

Letter to the Editor

Spirituality must be given its due

Adhikary M

To the editor

Since the dawn of civilization human beings have been trying to understand the meaning and purpose of life, the worldly life and the life thereafter and their interrelationship. Thus a spiritual dimension has played an important role in fashioning human life both as an individual and as a member of his or her society. However, it has defied any concrete definition. It is an intangible factor which is beyond the domains of physiology and psychology. The spiritual dimension includes human integrity, adherence to the ethics and principles, an effort to understand the meaning and purpose of human existence, commitment to higher being and certain beliefs and concepts which may or may not be amenable to ordinary reasoning.

Not too long ago anyone suggesting a link between spirituality and good health would have been laughed out of the room. But thanks to effort of physicians, who popularized the concept of holistic healing, spirituality is no longer taboo in the world of science and medicine. A preliminary study by university of Chicago researchers contends that belief in god may improve a person's physical health. The study says strong spirituality, regardless of religion, results in improved physiological functioning, health and well-being. The university aimed to conduct a comprehensive study to examine the connection between religious belief and health. The fact that a major research university is exploring the link between religion and health

is a big step in recognizing the importance of spirituality in our lives. This considerably undermines the thesis that trade and economics have been the engine for human evolution. If even one accepts the theory that it was trade that gave Homo sapiens an evolutionary leg-up, spirituality and religion must surely have had a role to play.

It was possibly the age of enlightenment in Europe that set the ball rolling on the marginalization of religion. One of the features of modernity has been a strong belief in the triumph of science and rationality. Now the wheel seems to have turned full-circle with religion making a surprise comeback in our lives with growing intensity. The interest of researchers in establishing connection between science and spirituality is an indication of this profound change. Molecular biologist Dean Hamer in his 2004 best-selling book 'The God Gene' make the controversial claim that human spirituality is an adaptive trait and that the genes responsible for it can be identified. That argument still has few takers. But it goes to show that scientists are finally taking account of the role of religion and spirituality in the story of human evolution. Proponents of holistic health believe that the time has come to give serious consideration to the spiritual dimension and to the role this plays in health and disease. It includes integrity, principles and ethics, the purpose in life, commitment to some higher being and belief in concepts that are not subject to "state of the art" explanation.

*Dr Minati Adhikary, Associate Professor of
Community Medicine, Dhaka Medical College, Dhaka
e-mail: minatibd@yahoo.com

**For correspondence*