

Brilliant Stories about Wisdom from All Over the World

James Lee Robinson (Ed.)

*SOUL AND MIND SERIES*

*# 2*

## **Brilliant Stories about Wisdom from All Over the World**

feat. Old and Contemporary Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Romanian, Polish, Russian, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Persian, Scottish, Swedish, Turkish, African and Other Tales, including "The Stone of the Wiseman" by Hans Christian Andersen

**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*

## Not a... *Foreword: 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 οἶεταί 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 Jewish 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 Mimir, 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