



# Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

August 2024

## Wisdom

## Wisdom Story



Solon of Athens, Periander of Corinth, Cleobulus of Lindos, Chilon of Sparta, Bias of Priene, and Pittacus of Mytilene. They were valued for their philosophical insight, practical wisdom, and moral maxims.

### Introduction to Wisdom

The etymology of the word wisdom does not give particular insight into what it is or how we can acquire it. The word is rooted in Old English and refers to “knowledge, learning, and experience.” To be sure, all three are fundamental to acquiring wisdom, but wisdom appears to be so much more. Going back further, wisdom, along with other words, has the Proto-Indo-European root, \*weid-, which means “to see.”

This seeing involved the eyes, mind, and heart. Historically, the sage had such vision. A sage refers to wise men of profound wisdom, to serious philosophers. Originally, there were Seven Sages in ancient Greece who were renowned for wisdom—Thales of Miletus,

Relative to women, the Muses were the nine goddesses of the arts and sciences in Greek mythology, led by Calliope, the oldest and wisest who inspired authors of epic poetry and orators seeking eloquence. There were also women known for their wisdom, including the Oracle of Delphi, Sappho of Lesbos, Diotima of Mantinea, Aspasia of Miletus, Hypatia of Alexandria, and Arete of Cyrene. While originally a derogatory term, the word *kronos* has been revalued by feminism and neo-paganism and is now a symbol of mature female wisdom and power.

The above recitation illustrates the value placed on wisdom in Ancient Greece, where *Sophia* was a personification representing divine wisdom and understanding. This focus was not es-

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### Anansi and the Clay Pot

In the time before time, the people struggled. They survived by picking berries and other fruit in order to live. They did not know how to build huts for shelter, weave cloth to make clothes, make farming tools in order to grow food, or even make fire. They were miserable and complained constantly.

Anansi, the spider, was known as a trickster. He wove webs in all kinds of shapes. Some would look like food like a squash or a cornstalk. Hungry, the people would grab at the “plant,” only for the web to collapse in air.



Anansi, who was very curious, traveled far and wide around. And because he paid attention, he learned a great deal. He knew more than the people, but he did not know everything. He did know someone who had all the knowledge and wisdom, and that was Nyame, the God of heaven. In the Akan language of Ghana, Nyame means “the one who knows and sees everything.” The moon represented Nyame’s female side, and the sun represented his male side. Nyame was Anansi’s father.

Anansi would often visit Nyame. While there, he would try to get near Nyame’s clay pot because that is where Nyame kept all the knowledge and wisdom. One day, Nyame decided to give Anansi the clay pot if Anansi shared the

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Wisdom & Reimagining the Common Good

Reimagining the Common Good through the lens of wisdom involves applying ethical principles, empathy, and long-term thinking to create a society where everyone can thrive. By fostering interconnectedness, promoting justice and equity, supporting lifelong learning, and nurturing environmental stewardship, wisdom offers a powerful framework for addressing complex social challenges and enhancing collective well-being. It is only with this wisdom that we can begin to imagine a good that is both common and uncommon, but wisdom alone will not make it so. Through intentional action and thoughtful leadership, we can harness the power of wisdom to build a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world.

### A Theme-Based Ministry Project

*This project is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations.*

## Reimagining the Common Good

## Share Wisdom

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

knowledge and wisdom with everyone.

Anansi took the pot. Every time he lifted the top and looked in, he got more excited about what he saw and learned. Anansi decided that he would not share what was in the clay pot with the people. But where to hide it? Anansi wanted to hide the clay pot at the top of a tree in a web that would hold it to a branch hidden by leaves. He chose a huge, 2,000-year-old Baobab tree.

Anansi started climbing, but holding onto the pot he kept sliding down.

His daughter was outside watching Anansi struggle. "Father," she said, "you should tie the pot to your back so all of your legs are free for climbing?"

Anansi considered what she said and finally agreed that doing so was best. But he was not happy. He, Anansi, who had the clay pot with all the knowledge and wisdom in the world, did not need to take advice from a child. But he did. He spun enough strands to braid a rope and tie the pot to his back. Anansi began to climb, and now it was easy. Up he went, but the higher he climbed, the madder he became.

When Anansi reached the top, he untied the clay pot, but his anger overwhelmed him, and he threw the clay pot to the ground. Down, down, down it went. When the clay pot hit the ground, it shattered into pieces, releasing all the knowledge and wisdom in the world, which began flowing outward in a thousand streams in a thousand directions. It all went here, there, and everywhere. All the people got some knowledge and some wisdom, but no one could get it all. It meant that people had to share in order to learn enough to make clothes, grow food, create fires on which to cook, and so much more.

Looking down from the heavens, Nyame just smiled. He knew his son and knew he was selfish. Anansi had done just what he expected. He was the one who was tricked. Now, people have knowledge and wisdom, but they have to share them to live well.

Source: Touchstones

## Greatest Virtue

### Lakota Wisdom

Joseph M. Marshall III

In the Lakota encampments of old, the biggest and tallest lodge stood in the very center of the encampment. There the elders met.

The oldest men in the village formed the council of elders. There was one basic requirement: Obviously, one had to be old.

Try to imagine the number of years of experience represented by the village council. Depending on the size of the village, this could vary from hundreds to thousands of years. Yet, the council had no authority. As a matter of fact, there really is no word for *authority* in the Lakota language. So, how did the council of elders fulfill its responsibility?

The council of elders fulfilled its responsibility through the power of the influence of their wisdom.



Various matters of concern and importance were brought to the council—from everyday life issues to matters of war. Every issue was discussed at length, sometimes for several days and nights. At the end, the council didn't issue ultimatums or edicts. They simply informed the people what they thought. That opinion, or opinions, was the basis for action because of the depth of the council's wisdom.

The Lakota consider fortitude, generosity, bravery, and wisdom to be the four greatest virtues. ...Wisdom is not only the greatest of the four, it is also the most difficult to achieve. ...It is, many also realize, a gift they cannot keep to themselves. It must be given back to life.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/21855>

## Wings & Wisdom

### Expressing Wisdom

Jane Vennard

Wisdom seems to defy description, but we tend to know it when we see or hear it. We are acutely aware of the wisdom and the accompanying humility we experience in others. Being in their presence often gives rise to the longing to possess such wisdom for ourselves, and we begin to search for it, always believing wisdom lies somewhere beyond us. Poet Mark Nepo describes the outcome of his search: "I wanted to become wise, but after much travel and study, it was during my bedridden days with cancer that I realized I was already wise. I just didn't know the language of my wisdom."

I don't think that Nepo is referring to words when he writes of the "language of wisdom." I believe he is implying that one's wisdom is not expressed through words but rather through the language of being. Who he is and how he lives are the expression of his wisdom. Therefore, we cannot find wisdom beyond ourselves or teach another how to be wise, but we can create the space for our wisdom and the wisdom of others to be revealed.

In the Zen Buddhist tradition, it is believed that teachers cannot teach their students how to wake up; they can only provide the wings of awakening. I imagine this ...applies to wisdom as well.... I think these words are synonymous. As teachers, we need to recognize that teaching the wings of awakening is what the sacred art of teaching is all about.



Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/27998>

# Readings from the Common Bowl



**Day 1:** "Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many ... know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it."

There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom."  
Charles Spurgeon

**Day 2:** "Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad." Brian O'Driscoll

**Day 3:** "We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us." Marcel Proust

**Day 4:** "Our shared values define us more than our differences. And acknowledging those shared values can see us through our challenges today if we have the wisdom to trust in them again." John McCain

**Day 5:** "The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom." Isaac Asimov

**Day 6:** "There's a beauty to wisdom and experience that cannot be faked. It's impossible to be mature without having lived." Amy Grant

**Day 7:** "Before you become too entranced with gorgeous gadgets and mesmerizing video displays, let me remind you that information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, and wisdom is not foresight. Each grows out of the other, and we need them all." Arthur C. Clarke

**Day 8:** "They will envy you for your success, your wealth, for your intelligence, for your looks, for your status but rarely for your wisdom." Nassim Nicholas Taleb

**Day 9:** "When Don Quixote went out into the world, that world turned into a mystery before his eyes. That is the legacy of the first European novel to the entire subsequent history of the novel. The novel teaches us to comprehend the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude." Milan Kundera

**Day 10:** "I was tired of seeing the Graces always depicted as beautiful young things. I think wisdom comes with age and life and pain. And knowing what matters." Louise Penny

**Day 11:** "When we walk out of our boundaries, we find out that knowledge is not a completion or a windfall, but a long process of revisions or adjustments. Likewise, we recognize that wisdom results from the painful filtering of experiences we collect on the bumpy path of life." Erik Pevernagie

**Day 12:** "Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time." Jon Kabat-Zinn

**Day 13:** "To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is wisdom." Ralph Waldo Emerson

**Day 14:** "You can never know everything. Part of what you know is always wrong. Perhaps the most important part. A portion of wisdom lies in knowing that. A portion of knowledge lies in going on anyway." Robert Jordan

**Day 15:** "There are times when wisdom cannot be found in the chambers of parliament or the halls of academia but at the unpretentious setting of the kitchen table." E.A. Bucchianeri

**Day 16:** "There is so much noise on the Internet, with would-be prophets daily haranguing their audience and megalomaniacs trying to push bizarre ideas, that eventually people will cherish a new commodity: wisdom." Michio Kaku

**Day 17:** "If it's knowledge and wisdom you want, then seek out the company of those who do real work for an honest purpose." Edward Abbey

**Day 18:** "Wisdom tends to grow in proportion to one's awareness of one's ignorance." Anthony de Mello

**Day 19:** "Wisdom says we are nothing. Love says we are everything. Between these two our life flows." Jack Kornfield

**Day 20:** "Wisdom is being able to see the world for what it is, rather than what you

want it to be." Patrick F. Rooney

**Day 21:** "Empathy nurtures wisdom. Apathy cultivates ignorance." Suzy Kassem

**Day 22:** "By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest." Confucius

**Day 23:** "Turn your wounds into wisdom." Oprah Winfrey

**Day 24:** "The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind." Khalil Gibran

**Day 25:** "Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk." Doug Larson



**Day 26:** "Every ... [person] is a damn fool for at least five minutes every day; wisdom consists in not exceeding the limit." Elbert Hubbard

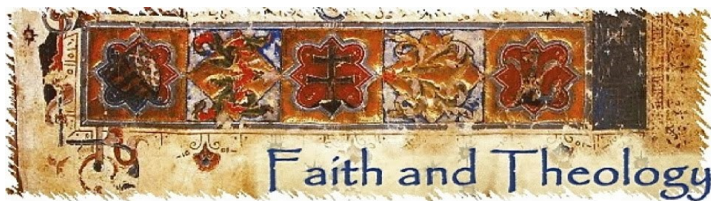
**Day 27:** "Age is a hell of a price to pay for wisdom." George Carlin

**Day 28:** "Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself." Khalil Gibran

**Day 29:** "To acquire knowledge, one must study; but to acquire wisdom, one must observe." Marilyn vos Savant

**Day 30:** "Wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age. Sometimes age just shows up all by itself." Tom Wilson

**Day 31:** "We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom." E. O. Wilson



### Narrative

**Wisdom:** Valuing Love and Pluralism, narrative wisdom employs stories, parables, and narratives to convey moral and

## A Liberal Theology of Wisdom

A liberal theology of wisdom embodies an inclusive approach rooted in the values of Love, Interdependence, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Generosity, and Justice. One way to explore this theology is through the domains of wisdom: prophetic, contemplative, practical, narrative, and ecological. These five are not exhaustive, but they express the depth and breadth of wisdom in our faith.

**Prophetic Wisdom:** Grounded in our values of Justice and Equity, prophetic wisdom calls for a commitment to social transformation. It draws inspiration from prophetic figures, both historical and contemporary, who challenge societal norms and advocate for systemic change. This wisdom emphasizes active engagement in social justice issues, standing up against oppression, building the common good, and working towards a more just and compassionate world. The teachings and actions of figures like Theodore Parker, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and James Luther Adams within our history exemplify this type of wisdom.

**Contemplative Wisdom:** Drawing on our values of Love and Transformation, contemplative wisdom is informed by meditation and other spiritual practices. It values harmony, and seeks inner transformation and connection with the divine, however it is understood. Cultivating contemplative wisdom fosters personal growth and a deeper understanding of one's place in the interconnected web of all existence.

**Practical Wisdom:** The ancient Greeks valued practical wisdom, which they called *phronesis*. It was concerned with practical action and implied excellent character and good judgment. We root Practical Wisdom in Interdependence and Equity. Involving ethical decision-making and the application of moral principles in everyday life, practical wisdom emphasizes discernment and the ability to navigate complex moral landscapes.

spiritual truths. Recognizing the power of storytelling in shaping beliefs and values, our tradition draws on a rich tapestry of narratives from diverse traditions to illustrate ethical and spiritual lessons. This wisdom celebrates the diversity of human experience and fosters empathy and understanding through shared stories.

**Ecological Wisdom:** Rooted in Justice, Interdependence, and Generosity, Ecological Wisdom highlights the interconnectedness of all life. It draws on the imperative of environmental stewardship, which is grounded in generosity. Integrating theological insights with ecological science, we advocate for sustainable and respectful care of the Earth. This wisdom calls for actions that promote environmental sustainability.

A liberal theology of wisdom is inclusive, embracing a wide range of religious, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. This is reflected in the six sources upon which Unitarian Universalism has drawn. Wisdom is not the province of any gender, race, religion, culture, identity, or intellectual tradition.

Our pursuit of wisdom emphasizes rational inquiry and critical thinking, yet we also rely on intuition and emotional intelligence, as well as the authority of our own experience. The pursuit of wisdom is a multifaceted endeavor that goes beyond intellectual capabilities. Some refer to the role of common sense, which often in its insight is quite uncommon.

A liberal theology of wisdom supports the individual pursuit of wisdom while emphasizing the role of our congregations in fostering life-long learning and the collective pursuit of wisdom. Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker writes that wisdom is "an achievement of life together in human communities that foster astute attention to life in the present, that celebrate beauty and goodness, and that resist evil." We not only acquire wisdom but act according to its dictates.

Source: Touchstones

## 7th Generation

### True Wisdom: Head & Heart

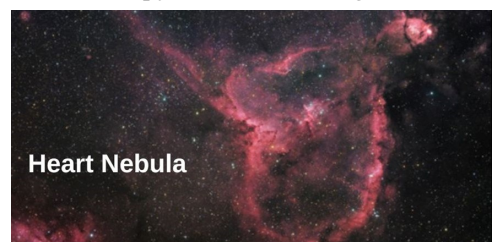
Jane Goodall

Wisdom involves using our powerful intellect to recognize the consequences of our actions and to think of the well-being of the whole. Unfortunately... we have lost the long-term perspective, and we are suffering from an absurd and very unwise belief that there can be unlimited economic development on a planet of finite natural resources, focusing on short-term results or profits at the expense of long-term interests.

The hallmark of wisdom is asking, "What effects will the decision I make today have on future generations? On the health of the planet?" ...

A great deal of our onslaught on Mother Nature is not really lack of intelligence but a lack of compassion for future generations and the health of the planet: sheer selfish greed for short-term benefits to increase the wealth and power of individuals, corporations, and governments. The rest is due to thoughtlessness, lack of education, and poverty. In other words, there seems to be a disconnect between our clever brain and our compassionate heart. True wisdom requires both thinking with our head and understanding with our heart. ...

Shakespeare says it beautifully when he talks of seeing "books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything." I get a sense of all of this when I stand transfixed, filled with wonder and awe at some glorious sunset, or the sun shining through the forest canopy while a bird sings, or when



Heart Nebula

I lie on my back in some quiet place and look up and up and up into the heavens as the stars gradually emerge from the fading of day's light.

Source: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2021/12/26/jane-goodall-book-of-hope-wisdom/>

## Teaching Wisdom

Teaching children wisdom involves more than just imparting knowledge; it requires fostering skills, attitudes, and values that prepare them to navigate life thoughtfully and compassionately.

Through intentional practices and supportive environments, we can guide children in becoming wise individuals who contribute to society. They need

- ◆ **Understanding:** Knowing why things happen and how they work.
- ◆ **Kindness:** Being nice and helping others.
- ◆ **Patience:** Waiting calmly and not getting upset when things take time.
- ◆ **Curiosity:** Wanting to learn and know more about the world.
- ◆ **Honesty:** Telling the truth and being fair.
- ◆ **Courage:** Doing the right thing even when it's hard.
- ◆ **Respect:** Treating others the way you want to be treated.
- ◆ **Sharing:** Letting others have some of what you have.
- ◆ **Helping:** Doing things for others to make their lives easier.
- ◆ **Listening:** Paying attention to what others are saying and thinking.
- ◆ **Thinking:** Using your mind to solve problems and make decisions.
- ◆ **Learning:** Getting new information and skills.
- ◆ **Love:** Caring for people, animals, and the world around you.
- ◆ **Fairness:** Treating everyone equally and not taking sides.
- ◆ **Forgiveness:** Letting go of anger and being friends after a disagreement.
- ◆ **Responsibility:** Doing the things you are supposed to do and taking care of yourself and others.
- ◆ **Friendship:** Being a good friend and making new friends.
- ◆ **Empathy:** Understanding how someone else feels and caring about their feelings.
- ◆ **Gratitude:** Being thankful for what you have.
- ◆ **Cooperation:** Working together with others to achieve a common goal.

In the end, wisdom is the outcome of these qualities, experiences in life, and reflecting in response to all of the above.

Source: Touchstones



## Family Activity: Finding Wisdom

The book *The Wise Woman and Her Secret* by Eve Merriam, Author & Linda Graves, illustrator (1991), offers insight into how wisdom is obtained. This story unfolds slowly, even though all of the town's people are in a hurry to find wisdom. They go to the Wise Woman and demand that she tell them where to find wisdom. She refuses, and they look everywhere, but they can't find it. Jenny, a young girl, wants to find wisdom, but she is not in a hurry. Instead, she inspects this and that as she wanders and wonders. In the end, she finds wisdom. Read or watch this at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWJmx5owSeM> (11:63 from 1:47 to 13:10), then discuss the story.

Consider these questions. How was Jenny different than the town's people? What did Jenny find along the way and what did she do with those things? Is wisdom a slow thing or a fast thing? What is the wise woman's secret? What questions could Jenny ask about each of the things she found: pebbles, a feather, a twig with a spider web, a twig with berries from a blackthorn tree, and a penny?

Source: Touchstones



## Reflections on Wisdom

Wise people generally share an optimism that life's problems can be solved and experience a certain amount of calm in facing difficult decisions. Intelligence may be necessary for wisdom, but it definitely isn't sufficient; an ability to see the big picture, a sense of proportion, ...and considerable introspection also contribute to its development.

Wisdom can be acquired only through experience, but ...experience does not automatically confer wisdom.

Wisdom encompasses cognitive components, such as knowledge and experience, reflective components, ...and prosocial components, meaning benevolence and compassion. Wisdom is also connected to abilities such as perspective-taking, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility.

Many people believe wisdom comes from advanced age, but the reality is more complex. ...Old age doesn't seem to be necessary or sufficient for wisdom—what matters more may be the motivation to pursue its development.

Difficult experiences certainly have the potential for growth—but they don't automatically confer wisdom. Wisdom is acquired only by learning from the experience. ...

Wisdom largely emerges from reflection on past experience. Wise people incorporate past observations and opinions into a more nuanced style of thinking—considering multiple perspectives rather than black and white options. Being open to new ways of thinking, essentially challenging the status quo, can be a hallmark of wisdom and help to cultivate it.

Balance is also a key component. Wise people generally act on behalf of the common good but also ensure that their own needs are met, striving for harmony among competing demands and goals. Wise people also seek to understand the motives of others, rather than merely judge their behavior. In addition to fostering understanding and respect of others, wisdom can provide a fulfilling sense of purpose.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/wisdom>

# Our Wisdom Tradition

# Imagine Wisdom

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to the Theme**  
teric. The Greeks were interested in practical wisdom that they could apply to their lives.

With our contemporary emphasis on materialism, prestige, and power, it is hard to see where wisdom ranks as a value. This tension is not new. Consider T.S. Eliot. Born into the Eliot family of St. Louis, a famous Unitarian family, he moved to England in 1914, and joined the Church of England and became a British citizen in 1927. In his 1934 play, *The Rock*, T.S. Eliot lamented the loss of wisdom. This one-act play was a pageant written to raise money to build churches in the Diocese of London. It consists of ten

scenes interspersed with choruses in the style of ancient Greek plays. In the first Chorus, Eliot famously wrote, "The endless cycle of idea and action, / Endless

invention, endless experiment, / Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness; / Knowledge of speech, but not of silence; / Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word. / All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance, / All our ignorance brings us nearer to death, / But nearness to death no nearer to God / Where is the Life we have lost in living? Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? / Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" He mourned that we were so close to death but so far from wisdom.

It seems that regard for wisdom remains low today because society emphasizes things like information, novelty, and instant gratification while valuing ambition, short-term results, and material success. These mitigate against wisdom, which involves a deeper, integrative understanding that requires time, reflection, discernment, and ethical judgment.

The wisdom deficit that pervades

society increases the likelihood of negative consequences. It leads to a decline in the quality of public discourse, poor decision-making, impulsive actions, and a decline in ethics and morals, including a loss of integrity. This has resulted in polarization, intolerance, and social fragmentation. Wisdom's ability to see different perspectives and find common ground is lost. Too often, we realize the need for wisdom when it is too late.

Wisdom is more than just information or knowledge, although it needs both. It encompasses deep understanding, sound judgment, ethical considerations, and practical application. It is gained through experi-



ence and reflection, and it involves applying insights in a way that promotes well-being and harmony.

Wisdom is enigmatic. Sometimes, it is gained through a disciplined search, but other times, it emerges serendipitously. Wisdom, like great art, beauty, and love, is hard to define. It is something we will know when we see it. Occasionally, wisdom can be received from others, but most often, we discover it along our journey of life. Because it involves the distillation of so many things, if we manage to accumulate half a cup of wisdom in a lifetime of living, we should consider ourselves fortunate.

The quest for wisdom involves a number of things, which is why its acquisition is not easy or quick. It begins with curiosity, as Annie Dillard wrote, "Our original intent, which is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover at least where it is that we have been so startlingly set down, if we can't learn why."

Wisdom requires open-mindedness. It means being receptive to different viewpoints and taking seriously things that we do not believe to be true or that challenge us.

## Wisdom Beyond Hunches

Toni Morrison

In all of our education, whether it's in institutions or not, in homes or streets or wherever, whether it's scholarly or whether it's experiential, there is a kind of a progression. We move from data to information to knowledge to wisdom. And separating one from the other, being able to distinguish among and between them, that is, knowing the limitations and the danger of exercising one without the others, while respecting each category of intelligence, is generally what serious education is about. And if we agree that purposeful progression exists, then you will see... that it's easy, and it's seductive, to assume that data is really knowledge. Or that information is, indeed, wisdom. Or that knowledge can exist without data. And how easy, and how effortlessly, one can parade and disguise itself as another. And how quickly we can forget that wisdom without knowledge, wisdom without any data, is just a hunch. ...

[I had read] the historical books... I had read the autobiographies of the slaves themselves and therefore had firsthand information from people who were there. You add that to my own intuition, and you can see the shape of my confidence and the trap that it would lead me into, which would be confusing data with information and knowledge with hunches and so on. I thought I knew a great deal about it. And that arrogance was the first obstacle.

What I needed was imagination to shore up the facts, the data, and not be overwhelmed by them. Imagination that personalized information, made it intimate, but didn't offer itself as a substitute. If imagination could be depended on for that, then there was the possibility of knowledge. Wisdom, of course, I would leave alone, and rely on the readers to produce that.

Source: <https://www.themarginalian.org/2019/03/06/the-source-of-self-regard-toni-morrison-wisdom-information/>

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## Demand Wisdom

### Shortage of Wisdom

Jerry Ortiz y Pino

[Wisdom is] one of those slightly old-fashioned words, the type that slip out of style because they sound less punchy

than the jargon we start using in their place. In time we forget about using it at all. And because the words



we substitute aren't quite the same, we're made poorer by the substitutions, losing slices of the original meaning with each change.

So wisdom, good ol' *sapientiae* in Latin, hardly ever gets airtime these days. Instead, we talk about "cleverness," "I.Q.," "managerial know-how," or any of 50 not-quite synonyms. None of those really are interchangeable with wisdom, but they get used in its place. Meanwhile, wisdom, the original concept, is forgotten.

[Wisdom is] the ability to make sound choices, good decisions. The best decision. Wisdom is intelligence shaped by experience. Information softened by understanding. And it is in very short supply these days.

Wisdom is not something a person is born with. Intelligence is. Cleverness is. The ability to appear dynamic is. But Wisdom isn't. It only comes from living, from making mistakes—or from listening to others who have made mistakes and learned from them.

If wisdom is in short supply among our leaders, we don't have far to look for the culprits. It started disappearing along about the time we stopped expecting it.

Source: *Notary Public* by Jerry Ortiz y Pino, *Santa Fe Reporter*, October 19, 1994

## Teaching us to live

### Kitchen Table Wisdom

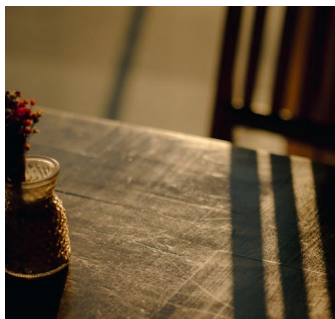
Rachel Naomi Remen

Everybody is a story. When I was a child, people sat around kitchen tables and told their stories. ...Sitting around the table telling stories is not just a way of passing time. It is the way the wisdom gets passed along. The stuff that helps us to live a life worth remembering.

...Real stories take time. We stopped telling stories when we started to lose that sort of time, pausing time, reflecting time, wondering time. ...Most often, something unforeseen stops us and it is only then we have the time to take a seat at life's kitchen table.

...After we stop, we see that certain of life's issues will be with us for as long as we live. We will pass through them again and again, each time with a new story, each time with a greater understanding, until they become indistinguishable from our blessings and our wisdom. It's the way life teaches us how to live.

...The kitchen table is a level playing field. Everyone's story matter. The wisdom in the story of the most educated and powerful person is often not greater than the wisdom in the story of a child, and the life of a child can



teach us as much as the life of a sage.

... Stories allow us to see something

familiar through new eyes. We become in that moment a guest in someone else's life, and together with them sit at the feet of their teacher. The meaning we may draw from someone's story may be different from the meaning they themselves have drawn. No matter. Facts bring us to knowledge, but stories lead to wisdom.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16128>

## Least Expected

(Continued from page 6) **Intro to the Theme**

In this pursuit, our open-mindedness is tempered by critical thinking and our ability to analyze information, question assumptions, and evaluate arguments. Getting to wisdom without being open-minded and being able to think critically is very difficult, if not impossible.

Self-awareness is also important. It is taking critical thinking inward to engage our assumptions, biases, and limitations, as well as our strengths.

Empathy helps us engage people thoughtfully and compassionately; otherwise, it is impossible to engage their wisdom.

The pursuit of wisdom requires intellectual humility, the willingness to admit what we don't know and to recognize when we are wrong.



Wisdom often takes time to cultivate; therefore, patience is required. We seldom see wisdom up ahead as we come around the bend. More often, we see it in the rearview mirror among all the things that we have previously considered.

Reflection is necessary to help us further consider, evaluate, and integrate our experience, learning, and insight and apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

Discernment is also required. It involves the ability to judge well, to perceive nuances, and to make thoughtful decisions based on careful consideration of facts, context, and potential outcomes.

Wisdom is a universal quality that transcends class, education, occupation, and many other categories that we use to define our similarities and differences. It is accessible to anyone willing to learn from their experiences, engage in reflection, and apply critical thinking and ethical considerations. And often, if we are open and listen, we find wisdom where it is least expected.

# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion

### Wisdom

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of *Explorations* and the questions.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “Wisdom is a state of the total being, in which capacities for knowledge and for love, for survival and for death, for imagination, inspiration, intuition, for all the fabulous functioning of this human being who we are, come into a center with their forces, come into an experience of meaning that can voice itself as wise action.”  
*M.C. Richards*

**Chalice Lighting:** (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.* (James Vila Blake)

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments after each to invite reflection.

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** “We walk the shoreline of life day by day, and sometimes the experience will catch our attention and demand to be noticed, like some beautiful shell that startles us with a reflection of how beautiful our own souls can be, or a piece of wreckage that refuses to let us forget how broken we are. The daily journey of life brings its own nuggets of wisdom.” *Margaret Silf*

## Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Can you recall a moment in your life when you felt particularly wise? What was the situation, and what did you do that demonstrated wisdom?
2. Who is the wisest person you know, and why do you consider them wise?
3. Was wisdom a value that you were raised with? If yes, how? What are some of the ways that we might help children value acquiring wisdom?
4. How do you balance intuition and rational thought in making wise decisions?
5. In what ways do you think wisdom is related to justice and fairness?
6. What role do you believe wisdom plays in leadership?
7. How does wisdom help you navigate difficult times?
8. What role does failure play in the development of wisdom?
9. What advice would you give to someone seeking to become wiser?
10. Wisdom does not seem to be valued by society today? Why? What role can UU congregations play in valuing and cultivating wisdom?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

## Closing Words

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

# Wisdom/Courage

## Knowing How to Prune

*Wayne Muller*

Every year, in early spring, our friend Molly comes.... It is ...time ...to prune our fruit trees, and Molly is the only one who can do it. She has a particular wisdom, an uncanny ability to see the tree that will grow out of the tree that now is. When she sees this, she is able without hesitation to cut from the tree what simply must go....

Every year, as I cook dinner on the grill in the backyard, I argue with Molly as she moves from tree to tree. “You’re cutting too much,” I always protest. I am afraid she will take more than the tree can do without, and it will not grow. She, of course, understands that things often grow taller and stronger with less, not more. This is something I still have trouble accepting completely, although I understand it conceptually. But Molly knows this for a fact. And so she cuts and cuts, leaving a trim, firm shape behind. Sometimes she leaves a little extra, just for me. The tree doesn’t need it, she insists; it is just so I won’t get so upset.

...Knowing what to cut—this is wisdom. Being clear and strong enough to make the cut when it is time for things to go—this is courage.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/18445>

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