiguous, straight, focused, receptive and sympathetic. Communicating effectively through transparency. I call it: Vak Yoga: Yoga of Language and Communication.

Action: Not ego-centric but work-centric implementation of decisions, ideas, and concepts with total energy given to work. It is a non-expecting commitment to work where the process, the journey itself is the goal. I see it as Karma Yoga: Yoga of Action.

Meditation: It implies attention without tension. It means being non-mechanical, being free from an approach based on a fixed pattern or patterns. It manifests awareness free from conditioned ways of seeing and doing. Meditation makes the output, the work or the production as part of a non-serious, fun loving effort rather than as a labour or drudgery. It stands for Dhyana Yoga: Yoga of Awareness.

While concluding, I wish to share that we are living in strange times – equally amazing and

challenging. On the one hand we are told of the folly and failures, stupidity and insanity of mankind, and on the other hand we also hear voices of supreme optimism, of evolutionary spiritual progress. We hear there is bright future ahead of us. There is assurance given of the unfolding of limitless human potential.

What are we suppose to believe? Is there anything we can do? Is it already too late? Is there any hope? Indeed, as a realist one can see things are bad; but does that make life hopeless? I believe not. One of our basic tendencies is to look at the flaws, looking at what is missing. Dennis Prager calls it “the missing tile syndrome.”

Imagine looking at a tiled ceiling from which there is one tile missing. Regardless of how beautiful the ceiling may be, we will most likely notice the missing tile and deprive ourselves from enjoying the rest of the ceiling. Extending this allegory, we fail to recognize that in human life there is nothing like a perfect ceiling. There will always be missing tiles. Although a ceiling can be perfect, but that is not necessarily the case with life – life is never perfect; if it were to be perfect, it would be a dead life. A plastic flower can be perfect, a real flower cannot be because it is alive, it is subject to growth; it is not fixed, it is dynamic.

When we look at the forces of insanity, death and destruction in our times, and when we see their ever increasing power and fury, one may pause and ask: why has our spiritual wisdom not triumphed? What about the power of the enlightened visionaries? The fact, however, is one can imagine how much worse our culture and civilization would have been if it were not because of those treasures of spiritual wisdom which the humanity has inherited and has tried to apply it even with flaws and imperfections.

What we need to recognize is that, even smaller acts and applications born out of our unawareness need to be immediately addressed. This is known as the “small window broken theory.” If in a house, we ignore one small broken window, and another small broken window, eventually the entire house may fall apart.

It is now being acknowledged that of all institutions, business is placed in a position where it carries a special significance. Hence, a New Manager seems to be placed in an ideal role from where he or she can respond to the incredible changes that need to be dealt with. It appears, today the churches, governments, and educational institutions that have historically served as guiding forces have become too inadequate for the present day challenges and complexities – in fact, almost dysfunctional. Certainly, management cannot be defined in a word or a sentence. It is reported, a judge of the U.S. Supreme court once said, “I cannot define what pornography is, but I know when I see it.”

We all have to function now as co-creators – this is both, a critical need and a needed

wisdom. We must now work through the principle of AUM – shared Aspirations, shared Understanding, and shared Motivation. But above all, it is the spiritual power that can now sustain management.

There is a story: a disciple asked his master what is it that keeps the world from falling through space. The master said, “The earth stays afloat because it rests on a big turtle.” The disciple asks, “What holds that turtle up?” The teacher said, “It is held by another big turtle.” The disciple continues, “But that turtle too needs to be supported. “Yes,” said the master, “it is turtles all the way!”

As for management ...it is spirituality all the way.

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