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## CASUALTY OF THE INFORMATION AGE?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

—T. S. Eliot, "The Rock"

We live in the so-called Information Age. Today, more books than ever are being published. In 2001, Canada alone published more than 53,000 books. Satellite and cable TV now provide a plethora of channels, whereas our grandparents somehow survived on only a handful of stations. The Internet allows us to scan the *London Times*, the *New York Times*, or virtually any newspaper around the world at the click of a mouse. While driving our car, we can listen to NPR, AP News, and a variety of talk shows from sports to gardening, from politics to investing. At home and in the office we receive a daily deluge of emails from friends, colleagues, and strangers. Where does it all end? And who has time to deal with all of it?

The glut of information provided by today's technology can easily overwhelm us if we are not careful. The practical person may wonder, "How much information do I really need?" The thoughtful person might ask, "What are the consequences of indiscriminately filling my mind with endless media chatter?" The Theosophist inquires, "Does this historically unprecedented access to information hinder or help my spiritual quest?"

These are questions that we have to answer for ourselves. We have to discover our own limits and vulnerabilities to the relentless media barrage, and we can only do this by careful self-observation in which we become aware of how the kaleidoscope of data affects our inner life. Are we able to remain centered and serene under most circumstances, or have we become agitated and distracted? Are we in touch with the spiritual side of life, or have we allowed our mind to become a playground for useless and frivolous sound bytes?

Theosophical literature provides some valuable guidelines that can help us to navigate this endless sea of information. For instance, *At the Feet of the Master* tells us to discriminate between "the important and the unimportant, the useful and the useless." *The Voice of the Silence* advises us to discern "the ever-fleeting from the ever-lasting." *Light on the Path* offers this paradoxical advice: "Listen only to the voice which is soundless." If much of today's media noise is inconsequential, ephemeral, and abrasively loud, what does that tell us?

To live a spiritual life, we need to be capable of experiencing deep inner stillness. To live our life wisely, we need time for quiet and thoughtful reflection. It will be difficult to experience inner peace and intuitive insights if our minds are consuming a constant and steady diet of media chatter. As the poetry of T.S. Eliot suggests, the loss of wisdom in this superficial and frenzied technological era may be the ultimate casualty of the Information Age.

David P. Bruce

Director of Education