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What We Seek (and What We Should Not)

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in voce **a.Steiner**

Abstract

An exploration of seeking without clinging to persona, drawing on Matthew 6, Qur'anic parallels, and rabbinical reflection.

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(Faculty Essay, Castalia Institute)

This essay is a faculty synthesis written in the voice of Rudolf Steiner. It is not a historical text and should not be attributed to the original author.

Introduction

In the Gospel of Matthew, we find these words: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." But what does it mean to seek? And what should we seek, and what should we not?

This question is not merely religious; it is fundamental to human flourishing. We are seeking creatures, always in motion, always looking for something: meaning, purpose, understanding, connection, fulfillment. But not all seeking is the same. Some seeking leads to growth, to understanding, to genuine fulfillment. Other seeking leads to attachment, to clinging, to the mistaken identification with roles and personae that we explored elsewhere in this issue.

This essay examines the nature of seeking, drawing on the wisdom traditions of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. It asks: what should we seek? And what should we not seek? And how do we seek without clinging, without mistaking the mask for the face, without becoming frozen in roles that no longer serve?

The Nature of Seeking

Seeking is fundamental to human nature. We are not static beings, content with what we have, but dynamic beings, always in motion, always looking for something more, something different, something better.

This seeking can take many forms. We seek knowledge, understanding, wisdom. We seek connection, love, community. We seek purpose, meaning, fulfillment. We seek security, comfort, stability. We seek recognition, status, identity.

Not all seeking is the same. Some seeking is outward, directed toward external objects, achievements, possessions. Other seeking is inward, directed toward understanding, growth, transformation. Some seeking is motivated by lack, by the sense that we are incomplete without

something. Other seeking is motivated by curiosity, by the desire to understand, to explore, to grow.

What We Should Seek

The wisdom traditions suggest that we should seek certain things: truth, justice, wisdom, understanding, connection with the divine, service to others. These are not external objects to be acquired, but qualities to be cultivated, relationships to be developed, ways of being to be embodied.

In Matthew 6, we are told to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. This is not a place to go or a thing to acquire, but a way of being, a relationship with the divine, a participation in a reality that transcends the purely material.

In the Qur'an, we find similar guidance: seek knowledge, seek justice, seek the path of righteousness. But this seeking is not acquisitive; it is transformative. We do not seek to possess, but to become, to grow, to align ourselves with what is true and good.

In rabbinical tradition, we find the concept of *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. This is not something we seek to acquire, but something we seek to participate in, to contribute to, to help bring about.

What We Should Not Seek

But the wisdom traditions also warn us about what we should not seek: the approval of others, the accumulation of possessions, the maintenance of false identities, the clinging to roles and personae that no longer serve.

In Matthew 6, we are warned not to seek the approval of others, not to perform our piety for public recognition, not to accumulate treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy. We are warned against seeking to maintain a persona, a mask, a role that we mistake for our true self.

In the Qur'an, we are warned against seeking the things of this world at the expense of the next, against seeking to accumulate wealth and status, against seeking to maintain false identities.

In rabbinical tradition, we are warned against seeking to be seen as righteous, against performing good deeds for recognition, against mistaking the mask of piety for genuine righteousness.

Seeking Without Clinging

The key is to seek without clinging. We can seek understanding, growth, connection, service—but we must not cling to the results, to the recognition, to the identity that these pursuits might give us.

This is difficult. It is natural to want recognition for our good deeds, to want to be seen as wise, to want to maintain an identity as a seeker, as someone who is on the path. But this wanting, this clinging, can become a trap. We can become attached to the persona of the seeker, to the role of the wise person, to the mask of the righteous.

The wisdom traditions suggest that we must seek, but we must also let go. We must pursue understanding, but we must not cling to being understood. We must serve others, but we must not cling to being recognized as a servant. We must seek truth, but we must not cling to being seen as a truth-seeker.

The Persona of the Seeker

This connects to the theme of persona explored elsewhere in this issue. We can become attached to the persona of the seeker, to the role of the wise person, to the mask of the righteous. We can mistake the mask for the face, the role for the reality, the persona for the person.

The wisdom traditions warn us against this. We must seek, but we must not become attached to being a seeker. We must pursue wisdom, but we must not become attached to being wise. We must serve others, but we must not become attached to being a servant.

This is not to say that we should not seek, or that seeking is wrong. It is to say that we must seek without clinging, without attachment, without mistaking the persona for the person.

The Integration of Seeking and Being

The goal is not to stop seeking, but to integrate seeking with being. We seek not to acquire something external, but to become something more, to grow, to align ourselves with what is true and good.

This seeking is not acquisitive; it is transformative. We do not seek to possess, but to become. We do not seek to acquire, but to grow. We do not seek to maintain a persona, but to transcend it.

This is the path of genuine inquiry: not to seek answers that we can possess, but to seek understanding that transforms us. Not to seek recognition that we can cling to, but to seek truth that sets us free.

Contemporary Implications

In contemporary life, we are surrounded by opportunities to seek: knowledge, status, recognition, identity. But we must be careful about what we seek, and how we seek it.

Do we seek understanding, or do we seek to be understood? Do we seek truth, or do we seek to be seen as a truth-seeker? Do we seek service, or do we seek to be recognized as a servant?

The distinction matters. When we seek to be understood, to be recognized, to be seen in a certain way, we are seeking to maintain a persona, to cling to an identity. When we seek understanding, truth, service, we are seeking something that transcends the persona, that goes beyond the mask.

Conclusion

What we seek, and what we should not seek, is a question that goes to the heart of human flourishing. We are seeking creatures, but not all seeking is the same. Some seeking leads to growth, to understanding, to genuine fulfillment. Other seeking leads to attachment, to clinging, to the mistaken identification with roles and personae.

The wisdom traditions suggest that we should seek truth, justice, wisdom, understanding, connection with the divine, service to others. But we should not seek the approval of others, the accumulation of possessions, the maintenance of false identities, the clinging to roles and personae that no longer serve.

The key is to seek without clinging, to pursue understanding without becoming attached to being understood, to serve without becoming attached to being recognized as a servant. This is the path of genuine inquiry: seeking that transforms rather than acquires, that grows rather than accumulates, that transcends the persona rather than maintaining it.

Faculty essays at Castalia Institute are authored, edited, and curated under custodial responsibility to ensure accuracy, clarity, and ethical publication.

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