

SOUL AND MIND SERIES

James Lee Robinson (ed.)

**Tales about The
Flowers of the
Mind: Stories of
Wise People from
All Over the World-**

INTEGRAL

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#2

Tales about The Flowers of the Mind Stories of Wise People from All Over the World

collected and edited by
James Lee Robinson

INTEGRAL

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“The fool doth think he is wise,
but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.”

— **William Shakespeare**, *As You Like It*

**Wisdom Is the Flower of the Mind. From *sophia* and
sapientia to... Master Yoda**

“Wisdom, compassion and courage are the three universally recognized moral qualities of men” once wrote Confucius. And, over the centuries, Immanuel Kant added that “Science is organized knowledge. Wisdom is organized life”.

And, in his own peculiar way, Khalil Gibran stated:

*“In the stillness of night Wisdom came and stood
By my bed. She gazed upon me like a tender mother
And wiped away my tears, and said : ‘I have heard
The cry of your spirit and I am come to comfort it.
Open your heart to me and I shall fill it with light.
Ask of me and I shall show you the way of truth.’*

*And I said : ‘Who am I, Wisdom, and how came
I to this frightening place? What manner of things
Are these mighty hopes and these many books and
Strange patterns ? What are these thoughts that pass
As doves in flight? And these words composed by
Desire and sung by delight, what are they? What are
These conclusions, grievous and joyous, that embrace
My spirit and envelop my heart? And those
Eyes which look at me seeing into my depths and
Fleeing from my sorrows ? And those voices mourning
My days and chanting my littleness, what are they?’*

Scholars have always tried to find the right definition for the concept of wisdom. Charles Haddon Spurgeon defined wisdom as “the right use of knowledge”. Robert I. Sutton and Andrew Hargadon defined the “attitude of wisdom” as “acting with knowledge while doubting what one knows”.

The Wise Old Man (also called *senex*, *sage* or *sophos*) is an archetype as described by Carl Jung, as well as a classic literary figure. This character is typically represented as a kind and wise, older father-type figure who uses personal knowledge of people and the world to help tell stories and offer guidance that, in a mystical way, may impress upon his audience a sense of who they are and who they might become, thereby acting as a mentor. He may occasionally appear as an absent-minded professor, appearing absent-minded due to a predilection for contemplative pursuits.

The Wise Old Man is often seen to be in some way “foreign”, that is, from a different culture, nation, or occasionally, even a different time, from those he advises. In extreme cases, he may be a liminal being, such as Merlin, who was only half human.

In medieval chivalric romance and modern fantasy literature, he is often presented as a wizard. He can also or instead be featured as a hermit. This character type often explained to the knights or heroes—particularly those searching for the Holy Grail—the significance of their encounters.

In storytelling, the character of the wise old man is commonly killed or in some other way removed for a time, in order to allow the hero to develop on his/her own.

In Jungian analytical psychology, *senex* is the specific term used in association with this archetype. In ancient Rome, the title of *Senex* (Latin for *old man*) was only awarded to elderly men with families who had good standing in their village. Examples of the *senex* archetype in a positive form include the wise old man or wizard. The *senex* may also appear in a negative form as a devouring father (e.g. Uranus, Cronus) or a doddering fool.

In the individuation process, the archetype of the Wise old man was late to emerge, and seen as an indication of the Self. “If an individual *has* wrestled seriously enough and long enough with

the anima (or animus) problem... the unconscious again changes its dominant character and appears in a new symbolic form... as a masculine initiator and guardian (an Indian *guru*), a wise old man, a spirit of nature, and so forth”.

The antithetical archetype of the senex is the *Puer Aeternus*.

The ancient Greeks considered wisdom to be an important virtue, personified as the goddesses Metis and Athena. Metis was the first wife of Zeus, who, according to Hesiod's *Theogony*, had devoured her pregnant; Zeus earned the title of Mêtietia (“The Wise Counselor”) after that, as Metis was the embodiment of wisdom, and he gave birth to Athena, who is said to have sprung from his head. Athena was portrayed as strong, fair, merciful, and chaste. Apollo was also considered a god of wisdom, designated as the conductor of the Muses (*Musagetes*), who were personifications of the sciences and of the inspired and poetic arts; Apollo was considered the god who prophesied through the priestesses (Pythia) in the Temple of Apollo (Delphi), where the aphorism “know thyself” (*gnōthi seauton*) was inscribed (part of the wisdom of the Delphic maxims). He was contrasted with Hermes, who was related to the sciences and technical wisdom, and, in the first centuries after Christ, was associated with Thoth in an Egyptian syncretism, under the name Hermes Trimegistus. Greek tradition recorded the earliest introducers of wisdom in the Seven Sages of Greece.

To Socrates and Plato, philosophy was literally the love of wisdom (*philo-sophia*). This permeates Plato's dialogues; in *The Republic* the leaders of his proposed utopia are philosopher kings who understand the Form of the Good and possess the courage to act accordingly. Aristotle, in *Metaphysics*, defined wisdom as understanding why things are a certain way (causality), which is deeper than merely knowing things are a certain way. He was the first to make the distinction between *phronesis* and *sophia*.

According to Plato and Xenophon, the Pythia of the Delphic Oracle answered the question “who is the wisest man in Greece?” by stating Socrates was the wisest. According to Plato's *Apology*, Socrates decided to investigate the people who might be considered wiser than him, concluding they lacked true knowledge:

“[...] οὗτος μὲν οἶεται τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἶομαι [I am wiser than this man; for neither of us really knows anything fine and good, but this man thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas I, as I do not know anything, do not think I do either.]” — *Apology to Socrates 21d*

Thus it became popularly immortalized in the phrase “I know that I know nothing” that it is wise to recognize one's own ignorance and to value epistemic humility.

The ancient Romans also valued wisdom which was personified in Minerva, or Pallas. She also represents skillful knowledge and the virtues, especially chastity. Her symbol was the owl which is still a popular representation of wisdom, because it can see in darkness. She was said to be born from Jupiter's forehead.

Wisdom is also important within Christianity. Jesus emphasized it. Paul the Apostle, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, argued that there is both secular and divine wisdom, urging Christians to pursue the latter. Prudence, which is intimately related to wisdom, became one of the four cardinal virtues of Catholicism. The Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas considered wisdom to be the “Father” (i.e. the cause, measure, and form) of all virtues.

In Buddhist traditions, developing wisdom plays a central role where comprehensive guidance on how to develop wisdom is provided. In the Inuit tradition, developing wisdom was one of the aims of teaching. An Inuit Elder said that a person became wise when they could see what needed to be done and did it successfully without being told what to do.

In many cultures, the name for third molars, which are the last teeth to grow, is etymologically linked with wisdom, e.g., as in the English *wisdom tooth*. It has its nickname originated from the classical tradition, which in the Hippocratic writings has already been called *sóphronistér* (in Greek, related to the meaning of moderation or teaching a lesson), and in Latin *dens sapientiae* (wisdom tooth), since they appear at the age of maturity in late adolescence and early adulthood.

Sapience is closely related to the term "*sophia*" often defined as "transcendent wisdom", "ultimate reality", or the ultimate truth of things. Sapiential perspective of wisdom is said to lie in the heart of every religion, where it is often acquired through intuitive knowing. This type of wisdom is described as going beyond mere practical wisdom and includes self-knowledge, interconnectedness, conditioned origination of mind-states and other deeper understandings of subjective experience. This type of wisdom can also lead to the ability of an individual to act with appropriate judgement, a broad understanding of situations and greater appreciation/compassion towards other living beings.

The word *sapience* is derived from the Latin *sapientia*, meaning "wisdom". The corresponding verb *sapere* has the original meaning of "to taste", hence "to perceive, to discern" and "to know"; its present participle *sapiens* was chosen by Carl Linnaeus for the Latin binomial for the human species, *Homo sapiens*.

In Mesopotamian religion and mythology, Enki, also known as Ea, was the God of wisdom and intelligence. Divine Wisdom allowed the provident designation of functions and the ordering of the cosmos, and it was achieved by humans in following me-s (in Sumerian, order, rite, righteousness), restoring the balance. In addition to hymns to Enki or Ea dating from the third millennium BC., there is amongst the clay tablets of Abu Salabikh from 2600 BC, considered as being the oldest dated texts, an "Hymn to Shamash", in which it is recorded written:

"Wide is the courtyard of Shamash night chamber, (just as wide is the womb of) a wise pregnant woman! Sin, his warrior, wise one, heard of the offerings and came down to his fiesta. He is the father of the nation and the father of intelligence".

The concept of Logos or manifest word of the divine thought, a concept also present in the philosophy and hymns of Egypt and Ancient Greece (being central to the thinker Heraclitus), and substantial in the Abrahamic traditions, seems to have been derived from Mesopotamian culture.

Sia represents the personification of perception and thoughtfulness in the traditional mythology adhered to in Ancient Egypt. Thoth, married to Maat (in ancient Egyptian, meaning order, righteousness, truth), was also important and regarded as a national introducer of wisdom.

The word wisdom (חכמה) is mentioned 222 times in the Hebrew Bible. It was regarded as one of the highest virtues among the Israelites along with kindness (חסד) and justice (צדק). Both the books of Proverbs and Psalms urge readers to obtain and to increase in wisdom.

In the Hebrew Bible, wisdom is represented by Solomon, who asks God for wisdom in 2 Chronicles 1:10. Much of the Book of Proverbs, which is filled with wise sayings, is attributed to Solomon. In Proverbs 9:10, the fear of the Lord is called the beginning of wisdom. In Proverbs 1:20, there is also reference to wisdom personified in female form, "Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, she raises her voice in the marketplaces." In Proverbs 8:22–31, this personified wisdom is described as being present with God before creation began and even taking part in creation itself.

The Talmud teaches that a wise person is a person who can foresee the future. *Nolad* is a Hebrew word for "future," but also the Hebrew word for *birth*, so one rabbinic interpretation of the teaching is that a wise person is one who can foresee the consequences of his/her choices (i.e. can "see the future" that he/she "gives birth" to).

In Christian theology, "wisdom" (Greek: Sophia, Latin: Sapientia) describes an aspect of God, or the theological concept regarding the wisdom of God.

There is an oppositional element in Christian thought between secular wisdom and Godly wisdom. Paul the Apostle states that worldly wisdom thinks the claims of Christ to be foolishness. However, to those who are “on the path to salvation” Christ represents the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:17–31) Wisdom is considered one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit according to Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran belief. 1 Corinthians 12:8–10 gives an alternate list of nine virtues, among which wisdom is one.

The book of Proverbs in the Old Testament of the Bible primarily focuses on wisdom, and was primarily written by one of the wisest kings according to history, King Solomon. Proverbs is found in the Old Testament section of the Bible and gives direction on how to handle various aspects of life; one's relationship with God, marriage, dealing with finances, work, friendships and persevering in difficult situations faced in life.

According to King Solomon, wisdom is gained from God, “For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” Proverbs 2:6. And through God's wise aide, one can have a better life: “He holds success in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones” Proverbs 2:7-8. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight” Proverbs 3:5-6. Solomon basically states that with the wisdom one receives from God, one will be able to find success and happiness in life.

The Arabic term corresponding to Hebrew *Chokmah* is *حكمة hikma*. The term occurs a number of times in the Quran, notably in Sura 2:269: “He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.” (Quran 2:269). and Sura 22:46: “Have they not travelled in the land, and have they hearts wherewith to feel and ears wherewith to hear? For indeed it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts, which are within the bosoms, that grow blind.” Quran 22:46 Sura 6: 151: “Say: “Come, I will rehearse what Allah (God) hath (really) prohibited you from”: Join not anything as equal with Him; be good to your parents; kill not your children on a plea of want;— We provide sustenance for you and for them;— come not nigh to shameful deeds, whether open or secret; take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law: thus doth He command you, that ye may learn wisdom” (Quran 6:151).

The sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi considers *al-Hakim* (“The Wise”) as one of the names of the Creator. Wisdom and truth, considered divine attributes, were concepts related and valued in the Islamic sciences and philosophy since their beginning

In Norse mythology, the god Odin is especially known for his wisdom, often acquired through various hardships and ordeals involving pain and self-sacrifice. In one instance he plucked out an eye and offered it to Mímir, guardian of the well of knowledge and wisdom, in return for a drink from the well. In another famous account, Odin hanged himself for nine nights from Yggdrasil, the World Tree that unites all the realms of existence, suffering from hunger and thirst and finally wounding himself with a spear until he gained the knowledge of runes for use in casting powerful magic. He was also able to acquire the mead of poetry from the giants, a drink of which could grant the power of a scholar or poet, for the benefit of gods and mortals alike.

In Bahá'í scripture, “The essence of wisdom is the fear of God, the dread of His scourge and punishment, and the apprehension of His justice and decree.” Wisdom is seen as a light, that casts away darkness, and “its dictates must be observed under all circumstances”. One may obtain knowledge and wisdom through God, his Word, and his Divine Manifestation and the source of all learning is the knowledge of God.

Zen is a form of Mahayana Buddhism, grounded on the schema of the *bodhisattva* path, which is based on the practice of the “transcendent virtues” or “perfections” as well as the taking of the bodhisattva vows. The most widely used list of six virtues is: generosity, moral training (incl. five precepts), patient endurance, energy or effort, meditation (*dhyana*), wisdom.

Even in the Star Wars universe, wisdom is valued in the narrative of the films, in which George Lucas figured issues of spirituality and morals, recurrent in mythological and philosophical themes; one of his inspirations was Joseph Campbell's *The Hero of a Thousand Faces*. Master Yoda is generally considered a popular figure of wisdom, evoking the image of an "Oriental Monk", and he is frequently quoted, analogously to Chinese thinkers or Eastern sages in general. Psychologist D. W. Kreger's book *The Tao of Yoda* adapts the wisdom of the Tao Te Ching in relation to Yoda's thinking. Knowledge is canonically considered one of the pillars of the Jedi, which is also cited in the non-canon book *The Jedi Path*, and wisdom can serve as a tenet for Jediism. The Jedi Code also states: "Ignorance, yet knowledge." In a psychology populational study published by Grossmann and team in 2019, master Yoda is considered wiser than Spock, another fictional character (from the Star Trek series), due to his emodiversity trait, which was positively associated to wise reasoning in people: "Yoda embraces his emotions and aims to achieve a balance between them. Yoda is known to be emotionally expressive, to share a good joke with others, but also to recognize sorrow and his past mistakes".

... Our mind is a garden and our thoughts are the seeds: Wisdom is the flower of the mind.

Sonnet XI by William Shakespeare

*As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st
In one of thine, from that which thou departest;
And that fresh blood which youngly thou bestow'st,
Thou mayst call thine when thou from youth convertest.
Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase;
Without this folly, age, and cold decay:
If all were minded so, the times should cease
And threescore year would make the world away.
Let those whom nature hath not made for store,
Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish:
Look whom she best endowed, she gave the more;
Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty cherish:
She carved thee for her seal, and meant thereby,
Thou shouldst print more, not let that copy die.*

The Saint and the Idiot. An Old Russian Story

In a village a man, a young man, is called an idiot by everybody. From his very childhood he has heard that, that he is an idiot. And when so many people are saying it—his father, his mother, his uncles, the neighbors, and everybody—of course he starts believing that he must be an idiot. How can so many people be wrong?—and they are all important people. But when he becomes older and this continues, he becomes an absolutely sealed idiot; there is no way to get out of it. He tried hard but whatsoever he did was thought to be idiotic.

That is very human. Once a man goes mad he may become normal again but nobody is going to take him as normal. He may do something normal but you will suspect that there must be something insane

about it. And your suspicion will make him hesitant and his hesitancy will make your suspicion stronger; then there is a vicious circle. So that man tried in every possible way to look wise, to do wise things, but whatsoever he did people would always say it was idiotic.

A saint was passing by. He went to the saint in the night when there was nobody about and asked him, "Just help me to get out of this locked state. I am sealed in. They don't let me out; they have not left any window or door open so that I can jump out. And whatsoever I do, even if it is exactly the same as they do, still I am an idiot. What should I do?"

The saint said, "Do just one thing. Whenever somebody says, 'Look how beautiful the sunset is,' you say, 'you idiot, prove it! What is beautiful there? I don't see any beauty. You prove it.' If somebody says, 'Look at that beautiful rose flower,' catch hold of him and tell him, 'Prove it! What grounds have you to call this ordinary flower beautiful? There have been millions of rose flowers. There are millions, there will be millions in the future; what special thing has this rose flower got? And what are your fundamental reasons which prove logically that this rose flower is beautiful?'

"If somebody says, 'This book of Leo Tolstoy is very beautiful,' just catch hold of him and ask him, 'Prove where it is beautiful; what is beautiful in it? It is just an ordinary story—just the same story which has been told millions of times, just the same triangle in every story: either two men and one woman or two women and one man, but the same triangle. All love stories are triangles. So what is new in it?'"

The man said, "That's right."

The saint said, "Don't miss any chance, because nobody can prove these things; they are unprovable. And when they cannot prove it, they will look idiotic and they will stop calling you an idiot. Next time, when I return, just give me the information how things are going.

And next time when the saint was coming back, even before he could meet the old idiot, people of the village informed him, "A miracle has happened. We had an idiot in our town; he has become the wisest man. We would like you to meet him."

And the saint knew who that "wisest man" was. He said, "I would certainly love to see him. In fact I was hoping to meet him."

The saint was taken to the idiot and the idiot said, "You are a miracle-worker, a miracle man. The trick worked! I simply started calling everyone an idiot, stupid. Somebody would be talking of love, somebody would be talking of beauty, somebody would be talking of art, painting, sculpture, and my standpoint was the same: 'Prove it!' And because they could not prove it, they looked idiotic.

And it is a strange thing. I was never hoping to gain this much out of it. All that I wanted was to get out of that confirmed idiocy. It is strange that now I am no longer an idiot, I have become the most wise man, and I know I am the same—and you know it too.”

But the saint said, “Never tell this secret to anybody else. Keep the secret to yourself. Do you think I am a saint? Yes, the secret is between us. This is how I became a saint. This is how you have become a wiseman.” This is how things go on in the world.

Once you ask, What is the meaning of life? you have asked the wrong question. And obviously somebody will say, “this is the meaning of life”—and it cannot be proved.

The Joke of the Wise Man

For years, people have been coming to the wise man and complaining about the same problems every time. One day, he told them a joke and everyone roared in laughter.

After a couple of minutes, he told them the same joke and only a few of them smiled.

When he told them the same joke for the third time no one laughed anymore.

The wise man smiled and said: “You can not laugh at the same joke over and over, so why are you complaining about the same problem every time?”

Moral of the story: Worrying will not solve your problems, it will just waste your time and energy...

The Boys Who Loved to Drum. An Old Indian Story

There was once an old wise man who after retiring from his work decided to buy a house in his old village and moved there to live his life in a peaceful setting. All was well until it wasn't.

Once the school started, there were a few boys who used to walk past his home on their way to school. They would drum on the metal garbage bins that were near the window of the wise man's bedroom. He would find this noise to be too disturbing and wanted the boys to stop the drumming.

Knowing that asking the boys to stop drumming might not work, as they seem to be enjoying the act, the wise man decided to do the next best thing he knew.

The next morning, he popped out of his house at the exact time that the boys started to drum. Once they finished drumming, he called them out and said, “I love the way you drum. I would like you to drum for me everyday morning at the same time. I will pay you a one pound every day.”

The boys loved it. They started playing there every day. After a few days, the wise man said that due to the economy being bad, he can only pay them fifty pence for the drumming. The boys were not happy but still continued to drum for the old man.