Unity and Diversity

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Can we accept as a starting point that there is behind all life and form a unified consciousness existing within Silence and from this Unity or Oneness all manifest life appears in diverse ways and forms?

'Unity in diversity' has become a well-known phrase to express harmony and unity between dissimilar individuals or groups. It is a concept that shifts focus from Unity, based on a mere tolerance of differences, towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that difference enriches human interactions.

A related idea to Unity is Unanimity - *'of one soul'*. In the English language we use this word to describe when a disparate group of people agree with a certain proposition. It is sometimes difficult to reach this state of unanimity because of the diversity of opinions involved. Working through the options to achieve positive unanimity will require all participants to make an effort to understand the opinions of those with opposing views and in a spirit of goodwill, seek a compromise to achieve Unanimity.

It is interesting to look at the word 'compromise' - defined as *"to make a mutual promise"*, and then to ask how do we define *'a promise'*? - and this can be defined as, *"that which affords a basis for hope or expectation of future excellence"* - so together a com - promise is *"that agreement which together with others affords a basis for hope or expectation of future excellence"*. We can see how close this meaning is to Unanimity, defined as a group agreement but not just an agreement but with the hope of future excellence. So there is a quality of aspiration and creative potential in this word 'Unanimity'.

Uniformity, defined as *'of one form'*, is another word related to Unity. It has the connotation of sameness or alikeness. Uniformity has its uses in our world in respect of clothing and identification, for example in a hospital, without some kind of uniform for the workers and medical staff it would be difficult for patients to work out who to talk with or listen to. The armed services, the Fire Service and the Police rely on uniforms for reasons of clarity, identity and obedience to the chain of command in life and death situations.

Over the past 70 years or so our Western societies have developed and advertised many commercial brands for consumption and this has led to a uniformity all over the world where certain types of foods, drinks, clothing, accessories, electrical goods and cars are universally known and consumed. This has often been to the detriment of local products in different countries, thus diversity of choice has been nullified in the face of this overwhelming force of international corporate capitalism or Globalism. This has flattened out, sterilised and homogenised our cultures.

A related idea to Uniformity is 'Standardisation' which brings a uniformity to various activities and products in the interests of safety and 'quality assurance' as it is often described. This has developed due to industrialised mass processes replacing local knowledge and traditional skill. An example of this would be contrasting the skill of a carpenter from 1900 who could look at a plank of timber and be able to tell from its shape, smell and flexibility, whether it would be able to span a particular distance in the construction of a floor. A contemporary carpenter, by contrast, is not allowed to have an opinion on a floor joist, he must use a piece of timber based on standardised factors. There is little skill called for and the size of the timber is far larger and heavier than that used by the carpenter of 100 years ago. Standardisation gives us safety, cheaper prices and reduced risk at the expense of efficiency, craft skill and local knowledge.

We can see that in the world of forms there are sound but limited reasons to recommend the concepts of Uniformity and Standardisation and also reasons to question their usefulness when it's to the detriment of diversity, individual skill and creativity. Returning to the idea of Unanimity which relates to decision-making at many levels of society. We can agree that it is not easy to achieve but it does signify a precious harmony of intention so needed today in modern life.

There is another idea that is expressed in the word 'Spontaneity', and seems to sit comfortably alongside Diversity. The definition of Spontaneity is from Latin '*sponte*' - "of one's own accord, willingly". There is something really beautiful about this quality of an individual or a group producing something freely out of their own natural genius or creativity. Finding ways to help people of all ages to become more spontaneous, playful and creative would certainly help to redress the balance of our over reliance on uniformity and standardisation in our modern world.

These ideas of freedom, spontaneity and diversity are at the foundations of the political movement of Anarchism, which flowered in the 19th century - one of the most prominent proponents of this philosophy was Mikhail Bakunin, who wrote this in a letter to a friend in 1872 which I think goes to the crux of this issue;

"I will never tire of repeating it: Uniformity is death. Diversity is life. The disciplinary unity that can only be established in any social milieu to the detriment of spontaneous creativity and life, kills nations. The living, truly powerful unity, the unity we all want, is that which liberty creates in the very heart of the free and diverse manifestations of life, expressing itself through struggle: it is the balancing and harmonisation of all living forces."