

# The connection between quantum physics and spirituality according to the Dalai Lama

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## Philosophy and psychology



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For the Dalai Lama, science and Buddhism can converge and mutually illuminate each other to achieve a much deeper understanding of the reality that surrounds us. We analyze this interesting vision of the spiritual leader in the following text.



**For the Dalai Lama, quantum physics and spirituality present some fascinating coincidences.** While it is true that science and Buddhism are two seemingly antagonistic spheres, the Tibetan spiritual leader believes that the two should work together. If we were to open ourselves without reticence to both perspectives, he says, we would gain a deeper and more meaningful vision of the reality around us.

In his book *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 2007, he explains that this interest in science has always been present in him. He often meets with leading scientists and seeks, above all, a reconciliation between the two perspectives. Because this is the only way to enlighten our conscience, to alleviate suffering and to find the answers to the enigmas of our world.

Let's take a closer look at this interesting perspective to understand the concepts behind it.

*"When I was about 19 or 20 years old, I developed a great curiosity about science. In China, during 1954 and 1955, I met Mao Zedong. He once praised me for having a scientific mind, and added that religion was poison, perhaps hoping that this would attract someone who had a scientific mind. However, more than 30 years ago I began a series of dialogues focusing on cosmology, neurobiology, physics, including quantum physics and psychology... I believe that Buddhism brings more meaning to all this knowledge."*

*—Dalai Lama—*

## Quantum physics and spirituality: how are they related?

**Theories that establish a connection between quantum physics and spirituality are not new, nor do they come only from the Dalai Lama.** Around 1970, the *New Age* culture became interested in this science thanks to books such as *The Roots of Chance*, 1972, by philosopher Arthur Koestler or *The Medium, the Mystic, and the Physicist*, by psychologist Lawrence LeShan.

Likewise, and within these clearly pseudoscientific currents, the figure of Deepak Chopra and his book, *Quantum Healing*, 1989, is also noteworthy. However, in this attempt to unite science and Buddhism, it is worth mentioning other personalities who inspired the Dalai Lama himself. Amit Goswami, a retired professor in the Department of Theoretical Physics at the University of Oregon, is a pioneer in this field.

Books such as *Science and Spirituality: A Quantum Integration* emphasize the need to combine both spheres. Likewise, physicists such as Raja Ramanna, known above all for his role in India's nuclear development, and author of research such as that published in the *Journal of Human Values*, took an interest in the texts of the philosopher Nagarjuna in his last days to discover something astounding.

**Many of the statements of the founder of the Buddhist *Madhiamaka* school converge with some of the principles of *quark* science.** Let us now try to analyze how quantum physics and spirituality are related, according to these perspectives.

## What is quantum physics?

- **The term “*quantum*” is the smallest unit that makes up light.** Thus, what quantum physics seeks is to be able to understand matter and energy at their most fundamental level, as well as all the elementary particles that compose it.
- A basic idea of quantum physics is that energy manifests itself in indivisible packages called “*quanta*”. These elements behave differently from macroscopic matter itself. That is, particles can manifest as waves and, in turn, waves behave as if they were particles.
- We are dealing with a science that began around the twentieth century, in which names like Max Planck established a large part of the theories we have today. Likewise, Albert Einstein also spoke of the “*quanta of light*”, referring to them as those elements organized in packets in the radiation itself.
- It is a discipline that **seeks to define and understand that which cannot be seen, that which cannot be measured and all the indeterminism inscribed in the particles that make up our reality.**

*Consciousness, and not matter, is for Buddhism the raw material of the universe.*

## Spirituality and the science of *quarks*

**What link can there be between the science of the atomic or quantum and the spiritual perspective?** To understand this, we can cite a study published in the journal *Nature* by Johns Hopkins University physics and astronomy professor Richard Conn Henry. In it, he concludes by suggesting that **the universe is immaterial, mental and spiritual.**

It should be noted that his ideas were very controversial for the scientific community itself. His vision harmonizes with the connection that the Dalai Lama himself sees between quantum physics and spirituality.

- **All the atoms that make up our bodies are the same as those of which the universe itself is made.** Moreover, these *quarks* are still the same ones that shaped their appearance.
- From a spiritual perspective, we would all be connected, attuned to each other by the same elements or subatomic particles.
- We are an indisputable part of the universe; we are one and the same matter and everything we do has an impact on others.
- Exploration of the subatomic world reveals that there is an innate energy that sets everything in motion. For spiritual practices, every element that surrounds us and even what we think, is energy in vibration or “law of resonance”.
- Likewise, and from this perspective, energy is a product of consciousness. What's more, **consciousness would be able to mediate our universal well-being, if we were able to practice mental approaches based on kindness, humility or forgiveness.**

*String theory in quantum physics tells us that a particle would be made up of small strings of vibrational energy.*

## What does the Dalai Lama tell us?

If the Dalai Lama chose to title his book *The Universe in a Single Atom*, it was not by chance. It recalls, in a way, that beautiful quote by physicist Fred Alan Wolf: “*the whole universe, all knowledge, is within each individual and each thing. Each part contains the whole. An electron is all electrons. One particle is all particles. And the microcosm is the electron's path beyond space-time*”.

Let us now see what ideas he conveys in his attempt to find a connection between quantum physics and spirituality.

## Two sciences for the same purpose

**The Dalai Lama wishes to transmit a more holistic and integrated way of understanding the reality that surrounds us.** Buddhism need not be the opposite of science or vice versa. The two disciplines have different methods of investigation, but they can converge and complement each other to achieve higher and deeper purposes.

## Criticism of scientific materialism

As expected, **spiritual leader is highly critical of scientific materialism.** This approach, in which every effect has its objective cause and, in turn, every cause produces its effect, is a very limited framework with little potential. From this perspective, questions such as the meaning of life or good and evil cannot be resolved. Conjugating spirituality in this variable broadens the view much more.

## Understanding consciousness

For the Dalai Lama, the universe itself is an inseparable part of mental life. It is our actions, thoughts and emotional states that map out our realities, what happens to us, and even those relationships of causality or karma. **For the Tibetan spiritual leader, quantum physics would be a mechanism to better understand our consciousness.**

This resonates with a paper published in the *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*. The world cannot be understood only by the aforementioned scientific materialism, by Newtonian principles of separation and atomism. Quantum physics and spirituality would allow us to better understand the phenomena of consciousness, which, so far, we have understood only as a mere phenomenon of the brain.

As an element of interest, it is also worth mentioning a research from the University of Arkansas. In it we are reminded of the revolutionary ideas that the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung contributed in his time through analytical psychology. **Jung's conception of the human mind would fit these same perspectives.** For him, the mind was a mystical entity.

*"If we think about the possible connection between quantum physics and spirituality, we can see that the mind would no longer be that accidental intruder in the realm of matter, but would rise rather as a creator and governing entity in the realm of matter."*

*—R. C. Henry, The Mental Universe—*

## Final conclusion

Nowadays and in almost any store, we can find an endless number of books with the term "quantum": "*quantum computing*", "*quantum mind*", "*quantum psychology*" "*quantum healing*" ... It is as if this mysterious dimension could suddenly become part of a large part of our everyday activities.

However, it should be noted that behind many of these disciplines, practices and approaches lies pseudoscience. This does not mean that they are inspiring and interesting subjects. Nor can we disregard the purpose that the Dalai Lama sought with his book *The Universe in a Single Atom*.

Science and spirituality have fought very antagonistic battles for years. **Seeking a syntony and interconnection between both spheres for the good of humanity is certainly something hopeful and anyone can wish for it.** That is the key.