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Wisdom is the seed that lies dormant in the planting of all forms of life from the speck of dust to the newborn child. The seeds of wisdom are carried by the onrushing traffic along the roadway of life picking up such nourishment as can be found on the way. And then at last, the soul's ease, the splendour of that bloom so rare, found only on the steepest pathways of life's highways. Behold, the harvest is ripe for the reaping, each blossom opening only in its due season and under the light of a newly awakened Spiritual Sun.

here is no such thing as chance! Nothing anywhere or at any time has happened by chance. All apparently random events are simply parts of a pattern too great for us to perceive. Everything that lives or has lived or ever will live has come into being as part of the great prototypal expression of the divine thought in the universal mind. Therefore, ALL is ordered and working towards the fulfilment of that ultimate purpose.

This must, and does include you and me! Our lives, however great or insignificant, are not only a part of the ultimate purpose but are an essential part. What we do affects everything else. What we say affects everything else. What we think affects everything else. What we are is a vital part of what everything else is. This is so because everything is connected, and nothing is outside of the whole. I have often heard the question - 'can we, as individuals, affect the world or even the universe?' When we truly understand the nature of reality we will see that there is no way that we can not affect the world. What ever we do we are affecting the world and there is no way that we can avoid so doing.

It is wise indeed to think long and hard on this. If our lives are to be of some value (even only to us) we need to see ourselves as we truly are. It is so easy, almost mandatory in today's 'grab-and-go' society, to spend our lives in the pursuit of personal pleasure. But in what way does that kind of life bring the divine plan nearer to its completion? In what way does that attitude bring us nearer to our highest potential? What is our true part in the spiritual purpose that is constantly creating and re-creating life in all its myriad forms?

Taking the oneness of life as a basic premise, the meaning of our lives must be accessible both from the world around us and from the world within. Thus there are two broad approaches to living a spiritually orientated life. These are the mystic and the occult paths.

The mystic seeks to become one with the spiritual unity of all life, seeking to sever the connection to the material mind so that all sense of separateness disappears. The ultimate goal of this path is Nirvana or ascension to the eternal bliss of non-being. The mystic seeks to pass beyond the world of beings and things, of pleasure and pain, of hope and of disappointment, and the wheel of necessity.

Mysticism is not exclusively an Eastern thing; it is to be found in all cultures throughout the world. Many Christians take their worship and prayer to mystical heights, and this is also true of most if not all deeply religious aspirations of whatever denomination.

The occultist, on the other hand, seeks not to dissolve the outer world but rather to resolve it. Occultism is the means by which we seek to understand things, to reach concord with all things, and to see unity in diversity. The ultimate goal of this path is service through the realisation of universal brotherhood and the co-operation of all souls with the divine plan.

Occultism is not a form of magic; it is the science or study of those things that remain hidden from ordinary sight (occulted). Material sciences (all forms) are the same thing without the spiritual goal. Ordinary science seeks to understand creation so that it can manipulate it. Occult science seeks to understand creation so that it can assist in its unfolding.

But there is another way, one that seeks to combine both the occult and the mystical paths into one complementary journey. This is a way to live the paradox of the inner and outer worlds, the world of inner vision, and the world of outer knowledge, the way of movement, and the way of stillness. It is the path of wisdom, and it is followed by those who seek to live by the 'Wisdom Teaching'.

Students of the Wisdom Teaching do not seek knowledge for its own sake, nor do they scorn it in favour of visions; both are equally valid. Each significant step is a discovery of inner vision accompanied by the understanding of what that new awareness represents and how it can be used in the greater good. Not for the self but for better means to serve the many.

A river is like spirit, ever flowing towards the sea, which is both its source and its goal. It seeks to complete the cycle from oneness through diversity to oneness again. As the river flows over the land it cuts itself a channel and in so doing it forms banks. Both must exist for either one to exist. Without its banks a river has no direction. Without the flow of water the banks have nothing to contain. From this simple analogy we can easily visualise spirit traversing the worlds of matter working its way through a myriad forms on its inexorable cyclic path back to its divine source. Spirit and matter - each one the essential complement of the other.

It is said of the Buddha that he turned back from the portal of nirvana and that he refused his attainment of the highest spiritual union for the sake of those that he would have left behind - you and me, humanity, his sisters and brothers. Indeed, his whole spiritual quest was a search for an end to the suffering that he saw in the lives of those around him. Such was his compassion and such his wisdom that he would not claim the ultimate bliss for himself - knowing as he did that all of us are struggling toward the same spiritual goal.

This is the path of the Wisdom Teaching, and all theosophists should know that the Theosophical Society is an outward expression of that path; the Masters of Wisdom who give their energies to inspire and guide the Society are embodiments of this path - also known as the Path of Renunciation. Look deeply into the great religions and you will find the call to serve, the call to work for the good of the whole regardless of the cost to your own personal desires. But we can not truly serve the world if we do not understand it, or ourselves. Without spiritual wisdom we have no direction.

Both the path of knowledge and that of mystical vision must lead to wisdom. In the end, both must combine for us to reach true spiritual enlightenment. Knowledge is sterile if it does not lead to greater awareness and mystical vision, while such vision is meaningless if it is not understood in the context of our lives. This is the 'middle way' of the Buddha, the path that threads its way between the yearning and 'the need to experience' of the mystic and the curiosity and the need to know of the occultist. By this shall we know truth and see visions, and by the union of feeling and knowing, Wisdom is born.

The occult and the mystic paths are not in conflict with each other, such a view is the result of limited understanding, in truth they are complementary; each adding that which is lacking in the other. When the aspirant approaches the more rarefied heights of spiritual awareness these paths merge; they become one and the same, their seeming differences are resolved. From then on the aspirant treads the Path of Wisdom on steps cut from the very bedrock of spirituality, which is selfless service.

Eric McGough is National President of the Theosophical Society in England. He joined the Society in 1969 and has been a member of the English Section since 2004.

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