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KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, Part 3

In these current times, millions of people are obsessed with celebrity culture. Witness the popularity of the New York and London tabloids, the ubiquitous, self-promoting video clips found on YouTube, and the mindless tweets sent out on Twitter by celebrities to their legions of followers. It's no secret that celebrities sometimes behave foolishly, nor is it surprising that a large segment of the public derives voyeuristic enjoyment from observing the antics of the rich and famous.

By way of contrast, the Mahatmas of the wisdom tradition are probably the ultimate antithesis of today's typical celebrity. Shunning the media spotlight, the Mahatmas quietly carry out their important work in anonymity. Among other things, they are said to possess profound wisdom. Have you ever pondered the attributes of a wise person? Over two thousand years ago, a warrior named Arjuna once did just that. In the second chapter of the Bhagavad Gita, he asked his charioteer, Krishna, "What are the characteristics of the sage who possesses ever calm wisdom? How does this sage of steady wisdom speak and sit and walk?"

Although he lived centuries after the writing of the Bhagavad Gita, the Roman statesman and writer Cicero knew the answer to Arjuna's question. In one of his essays, Cicero wrote, "The wise man is free from all those disturbances of the soul which I describe as passions; his heart is full of tranquil calm forever."

Knowledge alone will not quiet our restless hearts, nor will it provide the peace we so desperately seek in this troubled world. If peace of heart and mind were simply a function of more knowledge, anybody with a Ph.D. would be living a life of uninterrupted serenity.

Oliver Wendell Homes once said, "It is the province of knowledge to speak and it is the privilege of wisdom to listen." Have you noticed that a wise person is not overly talkative? More often than not they remain silent, while others tend to speak without weighing the effects and consequences of their words.

Whereas knowledge comes from without, wisdom arises from within, and its presence is facilitated by our ability to rise above our personal nature and engage in periods of quiet reflection and introspection.

David P. Bruce is the National Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America.