

What is Wisdom and how does one attain it?

At this Christmas season, let us begin to address these questions by exploring an important historical event that reportedly occurred sometime after Jesus' birth – the visit of the Wise Men to the manger. Have you ever paused and wondered why the visitors from the east were called “Wise Men”?

According to Artificial Intelligence sources:

They were called “wise men” (Greek: magoi) in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:1–12) because “Magoi” refers to learned scholars. The term magoi in the ancient world referred to: Scholars, Astrologers, Priests of Persia or Babylon, Interpreters of dreams, Experts in astronomy and sacred writings. So, they were highly educated men, skilled in observation, interpretation, and religious studies—hence wise men.

Also, they recognized the significance of the unusual star and were able to interpret “The Star of Bethlehem” as the sign of a significant royal birth. This ability to read “signs” was considered part of their wisdom.

These men sought truth far beyond their own culture as demonstrated by traveling hundreds of miles to seek a newborn king thereby demonstrating openness, discernment, and humility — traits viewed as “wise” in the ancient world.

Additionally, they recognized Jesus' significance and deemed him worthy of honor and worship, which they evidenced by their valuable offerings of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh. Thus, their insight into the identity of Jesus reinforced the idea that they were, in fact, wise.

How then do we define Wisdom?

Drawing from the traits exhibited by the “Wise Men”, we could sum up wisdom simply as the ability to use one's knowledge, experience, and good judgment in determining the best option for selecting one's opinions, words, and actions in various situations.

But somehow that definition feels incomplete. So, let us examine the nuances of the issues involved in more depth:

Knowledge vs. Wisdom

Knowledge means you have information about something, while wisdom is knowing how to use that information in the “best” way. For example, if you *know* the dog can be vicious and do not provoke it, that is *wise* because you are exercising good judgment. Wisdom is developed from reflecting on decisions and observing the positive or negative outcomes of your, or others', decisions.

Good judgment is often drawn from experience, which allows us to understand the short-term, and long-term, consequences of our decisions regarding how they might affect us and others. Wisdom is judgement molded by experience that enables us to see repeating patterns that others may fail to perceive.

Wisdom also includes a large dose of humility which is needed for us to acknowledge that we do not know everything but are eager to learn. We exhibit this by listening a lot and speaking less, i.e., we realize that pride (speaking) hinders wisdom while humility (listening) fosters wisdom.

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Additionally, the wise seek the root cause of the situation, think before acting, perceive others' motives, and, most importantly, distinguish between what matters and what does not. A wise person only speaks or acts after careful consideration of his motives, the likely impacts on all those concerned, and only if it is truly vital that he do so.

Does a “wise” person, display wisdom about everything?

Perhaps some are, but probably not all. Most humans have aspects of their life where they are not so wise. For example, take a man who is recognized by others as being wise in every aspect of his work life. That same man, as a husband and father, may be very unwise in how he emotionally relates to his wife and children.

Reflecting on the “Wise Men” of the bible again, despite their long journey, they left to return to their home thus failing to recognize and complete their real mission which was to protect and nurture the Christ Child during his life.

So, the truly wise, are conscious of, and adapt to, changing circumstances – they recognize that the same formula may not apply to all situations.

What is the source of wisdom in an individual?

While a person who is solely clever may be capable of manipulating others to do what he wants, a wise person is morally insightful as well as clever. He intuitively knows and chooses what is right and fitting in any situation. But where does that intuitive knowing come from?

For those who believe that humans are governed solely by their intellectual brain, wisdom is only practically and logically driven. They attempt to make all their decisions via intellectual analysis, listing pros and cons and applying a weighting percentage that then results in the “best” option. In this way, such people manage their financial, relationship, and life decisions.

This practical wisdom generally is derived from reflecting on experiences that they deem to be regretful mistakes followed by a vow not to make the same ones again. Nonetheless, people often make the same “mistakes”, again and again, sometimes because the circumstances appear to be somewhat different, so they fail to perceive that the underlying cause within themselves remains the same.

Not all mistakes are of the same nature. Mistakes can be categorized based on whether we are (a) aware that an action is a mistake, and we intentionally proceed anyway; or (b) unaware the action is a mistake, and we unintentionally proceed to make it.

Regardless into which category a mistake falls, the underlying cause is likely due to a certain propensity that governs one's decision making with respect to a specific issue.

For example, let us take a category (a) mistake: a person addicted to drugs or alcohol, aware that this behavior is destructive for them, may try hard to resist using them only to fall back even after going to rehabilitation repeatedly. They are unable to resist their propensity to indulge in something that temporarily makes them feel better because they are not in touch with their inherent spiritual wisdom.

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Category (b) mistakes may be because we have failed to consider the possible outcomes or that we have labeled something a mistake only in hindsight. We look back on a mistake and think that our lives would have been much better if we had chosen a different path. But we rarely consider whether that alternative path would have had a more negative outcome than our “mistaken” path.

Ultimately, it does not matter in which category a mistake falls because once a decision has been made and is in the past, we still must deal with the consequences of that decision.

True wisdom comes from the spirit – the core of a human being. This spiritual wisdom sees everything from the perspective of the Laws of Creation as God intended. The spirit knows the truth of the Laws, and that failure to obey those Laws is not an option; at least not if one is wise and wishes to avoid suffering, which is the inevitable result of disobedience of the Laws.

Spiritual wisdom often comes to us in a flash of realization without “rational” thought or analysis. It is that sudden insight that originates in our intuitive, not our intellectual, brain. We are open to these insights when we are not so consumed by “stuff” in our busy brains - in the “space between thoughts” which can occur in a dream, upon awakening, during meditation, times when we are distracted from everyday tasks, and frequently when one is distraught, suffering and has hit bottom.

If one listens to that clear directive and acts on it, one can overcome most any propensity if they wish. Unfortunately, all too often, people ignore the guidance they receive and dismiss it because, to their rational mind, it seems impractical or impossible for them to follow. Humans are capable of doing this because we are endowed with unbridled free will to make decisions. Nonetheless, we remain bound to face the consequences of our decisions either “favorable” or “unfavorable”. If the latter, we will likely suffer as a result. But actually, that suffering is a gift of love from our Creator as it allows us to recognize that our decisions have violated his Laws and gives us the opportunity to make amends for them and not to repeat them – if we are spiritually awake.

Conclusion

To be truly wise, one must strive to be spiritually wise and to be open to the insights received by their intellect from their intuition.

A final observation: wisdom does not always come with age as many believe. There are many older people who are not wise while some young people appear to have been born wise. However, this leads us to a different topic which we will not address here.