

## Experts Could Destroy Us

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"The fish in the water is silent, the animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the air is singing. But man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the earth, and the music of the air."

- Rabindranath Tagore

The Indian Nobel laureate would have known about such matters because he gained expertise in and respect for his work in many different specialties.

The silence of the sea? Recent studies have shown that where there are animals in the sea, the environment is certainly not silent. But he was not wrong. We have the ability to choose whether we enjoy the pacific calm of the top of the sea, which has been proven to have a tranquilizing effect on the nerves, or the realm under the surface that brings mystery, adventure and excitement as well as an abundance of sound.

The noise of the earth? Those who live in rural or wilderness areas find their ears assaulted by the noise of the city while city folks think nothing of the constant din. City people who visit the countryside, a remote park or wilderness find it remarkably peaceful and quiet, while rural people hear the noise of the birds, of distant engines, of small animals scruffling among the leaves, a veritable cacophony of sound.

The music of the air? Could Tagore have been referring to the songs of warblers and songbirds? I suspect he meant this metaphorically, referring to the human imagination and all that it can devise, perhaps while daydreaming on a sunny afternoon in a hammock.

Together Tagore's quote means that we humans have the ability to make of the natural world what we want, to use the skills of birds to fly, of aquatic mammals and fish to swim with relative ease, to be within the earthly environment whatever we want to be. Not to bend and hack at nature to cause it to do our bidding, but to learn from what we see to become greater than the environment into which we were born.

What most of us lack is the vision to make it happen. And the knowledge to understand the foundation on which we could build.

Gone are the days of the liberal arts education in college where young adults learned a smattering of many different arts and disciplines. Today students focus on one area of study so that they may have enough knowledge and skill to gain entry into the vocation of their choice.

Oddly, most will migrate from that vocation, often many times through their working and retirement years, making the original specific studies redundant. Few manage to gain a broad range of knowledge about the world around them. They believe they know what they need to know.

We have many people who have expertise in one or two areas, but are virtually ignorant about most others. In fact, a high school dropout will have more knowledge about the world around him (or have had more opportunity to learn it) by age 40 than the college graduate or postgrad who specialized. This may seem counterintuitive, but remember that the dropout had to make his way in the world without a specialty, diploma or degree.

As a result we have many people driving SUVs that pollute the planet more than most other vehicles, but that provide the kind of status symbol that the highly paid experts seek. We have landfills (dumps) filling with appliances (some which still work perfectly, but were no longer "suitable") that have been discarded by people who bought something "better." Most of them are built to be thrown away so they couldn't be fixed in order to save the natural resources that went into their manufacture.

We have people getting excited about global warming who have only a vague idea of the concept, but they have a thorough grasp of the effects that a global atmosphere of ten or more degrees higher will have on calving of the Antarctic icecap and the extinction of the Mongolian titmouse (I made that up--it's a metaphor). The facts that air pollutants are poisonous to humans, may give asthma to children or depress their natural intellect and may have devastating effects on the health of everyone during their lifetimes, for examples, are totally lost on them.

Heaven help the society that is filled with experts. It will be doomed to obscurity, like blindfolded mice constantly running a maze until they expire.

We need more people who don't go stupid once they get out of their work environment. We need people who understand, as did Tagore, that there is a balance to life. Most experts don't have it.

Experts are wonderful when you need someone with expertise in one particular area. They can be like rocks on a highway when you want to get somewhere--need to get somewhere--and they stand in the way because they believe they have sufficient expertise in all matters, even beyond their specific area.

Get most experts away from their areas of specialty and they are just as dumb as the rest of us. Except that they bring their hubris with them.

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