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A conceptual analysis on *Atma Vijnanam* from health care perspective: A Review of Ayurvedic Classics

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ABSTRACT

For millennia across the globe knowledge about the outer world i.e. physical knowledge and self-knowledge have been well recognized as the core principle of life and living. Exploration of self-knowledge through understanding the fundamental cognitive part of the self i.e., self-concept and self-realization provide the firm basis for attainment of broader aspect of health as well as for fulfillment of basic pursuits of human life (*Purusartha*). But the importance of self-concept, self-actualization, self-realization etc. both for a recipient and health care provider from health care perspective are relatively underdeveloped. The most neglected area in medical field is ignorance about exploration of self-knowledge and self-awareness both by healthcare provider and recipient. But the philosophy of Ayurved and visionary thought of great seers of Ayurveda discovered the knowledge of true self lies at the root of all knowledge such as virtue, health, happiness etc to get rid from all miseries created by self. An effort has been made by the author for exploration of value of understanding the true self and self-knowledge from health care perspective as vividly explained in Ayurvedic classics.

Key words: *Self-realization, self-concept, Satya Buddhi, Adhyatma Dravya, empirical soul.*

INTRODUCTION

Knowing yourself is life's eternal homework.^[1] In the age inspired of skepticism and materialism few people only came to know their real self which is divine and immortal. But the knowledge of true self has always been the principal theme of philosophy and Vedic scriptures. The great seers in Veda and Upanishad discovered and taught that knowledge of the self lies at the root of all knowledge whether of science,

philosophy or religion. Hence for millennia across the globe knowledge and awareness of the self has been well recognized as a core principle of life and living. Its importance is well documented in ancient literature, eastern and western philosophy, doctrinal religions even in modern literature. Its impact now days on modern scientific field of quantum biology has been recognized and is gaining wide popularity. Most often people consider knowledge means outer world knowledge or physical knowledge which is useful and enough for life. But they are still ignorant that the result of physical knowledge for this materialistic world is worthless. Because the core difference in physical knowledge and self-knowledge is that physical knowledge becomes the basis of cosmic resources but they don't become the conductor of aim, peace-happiness of those mean. Veritable pleasure (peacefulness) cannot be regained by just cosmic knowledge. Even after achieving the entire world as a source of knowledge, without *Atmika Jnana* (self-knowledge) the individual is devoid from the knowledge of light and exist in the darkness of

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ignorance. Exploration of self-knowledge through understanding the fundamental cognitive part of the self i.e., self-concept and self-realization provide the firm basis for attainment of broader aspect of health as well as for fulfillment of basic pursuits of human life (*Purusartha*). Being a part of Vedic scripture Ayurveda lay emphasized on the *Atma Vigyana* which can be understood as the concept of theory of soul in relation to evolution of human life, self-knowledge, self-awareness etc. The concept of *Atma Vigyana* has been vividly described from health care perspective in Ayurvedic classics. Ayurveda's history can be traced back to the Vedas and being a life science, the great seers of Ayurveda has explored some eternal truths related to life by their visionary thought and lay emphasized its importance as ultimate cause for attainment of broader aspect of health i.e., physical, mental, sensorial & spiritual well-being. Concept of *Atma Vijnanam* or theory of soul one of such eternal knowledge incorporated in Ayurvedic classics. If the expression of treatise is devoid of knowledge of benefits then the readers are not interested in going through it and again wise people are not motivated towards the study of those things having no sense or meaning. Hence it is necessary to determine the relation between subjects and object otherwise the objective of science will not be helpful in stimulating the study of science.^[2] Exploration of *Atma Jnana* and its thorough understanding from the perspective of health is need of hour both for a recipient and provider of health care in health care professionals. But still understanding of true self, importance of self-concept, self-actualization, self-realization etc. both for a recipient and provider of health care from health care perspective are relatively underdeveloped. Hence it needs to understand the various perspectives of *Atma Vigyana* and its impact on various perspective of life.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the concept of *Atma Vijnanam* in Ayurvedic classics.
2. To understand the contextualized application of *Atma Jnana*, *Atma Tatva*, *Atma Bodha* etc. from health care perspective.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. A thorough review of Charak Samhita and Sushruta Samhita has been made along with related commentaries.
2. Web journals are referred to look insight the contextualized application of self-knowledge.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Soul in Ayurveda perspective

Atman (Sanskrit: 'self' 'breath') one of the basic concepts in Hinduism, the universal self, identical with the eternal core of personality that after death either transmigrates to a new life or attain release (*Moksha*) from the bonds of existence. Broader definition of *Atma* has been highlighted in various contexts throughout the classics. Based on various contextual meaning it can be understood as the soul of the universe (*Paramatma*), soul of individual body or empirical soul (*Jeevatma*), the self of the abstract person or individual or being, the nature of the constitution, mind, the intellect or understanding, the fundamental cause (*Karta*), as absolute element (*Adhyatma Dravya Sangraha*) for all auspicious or inauspicious deeds etc.^[3] Empirical soul is the element of consciousness in a holistic human being. It forms the fundamental structure of holistic human being and essential component of life with combination of *Panchabhoutika Sarira*, *Indriya* (sense and locomotor organs) and *Satva* (mind).^[4] *Atma* means soul, self or consciousness and it is the connection to knowledge depository (*Jnanapratisandhata*).

Karma (self-deed), Karma Phala and longevity

As absolute element *Atma* along with mind, intellect and sense faculties recognized as *Adhyatma Dravya Sangraha* responsible for all auspicious and inauspicious deeds and these deeds further derive the destiny (*Daiva*) of an individual.^[5] Depending upon virtuous acts or sinful past acts the soul (*Atman*) takes birth in another suitable body for the sake of enjoyment of fruits of such action.^[6] Ayurvedic scripture lay emphasized on virtuous acts both in current birth i.e., *Paurusa Karma* & in previous birth

i.e., *Daiva Karma* as both are conducive to health, happiness & longevity.^[7] All the virtuous acts determine the life span of an individual. The span of life of humans may be definite or indefinite based on *Daiva Karma* & *Paurusha Karma*. Predetermined span of life represents the strength of the actions of the past as well as present life otherwise it indicates the weakness of these actions.^[8]

Even though the action of previous life is no more present in the existing life, still their effects manifest themselves in this life. Actions of the existing life for health & longevity can be in form of conducting righteous offerings and auspicious acts as well as indulgence of wholesome regimen & rejuvenating diet & drug with due consideration to climate (*Kala*), geography (*Desha*) & nature (*Atma Guna*).

Hence both aspects related to *Ayu* i.e., *Hitayu* & *Sukhayu* has been lay emphasized in Ayurveda. The span of life will be equivalent to the prescribed span for the respective *Yuga* depending upon the excellence of the action of the previous and existing lives.^[9] *Satva*, *Atma* and *Sharira* just like *Tripod* constitute the base of all living beings and the existence of entire of entire sentient world depends upon their combination.^[10] When a single pillar get disturbed the object supported by the tripod falls down just like that none of the sentient being can survive properly by disturbance of any one single pillar it may be *Sharira*, *Satva* or *Atma*. Hence fabrication of person's life with suitable deeds is required for eradication of various miseries related to life & deterioration of life span before the expiry of specific period. As a cart when fabricated with appropriate material and being used properly come to the stage of deterioration only after the expiry of specific period and in the other way the same cart deteriorates much earlier than the specific period if it is not fabricated and is continuously overloaded. Just like that even after enough physical knowledge about all the resources about the cosmic world the deterioration will start before the expiry of specific life span due to misdeeds. Hence the people of contemporary world desirous of longevity must be aware about their own deed.

Trividha Dukha and Atma Karma

A very common and natural reaction to experiencing pain in one's life is why this happening to me is? Though pain and suffering is an integral part of human life either of *Adhyatmika*, *Adhibhoutika* or *Adhidaivika* in origin hence one should keep wondering the cause of suffering, is it because one's own action, due to action of ancestors or any evil spirit, or is it one's destiny. Quest about this existence of three fold pain and suffering in the world can trigger the desire in the being to find a permanent cure for it.^[11] Own deed or action made by self (either in previous or current birth) can be considered as root cause for all these three fold of suffering. *Adhytmika (Atmanam Adhikrutya) Dukha* is experienced due to in virtuous action made by mind (*Mana*), body (*Kaya*) or speech (*Vak*) as well as indulgence of unwholesome regimen. Cognitive distortion (*Prajnapradha*) followed by unwholesome contact/attachment (*Indriyarthasamyak Samyoga*) can be considered as key factor for all suffering physical, mental or sensorial.^[12] Even by adoptance of positive deed (after evaluation of self-deed and self-realization) can enable the individual to get rid from *Adhibhautika* or *Adhidaivika Dukha*. *Adhibhautika* miseries are caused to us by other beings of this world and *Adhidaivika* misery is experienced by one due to some unseen or unknown cause and situation which are out of one's control. Such conditions like natural calamities like floods and hurricanes which cause unfathomable suffering to millions across the globe every year or manifestation of some diseases of unknown origin which cannot be figure out by applying any logic can be treated as *Adhidaivika* origin or as consequence of unrighteous action of previous birth. Ayurveda broadly depicts own misdeed due to intellectual blasphemy hold responsible for happiness and miseries.^[13] So the wise man should not blame the gods, ancestors or *Rakshasas* for diseases. Eradication of cognitive distortion by self-realization and exploring self-knowledge and accordingly resorting to wholesome regimen can act as antidotes to all the misdeeds of the individual. Hence without apprehension one should follow the path of propitiousness. Not only for miseries at individual level

but also sinful act is the root cause of the destruction of population by curse.^[14]

Need of exploration of *Atmika Jnanam* (Awakening to the state of reality)

One is able to apply the right perspective to the cause of pain and how it can be eradicated permanently by '*Jijnasa*'. Human intellect has the capability to analyze the own knowledge, value, belief, potential, behavior, strength & weakness or any shortcomings and realizing real self. Realization of one's real self can provide a chance for reformation as required for the path of life. The root cause of all suffering is ignorance and the process of enlightening in the dark of ignorance is *Atma Bodha* i.e., self-realization which provides a chance to understand ourselves and ability to change the old attitude, develop positivity and accordingly act upon it. *Atma Bodha* aware about our real root of life from where it evolves our responsibility, qualities, goals and resources. Ultimately understanding the fundamental cognitive part of the self i.e., self-concept is *Atma Bodha*. The moment one is born one's connect to the supreme consciousness is severed by the attachments which emerge due to contact with the world. As one grows one continues to entangle with the ever intensifying web of material attachments, this web of entanglements keep one away from realizing the divinity present within oneself. Realizing this divinity within oneself is the only permanent solution to all miseries of human life.

The real source of *Atmika Jnana* is self-reflection i.e., understanding the attribute. *Karma* and behavior of self. If any individual could not be aware of his/her attribute, *Karma* or behavior he cannot be devoid from the darkness of ignorance. A lack of self-awareness is identified as poison and self-reflection or review can be considered as antidote. In philosophy self-awareness is the experience of one's personality or individuality, action, value, belief, emotion etc. self-reflection encourages a level of self-awareness and consciousness about practice. Self-realization followed by self-reflection leads people towards a meaningful or fulfilling life and unlocks their complete potential and they can be able to realize where their unique

happiness lies and ways for distinctive flourishing. Lack of awareness or consciousness with due consideration to time and space followed by cognitive distortion is considered as prime concern for manifestation of all suffering and it can be enhanced by understanding the real truth of life and self-cognitive practice.

Again, the great seer in Ayurveda compendia highlights the blissful state of *Atma* (soul), *Indriya* (senses) and *Mana* (mind) as essential component of health & well-being.^[15] Blissful state of *Atma*, mind and senses can be attained by obtaining *Atmika Jnana*. *Atma* is also enumerated under *Karana Dravya Sangraha* i.e., nine basic entities which must be perceived by intellectual vision for attainment of maximum happiness (*Sarma*) and eradication of all miseries.^[16] Understanding the right perspective of the concept of *Atma* must be explored by intellectual vision as prescribed by great preceptor Acharya Caraka for attainment of health, happiness and long life.

Exploring *Atma Gyana* from health care perspective

Self-knowledge has always played a crucial role in health care. Mastering others is strength, mastering yourself is true power. Mastering on yourself by true understanding of the fundamental cognitive part of the self is required for holistic health care both by provider (physician) and recipient (patient himself). It enables an individual to accurately assess the conduct, behavior or lifestyle and their impart in triggering disease condition and accordingly develop self-realization to change the old attitude, develop positivity and how to act upon it. Ayurveda broadly depicts that one should hold himself responsible for his happiness and miseries. That's why the wise man should not blame the gods, ancestors or demons for diseases. All the diseases either somatic, psychosomatic or any exogenous origin are as a result of consequence of misdeeds. Therefore, without apprehension in respect to any circumstances one should follow the path of propitiousness. Ayurveda broadly accepts wrong utilization, none utilization and excess utilization of *Kala* (season), *Buddhi* (intellect) and *Indriyarth* (objects of sense organs) due to lack of self-cognitive knowledge as the basic causative factor

for manifestation of both psycho-somatic diseases. Intellectual error followed by cognitive distortion (*Prajnapradha*) can be considered as key factor or prime concern for improper utilization of sense organs (*Asatmandriyarth Samyoga*) and *Kala Parinama* i.e., seasonal affective abnormalities. In such circumstances self-reflection in form of resorting to wholesome regimens and following the path of propitiousness can act as antidotes to all the misdeeds of the individual and to get rid from Intellectual blasphemy. Exploration of *Atmik Jnana* (self-knowledge) is required for self-reflection in form of adopting proper conduct, behavior, lifestyle etc. by an individual as required by time or space.^[17] Through self-knowledge the individual experiences or cognize reality about his/her own mental state, behavior, conduct etc. and evaluate how far it will be responsible for all happiness and miseries. Through self-reflection the individual can take a chance to reevaluate his/her emotion, belief or action deeply which provides a chance to change the old attitude, behavior or mental states. Self-reflection provides avenue for self-realization i.e., realization of one's aim, revealing his or her potential, self-satisfaction and other personal accomplishment. Self-reflection and self-realization encourages a level of self-awareness and consciousness about practice Cognitive enhancements enable every individual to promote into any subject after thorough analysis regarding all about its pro and con prevents cognitive distortion (*Prajnapradha*).

Practices for self-cognitive knowledge

Various practices in form of regimen, code of conduct has been advocated in Ayurvedic classics for cognitive enhancement to get rid from all unwholesome attachment and annihilation of the effects of potent past actions. One should always remember his own nature.^[18] One should have correlation of the cause and effect i.e., definite result of all good and bad deeds.^[19] Hence in behavioral practice it has been advocated in Ayurvedic classics to be self-controlled and virtuous, envy in action but not in the results.^[20] One should not be a slave to senses nor should one let loose his fickle mind. Truthfulness, compassion for living beings, charity, prayers to gods, search for things

as are good for self, observance of *Brahmacharya*, discussion of religious scriptures, due devotion to noble souls, shunning of the company of the wicked, pursuit the rules of good conduct, absolute mental control, desires to get away from the worldly trap, concentration of the mind and intellect in the soul, review of spiritual facts etc. have to followed in daily practice to get liberation from all miseries.^[21] Accurate overall self-awareness benefits the development and well being of an individual.

Self-awareness and knowledge for enhancing health care

Self-awareness is vital to a physician's development and patient care. Self-awareness should be tendency of every physician to pay attention to his/her own emotion, attitudes and behavior in response to holistic health care. An ethical responsibility competence encompasses more than medical knowledge and skill. To fulfill the ethical responsibility of competence, emphasize should be given to cultivate continuous self-awareness and self-observation. Every physician should recognize that how different points on transition in professional life can make different demand on competence and take advantage of well-designed tool for self-assessment appropriate to their practice setting and patient population. In present practice diagnostic error due to over confidence or lack of self-awareness can be remedied by self-knowledge. Self-knowledge and awareness influences happiness in the professional practice, professional fulfillment, career longevity as well as clinical decision making and relationship with patients. The word '*Atmavanta*' (having self-control) has been mentioned as quality of good physician in Ayurvedic classic.^[22] The physician endowed with self-knowledge and having self-control succeeds well in clinical practice. Holism means treating the whole aspect of a person i.e., taking into account the physical, mental, sensorial, spiritual aspect etc. not merely the physical symptoms of disease or injury. Ayurveda not only take care of physical part of life but it goes for deep analysis into spiritual part also. Because it has been postulated that as long as the bond of empirical soul (*Jeevatma*) and the mind remain intact with the physical body the physiological and

biochemical pathways function properly. Self-knowledge can enable holistic health practitioner to consider the body, mind, spirit and their relationship in manifesting and shaping patient's health outcome and well being. Self-knowledge is also enable every individual for holistic health care i.e., holistic approach to self-care by thinking about strategy of own body, role of mental states and processes and true knowledge about empirical soul. Self-awareness helps the physician to make better decisions by providing insight into their thought process and emotion. Hence self-concept is super important in development of holistic practice.

Self-awareness with combination of self knowledge permits the clinician to attend and monitor the need of the patient, the work environment and his/her subjective experience. When functioning with less self-awareness clinicians are more likely to lose perspective, experience more stress in interaction with their work environment, experience empathy as a liability. Self-awareness may both enhance self-care and patient care and satisfaction. Additionally, when professionals integrate self-awareness into practice this may be helpful to accept their limits (Personal vulnerability, personal influence, responsibility and accountability for change, limits of the known and unknown) and maintain clarity about self in relation to others.

Integrating self-realization and awareness into one's clinical practice supports emotional availability, self-regeneration and increased personal & professional fulfillment even when faced with difficult or emotionally challenged situation. Hence several practice ways can be used by health practitioners to enhance their self-knowledge and awareness. The insight and understanding the personal inner world and interpersonal outer world enable every individual for management of own thought, feelings and action in order to protect and improve oneself. Every individual either patient or health seeker should see himself / herself objectively through introspection. Self-knowledge and realization can enable any individual to better cope with daily stressors.

Exploring *Tatvavabodha* (Awakening to reality)

The root cause of all suffering is ignorance and the process of enlightening in the dark of ignorance is *Atma Bodha*. An ability to control over the sense organs is recognized as best one for delightfulness which can be nurtured by *Tatvabodha* (understanding the truth). *Tatva Avabodha* is considered as best one for bestowing happiness. *Atma Tattva* is the science of both god and the living entity. *Tattva Bodha* means to know the reality or right perspective of various entities about self and in this cosmic world and their usefulness for the well being. Lord Krishna is the absolute truth and primeval cause of all causes of the creation, sustenance and destruction of the manifested universes. It is also recognized as *Satyam Param*, the highest truth. *Satya Buddhi* reveals the true reality that we are not this body that we appear to be, we are not even the mind and ego that thinks it's me, we are the divine spirit. It is the firm conviction that the self alone is real and all else is unreal. The knowledge what is real and what is unreal is the essence of inquiry into the nature of reality.

An individual is an epitome of the universe as all the material and spiritual phenomena of the universe are present in the individual and all those present in the individual are also contained in the universe.^[23] One who sees equally the entire universe in his own self and his own self in the entire universe is in possession of true knowledge.^[24] Attachment to various actions constitutes causative factor for all his miseries and detachment can be the way for cessation of all miseries is real knowledge. Once realization is made about own action as responsible for everything happening to him the individual avoids attaching himself to any drastic action. Realization of fact that attachment leads to miseries and detachment to happiness is the real knowledge.^[25] Realization of the identical nature of the universe and the self brings about true knowledge. As soon as he realizes his identity with this entire universe and considers himself as responsible for every external event then he gets rid of the bondage of happiness as well as miseries. Spirituality as complementary treatment in health care is recognized as key factor in reducing most of the physical, psychological and

endemic or pandemic outcomes. By virtue of this realization the individual will be absolutely free from attachment and hatred. In the possession of true knowledge every individual have to cognize the shining inner *Atma* as oneself and the factors responsible for attachment. Various causes of attachment have been vividly described in Charaka Samhita. Attachment can be caused by ignorance, desire, hatred and purposeful action. *Ahamkara*, *Sanga*, *Samsaya*, *Abhisaplava*, *Abhyavapata*, *Vipratyaya*, *Avisesha* and *Anupaya* arising out of attachment overcome and engulf an individual as trees with very long branches overcome and engulf a young tree.^[26] Various cause of attachment promotes the individual to run behind the temporary pleasure obtained from the materialistic world and devoid from absolute pleasure arising from *Atma Jnana*.

Ahamkara represents an egoistic feeling regarding wealth, character, conduct, learning, potency, influence etc. There is nothing wrong with having an ego but the ego needs to be regulated. *Sanga* represents non conducive mental, vocal or bodily action which is not conducive to the attainment of salvation. *Samsaya* stands for doubt regarding the existence of the result of past action, salvation, soul, life after death etc. *Abhisamplava* stands for vanity such as I am second to none in any situation; I am the creator; I am in the excellent state of health, sense organs, intelligence and memory. *Abhyavapata* represents for selfish disposition. When a person considers a desirable act as undesirable, a beneficial thing as harmful and as auspicious one as in auspicious such experience is recognized as *Vipratyaya*. Lack of distinction between a conscious and unconscious, attachment and detachment is known as *Avisesha*. Actions like *Proksana* (consecration), *Anasana* (fasting), *Avahana* (invocation), *Yajana* (priesthood) etc. are known as *Anupaya*. Such an individual who is devoid of intellect, patience and memory influenced by egoism, having attachment with doubts, full of vanity and selfishness with a wrongful insight and devoid of power of distinction is an abode of all miseries of the mind and body. If one realizes himself as spread in the entire universe and the entire universe spread in

himself, he is indeed in possession of transcendental and worldly vision. His serenity of mind based on wisdom does never fade away.

Highest truth '*Satya Buddhi*' aware every individual to obtain fourfold mental qualification i.e., ability to discriminate between permanent and impermanent, dispassion towards sense objects, worldly seeking, attainment of six qualities of inner wealth and burning desire for liberation.

Four steps for *Tattva Bodha Sadhana* are:

- 1) *Atma Chintana* (self-evaluation / contemplation) - self-evaluation of our qualities, strength or weakness, thought, desire & conduct in daily practice along with their positive & negative outcome objectively.
- 2) *Atma Sudhara* (self-refinement) - planning and practice to get rid from all negativity or ignorance which lead an individual into darkness.
- 3) *Atma Nirmana* (self-development) - planning and practice to cultivate those good qualities which we want to be in our life.
- 4) *Atma Vikasa* (self-evolution) - to know our reality in true sense and root of life and start evolution in that light.

DISCUSSION

Ayurvedic scriptures discuss the pursuit of righteousness (*Dharma*), wealth (*Artha*), desire (*Kama*) and salvation (*Moksha*) as the governing goals of human existence which can possible by attainment of broader aspect of health i.e., soundness in all aspect such as physically, mentally, sensorially and spiritually. Self-knowledge, self-evaluation and self-realization have always been playing the key role for pursuit of *Chaturvidha Purusartha* by promoting sound health. The spiritual elements as mentioned in Ayurvedic classics such as mind, objects of mind, intellect may be helpful or harmful to the soul according to their combination. As they serve as factors for promoting an individual to indulge and refrain from virtuous and sinful acts by their utilization in righteous or unrighteous manner hence metaphysically speaking by

understanding the right perspective of those spiritual elements and qualities helps in eliminating the bondage relating to the cycle of birth and death. Being a part of Vedic Scripture Ayurveda lay emphasized on *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* and explains that restraining from unwelcome activities made by body, mind or sense in daily practice one can enjoy the fruit of three pursuits of life such as *Dharma* (righteousness), *Artha* (wealth) and *Karma* (Desire). Spiritual practice through action of body, mind and speech which has been advocated under *Achara Rasayana* (behavioral practice for rejuvenation of body & mind), *Sadvritta* (code of conduct) etc. for prevention of untimely manifestation of exogenous and endogenous diseases and pandemic condition should be incorporated in health practice. One desirous of his well being during his life time and even after that should suppress urges relating to rashness and evil deeds - mentally, physically and orally. The virtuous one who is free from all vices relating to mind, speech and physical actions is indeed happy and enjoy the fruits of virtue (*Dharma*), wealth (*Artha*) and desire (*Kama*).

CONCLUSION

Atma Jnana and *Avabodha* can enable every individual for enhancing their spiritual health dimension which indirectly can contribute in diminishing number of global crises such as suicidal attempts, depression prevalence, less hospitalization, better coping with disease, better treatment adherence, cognitive & moral health crisis etc. As true knowledge of the self in relation to cosmic world is the true secret of creativity, leadership and happiness. Hence every individual must be endowed with self-knowledge through spiritual intelligence by integrating the rational knowledge, emotional knowledge and spiritual knowledge which may help to discover the richness and significance of value in this life.

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