

Wisdom

Epiphany and Enlightenment

Session 1: Starting the Conversation
The Rev. John Elliott Lein — January 12, 2020

Wisdom

1. Definition of *wisdom*

- 1.1. ability to discern inner qualities and relationships:
INSIGHT
 - 1.2. good sense: JUDGMENT
 - 1.3. generally accepted belief
“challenges what has become accepted wisdom among many historians” — Robert Darnton
 - 1.4. accumulated philosophical or scientific learning:
KNOWLEDGE
2. a wise attitude, belief, or course of action
 3. the teachings of the ancient wise men

In Scripture

The term "Sapiential Books" or "Books of Wisdom" is used in biblical studies to refer to a subset of the books of the Hebrew Bible in the Septuagint translation. There are seven of these books, namely the books of:

- Psalms (some of them)
- Proverbs
- Job
- Ecclesiastes

- The Song of Songs (Song of Solomon)
- The Book of Wisdom
- Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)

Psychology

“Wisdom is one of those qualities that is difficult to define—because it encompasses so much—but which people generally recognize when they encounter it. And it is encountered most obviously in the realm of decision-making.

Psychologists tend to agree that wisdom involves an integration of knowledge, experience, and deep understanding that incorporates tolerance for the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs. There's an awareness of how things play out over time, and it confers a sense of balance.

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—if only anyone could figure out exactly what it is—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 by itself, experience does not automatically confer wisdom. Researchers are probing the social, emotional, and cognitive processes that transmute experience into wisdom.

Numerous theories have now emerged:

- wisdom as expertise derived from five key components (rich procedural knowledge, rich factual knowledge, an understanding of different life contexts, an awareness of the relativism of values and priorities, and the ability to recognize and manage uncertainty).
- develop wisdom as personality characteristics encompassing reflection, compassion, and the pursuit of truth.
- wisdom as balance—balance between oneself and others so that actions are directed at the common good.

How Do You Gain Wisdom?

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 status quo, can be a hallmark of wisdom and help cultivate it.

Balance is also a key component of wisdom. 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.

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

Epiphany

Middle English *epiphanie*, from Anglo-French, from Late Latin *epiphania*, from Late Greek, plural, probably alteration of Greek *epiphaneia* appearance, manifestation, from *epiphainein* to manifest, from *epi-* + *phainein* to show.

1. January 6 observed as a church festival in commemoration of the coming of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles or in the Eastern Church in commemoration of the baptism of Christ
2. an appearance or manifestation especially of a divine being
3.
 - 3.1.
 - 3.1.1. a usually sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something
 - 3.1.2. an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking
 - 3.1.3. an illuminating discovery, realization, or disclosure
 - 3.2. a revealing scene or moment

Enlightenment

- the action of enlightening or the state of being enlightened.
- the action or state of attaining or having attained spiritual knowledge or insight, in particular (in Buddhism) that awareness which frees a person from the cycle of rebirth.

Keep Reading:

- *Original Wisdom: Stories of an Ancient Way of Knowing* by Robert Wolff
- *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living* by Krista Tippet
- *The Wisdom Jesus: Transforming Heart and Mind—A New Perspective on Christ and His Message* by Cynthia Bourgeault
- *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* by Cynthia Bourgeault