

# Spiritual Intelligence

with Harris Wiseman and Fraser Watts, "Spiritual Intelligence: Participating with Heart, Mind and Body"; Harris Wiseman, "Knowing Slowly: Unfolding the Depths of Meaning"; Harris Wiseman, "The Japanese Arts and Meditation-in-Action"; Harris Wiseman, "Meaning and Embodiment in Ritual Practice"; and Harris Wiseman, "Theoria to Theory (and Back Again): Integrating Masterman's Writings on Language and Religion."

## SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE: PARTICIPATING WITH HEART, MIND, AND BODY

by Harris Wiseman and Fraser Watts

*Abstract.* This introductory article to the thematic section on "Spiritual Intelligence" sets out the ways in which spiritual intelligence is currently conceptualized. Most prominently, spiritual intelligence is understood as an adaptive intelligence which enables people to develop their values, vision, and capacity for meaning. Questions arise as to whether spiritual intelligence is a distinct form of intelligence, and how to frame it if it is. It is questionable whether psychometric approaches justify concluding there is a distinct spiritual intelligence, and the authors reject any notion of a *God spot* in the brain specifically dedicated to spiritual intelligence, which is a much more broadly embodied phenomenon. The authors suggest that spiritual intelligence most likely makes use of existing cognitive architecture, though applied in a distinctive way. This article finishes with a brief introduction to the four main articles in this thematic section, which present spiritual intelligence as a kind of participation in transcendent being. The four articles approach the cognitive, embodied, meditative, and ritual aspects of spiritual intelligence as participation.

*Keywords:* embodiment; interacting cognitive subsystems; meditation; ritual; spiritual intelligence

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There has recently been much interest in *spiritual* intelligence, though that term is used in a wide range of different ways by different people. The articles in this thematic section take a particular and distinctive approach to understanding spiritual intelligence. In this introduction, we will highlight the key features of our approach and locate them within the broader range of ways in which spiritual intelligence is currently being conceptualized.

Some assume that spiritual intelligence is adaptive, and enables people to achieve their goals. Zohar and Marshall (2000) claim that it is the most fundamental intelligence, one that enables people to develop their capacity for meaning, vision, and value, and to dream, and to strive. There has now been a stream of self-help books about how people can develop their spiritual intelligence. The assumption that a spiritual perspective helps adjustment is convergent with the assumptions underpinning the development of spiritually integrated psychotherapy (Pargament 2007), namely that the counseling and psychotherapy are more helpful if they integrate a spiritual perspective on someone's problems and issues.

Approached from the perspective of Howard Gardner's construct of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993), the question arises of whether there is a distinct spiritual intelligence and, if so, how it should be framed. Others have proposed related concepts, such as "spiritual reasoning" (Emmons 1999) or "existential intelligence" (Gardner 1999). The concept of spiritual intelligence has not been universally accepted and the *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* published a set of articles debating, inconclusively, whether spiritual intelligence met the criteria to be accepted as a distinct form of intelligence (Emmons 2000a, 2000b; Gardner 2000; Kwilecki 2000; Mayer 2000).

There has also been interest, from a psychometric point of view, in whether spiritual intelligence can be measured reliably, and whether the correlations between spiritual intelligence and other similar intelligence are sufficiently low to justify the conclusion that there is a distinct spiritual intelligence. We do not yet have enough psychometric data to reach a firm conclusion about that. It is debatable how far spirituality is a matter of intelligence at all, or whether it is a broader personality dimension. Skrzypinska (2014) has proposed that spirituality involves three components, a cognitive scheme, a dimension of personality, and an attitude toward life.

Others have tried to tease out the components of spiritual intelligence. Emmons (2000a) suggested that spiritual intelligence comprised the capacity to transcend the physical and material, the ability to experience heightened states of consciousness, the ability to sanctify everyday experience, the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems, and the capacity to be virtuous. King and DeCicco (2009) suggested that there are four distinct components in spiritual intelligence: critical exis-

tential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. Negi & Khanna (2017) and Skrzypinska (2021), among others, have reviewed the ongoing debate about spiritual intelligence.

Approached from yet another perspective, neuroscientists such as Michael Persinger (1983) have proposed that there is a *God spot* in the brain—some discrete module in the brain dedicated to handling spiritual experience. If so, the temporal lobes are the favored location. However, this is implausible, and there are good reasons for rejecting the idea of a *God spot* in the brain, or a spiritual intelligence module in the cognitive architecture. Religion affects the whole of life, so almost every area of the brain will be involved in spiritual and religious life in some way or other. Equally, there is no area of the brain that is specifically and exclusively devoted to religion or spirituality. In spiritual intelligence, people use the same cognitive capacities that they use for everything else, though they may deploy them in a distinctive way in the spiritual life.

It is hard to understand why spiritual matters should be isolated in the brain region at all. After all, the brain is inseparable from the central nervous system, which is itself inseparable from the rest of the body, and that body is situated in a social world which is experienced and engaged with. People employ their whole bodies in their spiritual practices, as the work on embodied spirituality overwhelmingly shows. So, it might not be particularly helpful to constrain one's thinking about spiritual intelligence only to neural terms—though such perspectives certainly can be illuminating. At the core of the articles in this series is the manner in which spiritual intelligence is indeed an embodied phenomenon, just as the spiritual life is something one participates in.

If people use the same cognitive capacities in spiritual intelligence that they use for everything else, albeit deployed in a distinctive way, that raises the question of exactly how these cognitive capacities are deployed, for example, in spiritual practices. Progress has been made with that question, for example, in John Teasdale's work on how the *Interacting Cognitive Subsystems* (ICS) architecture (Teasdale and Barnard 1993) is deployed in the practice of mindfulness. A key feature of Teasdale's proposal is that the intuitive, schematic intelligence of the *implicational* subsystem is prioritized over the more rational and explicit intelligence of the *propositional* subsystem (Teasdale, Segal and Williams 1995; Teasdale 2022).

The articles presented in this thematic section also explore, in a different way, how the human mind—and the body too—are deployed in the spiritual life. There is no doubt that many different aspects of spiritual processing are to be found in the spiritual life, if that is broadly conceived. However, there may be modes of processing that are characteristic

of the spiritual life, and which distinguish it from much everyday cognitive processing.

#### PARTICIPATION IN A TRANSPERSONAL INTELLIGENCE

A particular emphasis in the articles presented here is on the sense that spiritual intelligence involves a participation in a “transcendent” intelligence, in the terminology of theology or a “transpersonal” intelligence in the terminology of psychology (Watts 2018). It is certainly a fact that many people who are engaged in the spiritual path have a sense of participating in something that is beyond themselves. William James, in his classic lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James [1902] 2012), suggested that the claim to have experienced the beyond should be accepted as a reality unless there is some good reason not to do so. Of course, William James was a faithful student of Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose transcendentalist philosophy was grounded precisely in the notion of some universal intelligence, an *overmind*, in which each person’s own individual mind could participate during moments of deep inward quiet. James masterfully connected this thesis to emergent psychological work on the unconscious mind.

It is beyond the scope of psychology to try to prove that there really is (or is not) a transcendent or transpersonal aspect of reality. Psychology is an empirical discipline and cannot be dogmatically wedded either to secularist or religious assumptions about whether there is a transcendent reality. Some traditions of spiritual practice assume the reality of the transcendent more consistently than others; most do, though there may be some approaches to spiritual practice, especially in the Buddhist tradition, that do not necessarily make that assumption.

It is worth noting that spiritual intelligence is not the only form of intelligence that makes this assumption. Mathematicians commonly (though not always) assume that mathematics is something that they are discovering, as John Polkinghorne and others have pointed out (Polkinghorne 1998). The assumption is that mathematics has a prior existence in which mathematicians are participating, and mathematics has sometimes been thought to give an insight into the mind of God. However, though the assumption of transcendent intelligence is possible in domains such as mathematics, it is characteristic of spiritual intelligence in a more fundamental sense, and may be an essential feature of it.

Until the late modern period, that is, from the latter part of the 19th century, it was probably the prevailing assumption that human understanding was participating in an understanding of things that went beyond the human person and beyond the natural world. The assumption of romantic philosophers such as Coleridge, for example, was that reason

stood behind the natural world, and that human understanding involved participation in this transcendent reason (Barfield 1971).

Owen Barfield in his *History in English Words* (Barfield 1953) uses changes in the meaning of words as a guide to changes in conceptual thought, and comments that words like *conscience*, *science*, and *intelligence* used to refer more to a quality which one would “partake off,” rather than being something one would actually *possess*. The idea that people *possess* intelligence seems to have become the predominant assumption only in the late 19th century. Once people began to assume that humans possessed intelligence, it was inevitable that questions would be asked about whether other creatures and devices also possessed it.

This shift in assumptions about *where* intelligence is to be located, and how humans relate to intelligence, seems to have been part of a general cultural shift from a participatory mode of consciousness to a more objectifying one. Commenting on the fact that premodern people seem to have been aware of a wider range of powers than we are, Rowan Williams suggests that “it wasn’t that they thought that, as a matter of descriptive fact, there are lot more things around than you might have expected. Rather, they thought that there was a great deal more into which we have to enter into relation than we can summarize in simple descriptive form” (Williams 2019, 1039). Lash has similarly commented on the shift in modernity from a participatory mode of consciousness to what he calls a “spectorial” one (Lash 1995, 207). Charles Davy (1951, 139–40) has called it the “on-looker consciousness.”

We wish to recover the earlier assumption that spiritual intelligence is more than a human power. Rather, we wish to explore the powers that humans use in order to engage with and participate in a transcendent spiritual intelligence. Put another way, the psychological dimensions of spiritual intelligence are concerned with the means, manner, and purposes by which a person works with, participates in, gives him or herself over to this transcendent intelligence. It is the powers and processes involved in that giving over that are the chief concern.

#### OVERVIEW OF THE THEMATIC SECTION ARTICLES

The articles in this series explore the different manners of engagement with transpersonal spiritual intelligence. The foci traverse intellectual pursuit, the meditative aspects of spiritual practice, and embodied ritual practices. All of these dimensions have crucial roles to play in spiritual intelligence. Without an intellectual seeking, without a physical practice, and without a kind of meditative (or contemplative) giving over of oneself, there is something lacking in the understanding of the participation in spiritual intelligence. Put another way, one participates in the broader spiritual intelligence with one’s whole mind, one’s whole body, and one’s whole heart.

Needless to say, there are profound social aspects to all these features of participation and, many (though far from all) of these participatory activities are given as social practices.

Another key concern in these articles is temporal—to explore what such engagement does to the person over the course of their lifetime. To that end, two of the articles in the series (the first and the concluding article) deal with a protracted activity of seeking for meaning across one's life, and the notion of *ways of life* with regards to spiritual intelligence. One of the key themes across all four articles is the need to distinguish both the content of what one is dealing with, but also the *manner* one performs one's spiritual practices. Spiritual intelligence is not just about information and knowledge, but also about the manner in which one relates to what one knows, one's *relationship* with what one knows. Is one's life changed by what one finds in the course of spiritual seeking, or is one merely expressing fine sounding spiritual words?

In Article 1, the search for spiritual meaning is presented in terms of *slow knowing* – an engaged seeking to unfold depths of meaning in things as one goes through one's life. A slow pace is needed to gradually unfold depths of potential spiritual meaning. *Lectio divina* will be taken as a paradigm practice of a kind of reading which, rather than being an information gathering exercise, seeks to dwell on the meaning of texts, to participate in the meaning of what is read. Herein, a passage on the peace of God would not be approached in any systematic or intellectual fashion. Rather, the sense would be allowed to gradually seep out of the text, to permeate the reader. Thus, the peace of God is not so much understood intellectually, as constituted within the being of the reader. Gustatory metaphors of “tasting” abound in describing such reading, which is slow, sustained, repetitive, searching, and fundamentally participatory. This seeking for meaning, an ongoing lifelong engagement, is one way of inviting spiritual intelligence to work through one's life. The more one seeks for meaning in such a participatory manner, the more informed by that reality one's life, ideally, becomes. The meanings at hand are precisely transformative, particularly over the longer term.

In contrast to this verbally based exploration of spiritual seeking, Article 2 explores the Japanese arts as meditation-in-action. Herein, spiritual work is directed toward a stripping down of the ego, or surface self. This invites a larger, unbounded intelligence to work through one, increasingly informing one's life. The various Japanese arts, or ways (*dō*), provide rigorous, ritual-like structures which involve moral and aesthetic training, as well as providing techniques for body-mind synchronization (as such: meditation-in-action). To this end, Article 2 explores the links between the Japanese arts and Zen Buddhist ideals (particularly *Sōtō* Zen) of enlightenment construed as the consistent practice of one's art. Contemporary Japanese archery (*Kyūdō*) will be presented as an exemplar of how such

ritual-like structures support spiritual work, the giving over of one's *small mind* so as to be receptive to, and thus to participate in, transcendent intelligence. Sister Elaine MacInnes, a Catholic nun and Zen teacher, captures the fruits of this participation in Christian terms using Paul's statement from Galatians 2:20: "I live now – not I – but Christ lives within me" (MacInnes 2003, 81).

One problem with some of the more meditative approaches to spiritual intelligence can be a certain diminution of the value of intellectual aspects of spiritual intelligence. At the very least, one should say that some balance of verbal and nonverbal practice is essential for a rich kind of participation. The remaining two articles address a more balanced approach. Article 3, on meaning and embodiment in ritual practice, looks at the possibility of spiritual intelligence being construed as a layering of different semantic levels, propositional and experiential. Applying Barnard and Teasdale's *Interacting Cognitive Subsystems* (ICS) model of cognition to ritual practice, Article 3 seeks to highlight the different ways humans grasp meaning and how this plays out in the rich embodied practices that Christian rituals enact. Participation in these rituals (if one's presence is sincere and consistent), allows different levels of semantic richness to inform the practitioner's life. Indeed, it is the layering of the various levels of meaning that fosters spiritual intelligence through embodied and participatory activity.

The final article concerns the work of Margaret Masterman, a leading figure in the Cambridge-based science-and-religion group, *the Epiphany Philosophers*, whose work spanned computational linguistics, philosophy of religion, and contemplative practice (Watts 2019). Her work on the ubiquity of metaphor and on machine translation offers many significant insights that are germane for exploring spiritual intelligence. Article 4 explores the manner in which metaphor, often hidden in plain sight, both leads and misleads in the search for understanding (religious and scientific alike). Religious language is, simultaneously, very generative and prone to misunderstanding. As such, Masterman claims there is a need for a "dual-approach" (Masterman 1989, 89), both speculative and critical, in approaching religious language. Such an approach requires dialectic, dialogue, self-awareness—various metacognitive skills. All of these approaches relate to energizing one's commitments to a religious and spiritual way of life.

There is no claim that the spiritual intelligence has been "wrapped up" in these four articles. These articles have sought to take a kaleidoscopic approach, attempting to open up discussion, and highlighting certain key factors relevant to spiritual intelligence. There has been no attempt to unify or reduce all these components to a singular, unified, and systematic model. Indeed, one might be justified in being suspicious of any attempt to reduce something so rich as spiritual intelligence to any one singular model. That being so, there are a number of unifying themes across these

articles. These themes relate to the temporal dimensions of spiritual intelligence, that is, the manner in which it unfolds slowly across the lifespan through engagement with various kinds of practices. There is a need for perseverance with one's practice, whose fruits come slowly. As such, pursuing spiritual intelligence does require some work and sustained effort. Such work balances a building up of certain habits, as well as a stripping away of certain other traits which impede one's spiritual work, particularly ego-centeredness. Above all, the overarching theme of these articles is that spiritual intelligence is shown more in how one lives than in anything else. Spiritual intelligence involves a personally significant commitment to a certain seeking and a sincere effort to move the center of one's agency away from ego-centric effort toward a deeper vision of life, the world and others—this vision and change in one's center of activity are informed by (and gradually transformed through) the participatory work one puts into one's practice.

#### SERIES ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (WISEMAN)

These articles owe a debt of gratitude to all the members of the "Understanding Spiritual Intelligence" project. Regarding the Japanese components, the author would like to thank Nicholas Ostler and Christopher Harding for reading these articles and for giving helpful comments and suggestions for further research. Regarding the theological implications of Margaret Masterman's work, Rowan Williams and Catherine Pickstock were very generous in their reading of the articles, and for providing feedback for reflection. Marius Dorobantu's theological perspectives were valuable throughout the work. Regarding the cognitive aspects of the project, gratitude must be given to Fraser Watts, and to Philip Barnard for his extensive help in working with his *Interacting Cognitive Subsystems* model. The background to some of this work was influenced by discussions about new directions in artificial intelligence research. For this, the conversations with William Clocksin, Yorick Wilks, Michael Reiss, Marius Dorobantu, and Vanessa Mathews were very illuminating. Another helpful contributor to the group discussions was Mark Vernon. Most of all, thanks need to be extended to Fraser Watts for his support on this project. The project was funded by Templeton World Charity Foundation, grant number: TWCF0542.

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