

Cleverness is not Wisdom

by Rosemary Wilkie

Rosemary has been a supporter of The Hamblin Trust for many years. She is a writer and storyteller with a great interest in the evolution of consciousness.

In my teens I fell in love with the poems of Robert Browning, whom I now recognise as a wise man.

'A Grammarian's Funeral' recounts the life of an old man who had spent his entire life learning how to live ~ sure that God would manage to find a use for his erudition ~ and died before he could act on any of it. This lack of wisdom I took superficially to heart then, as it seemed to me that often I acted unwisely without thought.

'Bishop Blougram's Apology,' intrigued me. The Bishop admits to a wavering faith, doubting the existence of God when he observes the unfairness of life. Yet he finds that abstract intellectual plans for life do not work either, and he finally settles for faith as the safer option.

I argued fiercely with my mother about 'Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made.' I somehow knew Browning was right, but it was a long time before I understood why. When we have struggled and survived the turmoil of exams, love, marriage, children, housing, money, careers, illness and perhaps bereavements, we settle down in whatever situation our trillions of small decisions have brought us to. It is only then that most of us have the time to find our own spiritual path, beginning to consider the deeper mysteries of life, or discovering a deeper meaning to our existing religious affiliations.

The original meaning of the word 'Wisdom' was the quality of expressing the essence or nature of God, and was applied, for example, when referring to the Books of the Bible. Wisdom is not just learning or erudition. It deals with the essence of things, and distinguishes clearly between truth and falsehood. Our minds are splendid tools for reasoning, analysis and rational activity ~ the attributes

that distinguish us from animals ~ and have produced great advances in human well-being. But all too often the outcome of our analytical ability is divisive, splitting hairs instead of being aware of underlying truth. We observe this with great sadness when people of identical race and colour go to war over whose interpretation of their common religion is right.

As Euripides said two and a half thousand years ago,

'Mere cleverness is not wisdom.'

So many people these days suffer from depression. Separated from the nourishment of nature, fresh air and silence, conditioned by a media that creates fear by its focus on bad news, and infected by 'everybody says,' too many of us retreat into a familiar and increasingly small space. We oppose all change, blame others for our situation and let our thoughts of dissatisfaction go round in an endless loop. In fact we are allowing our minds and emotions to lie to us. Our bodies never lie, but our minds and emotions do.

How important then, for us as souls, to make contact with our authentic Self ~ the Spirit within ~ which certainly does not lie either. Our souls mediate between spirit and matter, between God and the everyday world, between the two aspects of our nature, animal and divine. Some people make this contact easily. Others have to work through years of hard experience or psychotherapy to achieve it.

When at last our consciousness has expanded and our personality is controlled by our soul, we experience serenity, joy, gratitude and humility. Seeing things around us in this light we respond differently: understanding better what drives

people to act as they do, we respond with compassion instead of criticism. Accepting responsibility for our part in events, we cease to blame others and look instead to what we can learn. Our response to events is necessarily based on knowledge and experience, but as we mature Love will become an integral part of our response.

Not fuzzy sentimental love, but Intelligent Love. And what is that? It is Wisdom. Wisdom unites knowledge and experience with love and applies them to human affairs.

We need a great deal more of it in the world today.

'Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;

wisdom is humble that he knows no more.'

William Cowper 



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