

Wisdom

Epiphany and Enlightenment

Session 4: Wisdom as Depth
The Rev. John Elliott Lein — February 2, 2020

Wisdom in Review

Wisdom is “*a precise and comprehensive science of spiritual transformation that has existed since the headwaters of the great world religions and is in fact their common ground.*”
—The Rev. Cynthia Bourgeault¹

Wisdom is found in a balance of three centers of knowing: mind (understanding), heart (reconciling), and body (instinct, senses). To be identified solely with the rational mind (ala Descartes) is called “being asleep.”

Wisdom is a **way** not an object; “how you get there is where you’ll arrive.” This way may include sudden epiphanies but usually after many years of disciplined **practice**.

There are many scriptures and practices in the Christian wisdom stream (in addition to other traditions) that can give us the foundation for this work. Some include:

- *Centering Prayer*: resting in the presence of God
- *Lectio Divina*: transformation through sacred reading
- *Chanting Psalms*: vibration and harmony in song
- *Icons*: visual contemplation as a portal to God
- *Eucharist*: sacrament as spiritual discipline

Wisdom as Depth

“O the *depth* of God’s richness and *wisdom* and knowledge!
How *inscrutable* his judgments and *untraceable* his paths!”

Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, chapter 11 verse 33

- The common imagery of enlightenment and growth in wisdom is associated with ascent into the heights, but there is a complementing picture of descent into the depths.
- Descending from “head” into “heart” visualizes a way of being in the world more *present* using also physical senses and emotion rather than isolated in abstract language.
- Depth can also refer to wisdom which may come through experiencing and properly processing suffering. The “dark night of the soul” is an important part of our tradition.

Wisdom in Depth Psychology

- Voices from figures like Freud, Jung, and William James have developed an understanding of the human including the *unconscious* from both religious and scientific sources.
- Layers include the conscious (what we are aware of), the semi-conscious (patterns of personality and environment that shape us), and the unconscious which includes collective/transpersonal forces.
- Archetypes, symbols, and themes contained in religious ritual, teachings, and scriptures can guide us through an inner journey of exposing, healing, and connecting.
- Humans are story-making/-living creatures; we need more than doctrines and theories to grow and transform. Myths connect us to “the richness and wonder of humanity played out in a symbolical, thematic, and patterned storytelling.”

PRACTICE: *Lectio Divina*

“Let us *ruminate*, and, as it were, *chew the cud*, that we may have the *sweet juice*, *spiritual effect*, *marrow*, *honey*, *kernel*, *taste*, *comfort* and *consolation* of them.”— Thomas Cramner

Lectio Divina (“Sacred Reading”) is a contemplative way of reading the Bible dating back to early Christianity and maintained as a monastic practice ever since. Through this process we seek attunement to the presence of God in the written Word.

First, **find a short passage of Scripture**. The Gospels and epistles are a good source for beginners, and you can use the Daily Office readings in the BCP (pp. 933-1001) as a guide if it helps. Sit comfortably, breathe slowly and deeply, and request the divine presence and voice to come in its time. Then follow these four steps, allowing up to half an hour:

1. ***Lectio*** (read/listen): Read (aloud is best) reverently, listening in a spirit of silence and awe. Allow a quiet word or phrase to arise and speak to you personally and intimately.
2. ***Meditatio*** (ruminate): “Ponder in your heart” what you have heard, gently repeating the message as it mingles and interacts with your thoughts, hopes, memories, desires.
3. ***Oratio*** (respond): Now offer back to God your prayer and consecration of that part of yourself or your experiences which has been revealed or arisen so that they may be transformed. Hold them up as the bread is held in the Eucharist and recite the healing word/phrase you have been given in *lectio*.
4. ***Contemplatio*** (rest): Finally, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has spoken and heard and loves us. In silence, enjoy the experience of being with God.

Further *Lectio Divina* tips

Father Christopher Jamison, former Abbot of Worth Abbey in Sussex, England, suggests these three key features of *lectio*:²

- The “text is seen as a gift to be received, not a problem to be dissected...let the text come to you.”
- The *lectio* tradition “teaches us that in order to receive what the text has to offer we must read slowly.”
- *Lectio* is “a way of prayer. Before reading pray that God

will speak to you through the text. During reading, allow the reading to evolve into meditation and then into prayer and finally contemplation. When the reading is concluded, keep some phrase in mind and repeat it throughout the day so that prayerful reading becomes prayerful living.”

Father James Martin S.J. suggests using the following questions, one per step:³

1. “What does the text say?”
2. “What does the text say to me?”
3. “What do I want to say to God about the text?”
4. “What difference will this text make in my life?”

Notes

1. Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, p. xvi.
2. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253799/1-What-is-Lectio-Divina.pdf>
3. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i27FqIyk2qY>

Keep Reading:

- *Accepting the Embrace of God: the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Luke Dysinger OSB (*can be found online*)
- *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* by Fr Christopher Jamison
- *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