

Zaya and Maurizio Benazzo JOINING SCIENCE TO SPIRITUALITY

by Linda Sechrist

In 2008, the Sebastopol, California, filmmaking team of Zaya and Maurizio Benazzo created Science and Nonduality (SAND), which later became a nonprofit organization aimed at fostering a new relationship with spirituality that is free from religious dogma, based on timeless wisdom traditions, informed by cutting-edge science and grounded in direct experience.

The next year, they organized the first SAND conference, exploring nonduality and the nature of consciousness. Since then, the duo has been producing short films that contribute to the expansion of human awareness, and hosting annual conferences in the U.S. and Europe involving leading scientists, academics and other pioneering thinkers.

Thousands of participants from around the world interact in forums and respectful dialogues with luminaries such as Menas Kafatos, Ph.D., a professor of computational physics at Chapman University, in Orange, California; Peter Russell, a theoretical physicist and author of *From Science to God: A Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness*; Robert Thurman, Ph.D., professor of Tibetan Buddhist studies at Columbia University, in New York City; evolutionary biologist Elisabet Sahtouris, author of *EarthDance: Living Systems in Evolution*; and Robert Lanza, physician, scientist and co-author of *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the*



Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe.

Where do revelations about a deeper reality begin?

MB: Individual and communal explorations often occur around life's big questions, such as what it means to be

conscious and to seek meaning and purpose; the possible place of intuition as the edge where knowledge meets the unknown and unknowable; and how crucial individual awakening is to social transformation.

What is meant by nonduality?

ZB: Nonduality is the philosophical, spiritual and scientific understanding of fundamental oneness in which there is no separation. Through quantum mechanics, Western science has reached an understanding of what Eastern mystics have long understood. Duality, generally determined in terms of opposites such as self and other, conscious and unconscious, illusion and reality, as well as separation between the observer and the observed, is an illusion. Nonduality is the understanding that our identifying with common dualisms avoids recognition of a deeper reality.

Until recently, human sciences have ignored the problem of consciousness by calling it the "hard problem". This has led to our present fragmented

worldview rife with chaos, conflict and crises. It may be time for scientists to accept the discoveries of the mystics and consider consciousness intrinsic to every observed scientific phenomenon. Understanding that consciousness is the key to the universe, reality and ourselves may be the missing link in bridging science and spirituality.

What difference can exploring the nature of consciousness make?

ZB: Understanding the new science that points to consciousness as all-pervasive and the fundamental building block of reality—that we are all made of the same essence, like drops in the ocean—can change how we approach and harmonize day-to-day living. We can be far more open, peaceful and accepting of others. Absurd violence, as well as economic, social and political crises, could all be things of the past, based on a new quantum understanding of our interconnectedness and oneness.

How has the nonduality movement evolved?

MB: SAND has evolved into something we never imagined when we began discussing the ideas that the true spirit of science and spiritually is best supported by an open mind and a non-dogmatic inquiry; while science seeks

to understand our external reality and spiritual thinkers seek to understand our inner, personal experience of consciousness, these seemingly different disciplines rarely come together in open dialogue.

It became more evident that we weren't looking for scientific answers or proof of what spiritual wisdom traditions teach, but rather to expand the questions asked of both science and spirituality. Open-ended questions arise such as: What if space and time are just useful maps and quantum mechanics is pointing us to a deeper reality more mysterious than we can ever imagine? What if science and spirituality, while responding to our collective aspiration to grow and progress, would no longer need to carry the burden of having all the answers? What if we considered our search open-ended, rather than having to arrive at a grand theory of life or final state of enlightenment? What if, while we probe deeper into reality and who we are, we realize that knowledge gathered will always be just a stepping-stone?

For information about the 2017 conference in San Jose from Oct. 18 to 22, visit ScienceAndNonduality.com.

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