

At its heart, the Christian faith is an expression of traditional wisdom coming to us through the visionary seeing and apocalyptic ministry of Yeshua (Jesus). What was expressed through him was rooted in a wisdom tradition ancient in origin and rich with the sacred experiences of the peoples of the Middle East. Yeshua brought that wisdom to full flower in a fresh, living way, which for his followers and students becomes the basis of our common life today.

The Latin word *sapience* expresses the meaning of wisdom as the inner tradition of spiritual life on earth. It is a form of seeing into the depths of Reality. Sapiential knowledge is, thus, the goal and aim of authentic religion. Each religious tradition is a particular and unique perspective on the realm of Ultimate Reality, the source of its symbolic expression. The system of symbols particular to each religious tradition have the ability (if used correctly) to take us beyond the surface of the world to its interior depths. This inner tradition and form of knowing we call wisdom. As a quintessential wisdom teacher, it is this knowing which Yeshua saw and used.

WISDOM

Wisdom, therefore, is a way of seeing from the inside out, as well as along the vertical axis of existence whose coordinates are immanence and transcendence. Wisdom goes to the heart (the interior) and sees the world from that perspective and not simply from its surface structure. Perceiving the world from the perspective of the vertical axis means that wisdom discerns the immanent relationship of the divine Presence to the world, and also sees the transcendent Source of the world, rooted in Ultimate Reality. Like a magnetic pole, therefore, wisdom becomes a force which draws the world around it and gives it strength and stability.

Ranging along the vertical axis, and grounding us in its Reality, are four orders of wisdom which inform us. The first is personal wisdom—the unique experience of each human being as he or she passes through the world, absorbing its lessons in the form of wisdom. The second is practical wisdom—a treasury from the centuries of living that the inhabitants of the world have absorbed from life and have passed on to later generations concerning life as a practical matter (How to get through life with integrity and authenticity). This treasury is often transmitted through aphorism, story, and parable. The third level is called spiritual (or kardial) wisdom because it expresses the inner dimensions of human life reoriented to the vertical axis. Principles of spiritual life and practice, aspects of the struggle to grow and mature in spirit, insights into the journey of return, and knowledge of the inner secrets of metamorphosis are all encoded

into this sacred body of knowledge through figuration and instruction.

Finally, sapiential knowledge is expressed in a fourth dimension known as divine wisdom. This is ageless wisdom from an eternal source transmitted to us from the contemplative seeing. It is a form of revelation. Such knowledge gives humans direct access to the deep structure (and metaphysical dimensions) of the cosmos, the sacred anthropology of human beings, the outcome and destiny of time, and the ultimate nature of the Reality itself. These many dimensions are the great treasure which, as Yeshua taught, lie buried in the field of human existence. We are meant to search for and find the treasure. To that end, we have been given divine assistance in this temporal school called life experience.

A SCHOOL OF WISDOM AND THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Temporal experience on earth is a school for the creation of crones and sages — women and men who, when they leave this world, will possess essential wisdom in their very being. This will be “the great treasure” which they carry out of their struggle through their journey on earth.

Temporal experience, therefore, is constructed in such a way that we can learn wisdom from life. No one who goes through life on earth will emerge without having learned a great deal. This learning will bring us ultimately to a form of completion. We are here, therefore, to learn through attention.

The degree of our learning and the depth of our wisdom is dependent upon the quality of attention we bring to the teaching and the

teachers which have been specifically sent or which manifest themselves to us along the way. We are not left alone in the cosmos. Inside and all around us are instructors of great power, as well as a pedagogy (a methodology) which applies up and down the orders (“grades”) in this “School.”



To begin to understand sapiential guidance, we must begin within the sacred tradition to which we belong, and acknowledge the teachers who are its exemplars. In the tradition of Christian wisdom, Yeshua is the supreme guide and teacher. His words and deeds form the foundation of Christian

wisdom.

However, in addition to the external body of teaching found in the Scriptures about him stands the inner teacher who is the Christ within. His

Spirit continues to inform and guide as the Inner Master of Wisdom (Eph. 3:14-21). Attention to our relationship with this interior Master is the basis for continued learning.

Ranging along the vertical axis, however, are other sapiential Guides. Angelic beings are said to “ascend and descend” upon the sons and daughters of humanity inspiring and proclaiming the eternal Word through their prophetic voices.

The great Active Intelligence (known as the Soul of Humanity) is also personified in the feminine form of Sophia whose aim it is to inform and recreate not only the individual soul, but the soul of all humanity (Proverbs 7). Personal assistance from these celestial Beings is essential to sapiential learning. There are a myriad more beings living and dead who assist us in our learning.

THE PRAXIS OF INNER ATTENTION AND DISCERNMENT AT THE LEVEL OF THE HEART

Attention is the key to learning in any realm. Whether in a classroom, or in the learning that involves the whole of life, the quality of inner attention at the level of the heart is paramount in learning wisdom.

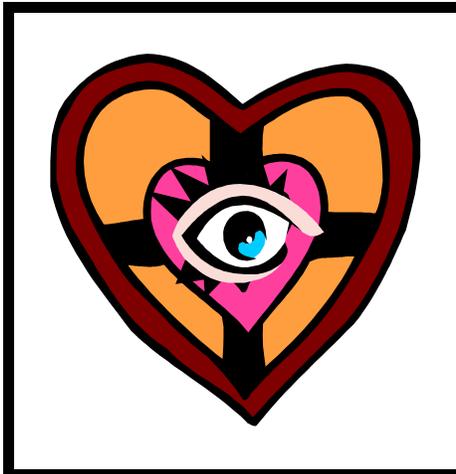
Inner attention is a form of deep listening that involves the whole of our being and focuses our awareness. It also involves the practice of “single-pointed” awareness concerning the world to which we attend. It is clear, however, that we attend to what we love. Clearly we will not attend to something for long that does not draw our desire towards it. Once we love something (desire it) we are then capable of attending to it with full consciousness. A teacher may get our attention for a moment, but the mind soon wanders if there is no desire for it.

Inner attention begins with our ability to cultivate a personal relationship with the interior Master as object of our desire. Awareness of that Presence allows a two-way dialogue to form which is the essence of the relationship. Through attention we can simultaneously be aware of our own inner state, and also view the world through the “window” of our attentiveness to the Teacher.

Attention can be cultivated through periods of meditation in which we focus on the Presence within. One form of practice redirects awareness from the outer sensory world to the inner world in stages. The first stage can be accomplished through the “breath prayer” which uses the rhythm of breathing as a means of moving deeper into the interior space of the heart. The second stage comes as we quietly turn our awareness and greet the Presence waiting within. At the third stage we “stand at attention” before that Presence listening from the depths of the heart.

The goal of this praxis is to use the power of attention as an opportunity for gathering further wisdom in everyday life from this deep interior place.

The highest capacity of the heart is discernment, and wisdom is the result of that discernment at that *kardial* level. The highest capacity of the rational mind is reason. Discernment is the capacity to ascertain spiritual value—that is to know the worth and meaning of things from a perspective transcendent to the limitations of the rational mind or analytical reasoning.



This capacity (and the resulting development of wisdom as an inner way of knowing), then, is the ability to draw from all the domains of wisdom available to us—among them, the personal, practical, kardial and sapiential and begin to integrate them into a whole. This is the meaning of and the means for adequacy: *adequatio*.

This whole knowledge, this woven integration has great power without which a human being never becomes adequate, never becomes complete. With it, however, the individual possesses a way of seeing the world and its many dimensions that is interior (some call it “seeing the world from the inside out”), and integral because it integrates or unites many separate domains into a whole. In just the way you know yourself (from the inside, as an integral whole), wisdom develops that “kardial capacity” for all

levels of reality. This is an amazing capacity, again with great power.

Used together in an integrated way, these capacities give human beings the ability to discern truth from its transcendent source and to see temporal reality in a non-illusory way. Truth received in this manner must, however, be embodied in one’s being through practice, and later assimilated to normal conceptual and linguistic categories. This process often renders it in paradoxical terms opaque to ordinary human consciousness. Sapiential learning, therefore, includes not only clear perception in the heart, but the means by which such knowledge can be embodied in and transmitted to the conventional world. The heart must first see, but it must also learn to practice and then speak its truth in many modes.

WISDOM: THE RETURN TO THE WHOLE

The following is excerpted from Willis Jaeger’s **Search for the Meaning of Life: Essays and Reflections on the Mystical Experience** Liguouri, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1989 (59-61)

Reality has two aspects, just as every staff has two ends. We call the one aspect “form” (or “creation”). In the world of forms we see reflected the other aspect of reality, to which we give different names: Godhead, Void, Brahman, the Absolute. The two constitute reality.

In the whole there is no polarity, no time, and no space. But this wholeness or totality is incomprehensible to our human consciousness, and that irritates reason. Mystical experience (or the experience of wisdom) is the experience of this whole, and so it often comes into conflict with theology, which is anchored in the world of polarity. It’s not as if mysticism were against theology, mysticism (or wisdom) merely stresses the side of the whole that it experiences but that remains closed to reason.... People have to find their way back to the Whole. Wholeness embraces everything; there is nothing that could lie outside it. In the Whole there is neither time nor space. Time and space are possible only within polarity. The Whole cannot be

described concretely, only in paradoxes, parable, and myths. The only way to illumine the Whole is to frame it in paradoxes.

When the One emerges into creation, it is polar. Creation means that unity crumbles into multiplicity. A popular image attempts to make this clear: light slants through a prism. Light stands for unity, the colors are polarity. The prism breaks down the light into many different colors, but the light always remains what it is: light. Another image is the paper fan; it is a flat sheet of paper; folded it is a fan. In the same way, the One unfolds into the “manifold.” It is simply (without-folds) and multiple (many-folds)The goal of mystical experience (and of wisdom), therefore, is not to escape polarity but to experience it as an expression of oneness. Both aspects belong together: unity (wholeness) and polarity (multiplicity) are like two sides of the same coin.

In reality the polar world does not exist the way we see it. As the esoteric school keeps telling us, it is a deception, but our ego continually hypnotizes us into believing otherwise. It’s hard to realize this so long as we are encapsulated in the deception. But not to see through it means to remain an eternal prisoner of deception. Every esoteric path aims to free people from this illusion. The insight that the world of polarization does not exist is itself liberating.



Wisdom

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Wisdom is real but intangible in many ways. You know it when you experience it. When and where have you experienced wisdom?
2. How has life itself been a “wisdom school” for you? What would you say you have gleaned as “personal wisdom” that is truly your own?
3. How do you experience *inner attention* and its practice which is so critical for learning wisdom? Is your attention scattered, or can you easily bring it into focus?
4. How familiar are you with the practice of contemplative prayer? What is your practice of it, if you have one? Does it involve deep inner listening?
5. A distinction is made between *discernment* and *reason*. Are those different for you? How do you experience them in your life? Give some examples.
6. The quote from Willis Jaeger strengthens the point that wisdom is integral knowing—a knowledge of the whole. Is this a function of the mind or of something else entirely different?

READINGS FOR INSIGHT

It always pleased the Master to hear people recognize their ignorance.

“Wisdom tends to grow in proportion to one’s awareness of one’s ignorance,” he claimed.

What asked for an explanation, he said, “When you come to see you are not as wise today as you thought you were yesterday, you are wiser today.

—Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom*, 90

When individuals lack wisdom their minds are always restless, and their senses are wild horses dragging them hither and thither. But when they are full of wisdom, their minds are collected, and their senses become tamed horses obedient to the driver’s will.

—Author Unknown

PRAXIS AND MEDITATION

1. For those on the path of Yeshua’s wisdom, it is important to develop a relationship with Yeshua as a wisdom teacher both through the ancient writings and in a direct, personal way. What is your relationship with him as an inner Teacher? If he is not your wisdom teacher, do you have one important to you? What is your relationship to that teacher?

2. An important starting point for the practice of contemplative prayer and deep inner listening is something that has traditionally been called “breath prayer.” Breath prayer uses the natural cycle of breathing as a means of focus and the stilling of the mind and heart. Begin this prayer by sitting quietly in a place conducive to prayer. Allow your breathing to slow and the in-breath and out-breath to lengthen. As you breathe, visualize that you are standing at the shore of the sea, and a wave is coming in with each in-breath, and receding back into the ocean with the out-breath. Continue this prayerful awareness for five to ten minutes, and then allow the visualization to stop and give yourself over to the silent, prayerful breathing.

3. A good introduction to contemplative prayer may be found in a book, **Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening**, by Cynthia Bourgeault. This text introduces the many dimensions of inner prayer that do not depend on thought but on the processes of the heart.