

Wisdom

Epiphany and Enlightenment

Session 2: Going Within

The Rev. John Elliott Lein — January 19, 2020

Wisdom: A Review

Wisdom is about judgement, discernment, and applied knowledge. We all know people who are intelligent and knowledgeable but not *wise*—and some who are wise may not have high IQ or extensive knowledge-base.

Wisdom is also a category of books in the Hebrew Scriptures: *Psalms* (some of them), *Proverbs*, *Job*, *Ecclesiastes*, *The Song of Songs* (Song of Solomon), *The Book of Wisdom*, and *Sirach* (Ecclesiasticus).

Psychologists say “wisdom cannot be defined but we recognize it when we see it. It can only be acquired through experience, but by itself, experience does not automatically confer wisdom. It takes deliberate work for transmutation.

Wisdom is also related to “epiphany” or “enlightenment”—a sudden manifestation of insight, usually acquired after years of preparation.

The Hebrew *Hakam* means “to live life skillfully.”

Principles of developing wisdom

- No cheating or shortcuts are possible because “How you get there is where you’ll arrive.”
- In the Wisdom tradition, to become identified solely with the rational mind (ala Descartes) is called “being asleep.”
- As post-Quantum scientists say, “Might it not be the case that the reason for existence has no explanation in the usual sense? This does not mean that the universe is absurd or meaningless. Only that an understanding of its existence and properties lies outside the usual categories of rational human thought.”¹

Wisdom in the Christian Tradition

- Hebrew thought was exposed to and inspired by the Wisdom school in Babylon during the Exile (586 BCE), and began speaking of Wisdom as a feminine figure.
- For some, Jesus appeared as a master of Wisdom, “a *moshel meshalim*, teaching a science of transformation that was both ancient and timeless.”²
- “Who do you say that I am?” Requires a new way of seeing.
- In the 4th century the Church began changing and losing the Wisdom way of being in favor of creeds and hierarchy.
- Those who clung to the old ways pulled away, becoming the Desert Fathers and Mothers in the 3rd-5th centuries.
- The Celtic Wisdom tradition from Christianity planted in the British Isles, led by Pelagius, also lost out to Augustine.
- The tools and structure of Wisdom were protected by St. Benedict and his monasteries starting in the 5th century.
- In Eastern Christianity this way was never lost: *theosis*, divinization, remained as a primary way of understanding Jesus’s gospel.

Re-encountering our own Wisdom

- Quakers
- Sufis
- Buddhists

- Hindus

Wisdom as a Way

- Three-Centered Knowing: mind, heart, body.
- Moving Center (instinct and senses), Emotional Center (reconciling), Knowing Center.
- Presence: a balance of all three.

Notes

1. Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning*, p. 225.
2. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, p. 13.

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 Tippett
- *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

