

Wisdom Writing

Notes made on reading Huston Smith biography 'Wisdomkeeper' (2015) and his 'Tales of Wonder' (2016).

Wisdom seems to be a combination of experience, reflection and emptying the mind so it can receive. This last is left deliberately vague. Receive what? What reality or God or the ineffable One deigns to give you.

If you like, it is a process involving a mixture of religion, philosophy, and scientific speculation grafted to intuition, mystical insight (this too is experience of the transcendent) and silence.

Is there a 'best mode' for expressing wisdom? Poetry for instance? Certainly and add to it the aphorism, clear or dense prose writing, music, other arts but also a well designed garden will do it, a mathematical proof, a perfectly played chess game or a life well lived most of all. Whatever works for you; or perhaps you do not choose – the mode is chosen for you.

The key thing which Huston Smith realised and clung to all his life is that there is more to reality than just a physical world as perceived by ourselves and our technology. He uses the analogy of a cross: the horizontal line represents the dimension of our time bound, physical-sequential existence; the vertical is the eternal, timeless, transcendent existence. We are beings who exist in both these dimensions. He believed that it was confirmed by mystical experience as well as reason.

Koan

In Zen Buddhism, a Koan is a way of confusing the mind into a state where it can break through or pass onto another level of understanding. You contemplate and try to resolve the koan. It is the process that is important; coming up with a viable answer is just a bonus.

What is the sound of one hand clapping?

George Eraclides says: It is a breeze (or if you want to be smarmy about it, which is anti-Zen) It's a breeze. Or more dignified: it is the wind, a gentle wind (breeze).

Imagine two hands about to clap then moving one aside – a breeze is the result the moving hand(s) make - where a clap would have been is the sound of a breeze.

Why does a Zen Master say that dogs cannot have Buddha-nature when the Buddha says even grass possess it?

George Eraclides answers: You may not have something yet you can still possess it; enlightenment (or satori) is possible for all; you and I, like the grass and a dog, may not have it but we can possess it.

'Put things aside and move forward' i.e. into your true nature.

'Turn your whole life into a life of gratitude.'

‘Set aside hatred, greed and delusion in order to be able to gain enlightenment.’

The last three quotes and most of above are from the ‘Huston Smith: Wisdomkeeper’ biography by Dana Sawyer, pp 110-112.

Being still, stilling your mind, in meditation in order to achieve a breakthrough – an experience of enlightenment or altered (higher) state(s) of consciousness is likened by GE to a hunter being as still and quiet as he can be in order to find and capture the prey. It wanders along into your stillness and you find it. Or perhaps it was always there and you did not see it (this latter is more Zen).

For anyone who is at all interested in spiritual matters or their own spiritual development, they must get and read the following book: ‘Huston Smith: Wisdomkeeper’ by Dana Sawyer, (2014), Fons Vitae (Publisher), Louisville KY., ISBN 978-1891785-290

It is the biography of Huston Smith, born 1919 and still alive (2016), a man who spent his life seeking answers to the most fundamental questions of human existence and himself the author of the classic work ‘The World’s Religions’. The writer has structured the biography in such a way that not only do you learn about Smith’s life but are also introduced to the most profound philosophies and religious ideas humanity has developed. It is also a finely written book and extremely readable: An extraordinary biography.

Also worthwhile is the shorter autobiography of Huston Smith ‘Tales of Wonder’. Highly recommended <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/4222760-tales-of-wonder>

Note that the quotes given by the insightful Mr Sawyer on p 113 of ‘Wisdomkeeper’ are deliberately sequenced: cry of hopelessness (because life is meaningless; Sartre); a plea for hope (from Nightwish, a Finnish Goth musical group); an explanation of what hope is (Vaclav Havel).

For instance:

‘Hope is an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. It is not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out’ – Vaclav Havel.

‘All revelation is summons and sending...’ It means that when you have a spiritual revelation, a meeting with God, it is a summons to you and then a sending of you forth into the world again, so that you can confirm there is meaning in the world (paraphrased from Martin Buber in his book I AND THOU).

‘The past is not dead, it is not even past.’ William Faulkner, *Intruder in the Dust*.

‘The Sailor cannot see the North – But knows the needle can.’ Emily Dickinson, poet, in *Selected Letters*.

‘We are all visitors to this time and place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home.’ Aboriginal Proverb, from Australia.

‘The more the pen writes the smoother the writing.’ (George Eraclides)