

Reading

There are two brief readings I have chosen for today's service, to be followed by several responses a handful of you shared with me (and each other) on line, when I asked you what WISDOM is and how becoming wiser happens. I appreciate & enjoy knowing more of what you think.

The first of these three things is a short poem by the English poet, David Whyte. He calls it "The Sun," and these are his words.

What I am
is [all] I have
been grown by,
the sun,
that great love,
all the many small loves,
and that one love, too,
who waited so long
to find me, and
who has always
walked by my side,
folding my
remembering
hands in hers.

The second reading is from the *Pirke Avot* (*PERK Ah-Voh*), ancient Jewish texts written around the year 275.

We are here to do
And through doing to learn
And through learning to know
And through knowing to experience wonder
And through wonder to attain wisdom
And through wisdom to find simplicity
And through simplicity to give attention
And through attention to see what needs to be done...

And, finally, these are some of your own reflections regarding the matter of wisdom, and becoming wiser human beings:

"When I was younger, I would confront life's trials and tribulations head on with resistance, defiantly and defensively. Sometimes I would win the battle, sometimes I wouldn't. Either way, "the fight" and the energy that went into it would always leave me feeling uncomfortable, aware of a lingering sadness or anger or regret with having fought so hard. I'd feel unsettled, especially if I knew what it was changed someone's opinion of me."

"Somewhere along the way, I've come to realize that so much of what was driving me was my ego. Wisdom, for me, has come with letting go of ego (which is very hard), and with that, has come a state of peace, yet strength."

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“I think that living and working in different cultures or just connecting with people who are different from me in other ways has helped me become a wiser person. By wiser, I mean able to take in truth & knowledge (sought or not) and use it for good.”

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“When being a wise person is an aspiration, all experiences contribute to one’s growth of wisdom...I have spent my life time noticing what appears wise to me, and trying to learn what I can about the elements of living that add up to wisdom. Not flinching from deep feeling of whatever kind, love, sorrow, anger, compassion, desire, dismay, whatever—mine or someone else’s, is a key ingredient. I think wisdom is also made up of an effort to problem solve, to keep life moving in some way, to see reality as given and cooperate with it rather than wishing for some change that would feel better.”

“Wisdom grows with the result of decisions made, so it can take a long time to acquire it. There can be long periods when wisdom does not appear to be present and I’ve certainly had those times. Now, in my “collected years,” I have pretty much made of me who I am. I am pretty much living out of that place now. I keep on trying to grow, to be willing, to be responsible for myself and to grow as a wise person...”

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“Wisdom is something accomplished over great lengths of time; something we are always building a relationship with—by design or by chance.

At the edge of great sadness, at the edge of great suffering, at the edge of great emotions, at the edge of great desires and yearnings, at the edge of great loves and great accomplishments, wisdom grows.

Out at the edge of nothing, when all has been laid bare—that is where we can see its tenacious grasp on us—believing in us, even here at the edge of our own worlds. Wisdom is risky, edgy. Wisdom is earned by a risk-taking or life shattering moment, it teases you with small understandings or crashes you with deep insights. Sometimes it hits you over the head, sometimes it vanishes as you reach for it—begging you to stir, to seek....

Wisdom is personal evolution. It is slow enlightenment.

Sermon

We are here to learn...

Rev. Sara Huisjen

It occurred to me several times in the last few days
that I must have been crazy when I chose
to preach and think about WISDOM today—
as if I know what that is; as if, at this very moment,
I can will any sense of heartache, and sadness,
and the stuff of learning a painful lesson,
to quickly seer wisdom into my being.
We all know it doesn’t work that way.
We all hope, at different times in our lives, that wisdom comes.
We all realize, in our own ways, that it takes time,
and real commitment, and continuing efforts on our parts,
as we aspire to see things more clearly, as they are.

Wisdom cannot be hurried, or rushed, or insisted upon.

And so, I say to you now, right up front, my sermon this morning, this very sermon about wisdom, about becoming wiser human beings, about how that happens and why it matters, my sermon this morning is also my prayer—an expression of a longing I feel in me.

It's a prayer I choose to share, to speak out-loud to my self, to the universe, to you, my dear and captive congregation, today. In a spirit of gratitude & humility, I offer my thoughts, believing they might also be some of your own, some of the hopes and prayers for wisdom & insight that you have carried; that you carry still, into this hour and day.

SO, we're going to do things a little differently today... As you're willing, I invite you to join me now in breathing consciously; in becoming aware of the fact that you are breathing or being breathed, as I've heard it said. You don't have to do anything differently than you are. Just breath. Be aware of your breathing. [Pause]

Feel your feet on the floor, the ground beneath you. Feel your body resting on your chair, comfortably I hope. Close your eyes, if you're comfortable doing so. Let your awareness of your breath help you find & feel a sense of spaciousness within. [Pause]

Let your shoulders drop down a little more each time you exhale. Feel the life force & steadiness within you, a strength that's rooted in the center of your body, of your being. Rest here a moment...[pause] Rest, and join with me in beginning to let the dust settle from the past week's living. Let the tears come if they are there. Let the lump in your throat rise and fall back down, if it appears. Let the gift of this space and time you have given yourself, comfort you.

Let the tenderness of any struggling that's yours soften. Let your habitual defenses begin to come down—remembering again, that sharpness and fighting are not the ways you want to respond to the hard stuff anymore. [pause]

This, too, shall pass, we remind each other here. *this too shall pass*—whatever *this* is, whatever weight we carry; not an automatic “get out of jail free” kind of promise, but a trustworthy truth that we can dare to lean into... *this too shall pass*.

Together, in this circle, in this sanctuary,
we rest in the refuge of knowing
we are no better or worse than any other;
we are ourselves—imperfect and flawed,
loveable and changeable human beings—
we are capable of acts of great kindness and of causing real harm.
We are each a beloved child of life's longing for itself...
we are vital, and alive; we are stretched into being
and becoming more awake in this moment,
more nurtured and grown by all the love and sorrow we've known,
our sharp edges tumbled more smooth,
our very lives lived and appreciated
for the blessings they are. Amen.

[Pause a few seconds]

A few months ago, I was on a plane, headed to Dallas, TX
to see my brother and sister-in-law, who was having a hard time.
I was going, hoping to be a help to them, just by being there if I could.
It was on the plane that day, that this thought first occurred
to me and kind of stopped me in my tracks:
If things unfold the way we might expect them to,
if I live to be fifty, then sixty,
maybe even seventy or eighty years old,
chances are I'll still be alive when some of you die.
I realize this isn't the most pleasant or uplifting
of thoughts to think about or share out loud...
and, that things could work out very differently,
any of us could be gone, at any moment...
but still, it's true, likely even, that many of you
who are so much a part of the life of this community
and of my own life, many of you will not be here some day...
and I am sad already...not a "puddle on the floor" kind of sad,
but a deeply moved, humbled and grateful kind of sad.

On the plane that day, I was surprised to be struck
by this awareness; to find myself wiping away
tears that were there,
knowing, too, I wanted to acknowledge this insight with you;
to name my thanks for the ways you share
your life with each other and with me.
I haven't shown up at your house yet with a
digital voice recorder in hand, and I don't think I will,
unless you happen to have one that I can borrow?!

But you should know, I am listening a little more closely
when we're together, in the same room; I'm taking notes

in my mind and on paper. I'm paying attention, and honoring more intentionally the longing that's there, at work in me, to know more about what you know. More about how you've made sense of things in your life. More about what rises to the top of your list as the most important things to do and attend to in your lifetime?

Where, I wonder, about each of you and all of us, where are you are still trying to grow? To let yourself be shaped by what you've learned? To see more clearly how living your life has called & coaxed & tumbled you into becoming more or less loving & caring people, more or less generous with others, and with yourself?

It's true, I'm interested in knowing your truths, and gaining wisdom myself that's instructive, that might help me make better choices down the line, and it's true, too, that we all have to find our own way into growing up, into new understandings and seeing more clearly what's "right" and "wrong;" what it is that's most important to give ourselves over to and be guided by...

The poet Jose Orez names this truth with these few words:

The wise and holy visit briefly;
They laugh and they cry and move on.
Poets record the echo,
Artists give shape to the shadow.
But here is the one knowable truth,
The heart of the heart of it:
Only I can live my life,
Only you can live yours.

And here's another truth about our human condition, there are so many... Our lives are bound together; our efforts & insights to know more about who we really are and wish to be; to be able to dive below the surface of our public identities—the roles and expectations laid on us by culture and family and places—these efforts to grow & change for the better, they are only possible because we have been and are still loved and companioned by others; seen by others, valued not for being perfect, but for being intrinsically worthy and loveable beings.

"What I am" writes the poet from the first of this morning's readings.

"What I am, is all I have been grown by..."

“Wisdom”, writes another poet,
an author who brings virtues & human emotions
to life in her work, *The Book of Qualities*,
“Wisdom”, you might imagine, “takes long walks
in the purple hills at twilight, pausing to meditate
at an old temple near the crossroads.
Wisdom was sick as a young child, so
she learned to be alone with herself at an early age.”

“Wisdom”, the poet goes on.
“Wisdom has a quiet mind.
She likes to think about the edges
where things spill into each other
and become their opposites.
Wisdom knows how to look at things
inside and out...Questions of time,
depth and balance interest her.”

“Wisdom,” a poet among you has written, “wisdom
is something accomplished over great lengths of time;
[wisdom is] something we are always building
a relationship with—by design or by chance...
Wisdom is personal evolution.
It is *slow* enlightenment.”

Every day, Jan Hutchinson, gets up and writes a poem...
Jan is a friend of our very own Eileen Brennan, who is here today, and she’s a member of the Unitarian
Universalist Meeting of South Berkshire. Eileen gave me the first of Jan’s books a few years ago.
I quickly bought ten more copies and sent them to friends from seminary who live all over the country.
Jan’s second book, *Raggedy Prayers and Crooked Ladders*
just recently arrived and I love it already.

Jan calls the poems she writes each morning, “thimble poems.”
They just seem to flow through her, she says,
They carry thoughts and insights,
and wisdom about living well with them...

This is Jan’s “thimble poem” from December 1st of 2011:

*Whoever
You are,
However
You’ve fallen
Short.*

*First,
With gratitude
And humility,
Say yes
To your self,*

*To your life,
Then see
How the Great Yes
All around you
Opens.*

About wisdom, Albert Einstein said this:
“Wisdom is not the product of schooling,
but the lifelong attempt to acquire it.”
Time, and self-reflection,
and sitting quietly and patiently with who we are,
and where we are in our lives;
with whatever it is that we’ve done or not done—
being accountable, and trying to see more clearly
the choices and decisions we’ve made along the way,
beginning to make any necessary adjustments where needed,
and they are always needed—
these are the daily disciplines, the practices and habits
that most help us to become wise,
more understanding and accepting,
more compassionate human beings;
the people we want to be, who are more capable
of living in ways that honor the great wisdom teachings
of the world’s religions:
To love your neighbor as yourself.
To see that all things are our relatives;
that what we do to everything, we do to ourselves.
To choose to regard our neighbor’s gain as our gain,
and our neighbor’s loss as our own loss.
To see the heart of the person before us as a mirror
that reveals truths about our own form.

This past week, in the Building Your Own Theology Class I’m teaching,
fifteen or so of us gathered together,
as we do each week, in this sanctuary space
and we took turns, going around the circle,
sharing something significant that had happened
in our lives over the course of the last week,
an experience that reminded us (or taught us again)
some truth about what it means to be human.
We said we long for moments of real connection
with others. We remembered that we come alive
when we find ways to be of serve to others.
We acknowledged that we love our children,
and grandchildren, and the other young ones
entrusted into our care. We remembered that
we are trying to be good, thoughtful people;
looking back and making sense of where we’ve been,
still wanting to be willing to be changed,
hoping to be of use, as long as we are here.

There's a humility at work in wisdom & wise people,
a knowing as Socrates suggests, that,
"The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing."

In the *Pirke Avot*, that same ancient collection of
Jewish texts I read a passage from earlier,
the question is posed, "Who is wise?"
And this answer is given:
"The one who learns from each person is wise."

Wisdom, we remember today, has little to do
with mastering particular bodies of knowledge,
though that can be and is important work.
Wisdom is not concerned with acquisition or accumulation.
Wisdom, instead, is a dynamic and unfolding process at work in us.
Wisdom describes a quality of presence and relationship
which allows for a different, more generous & caring
way of seeing to emerge and take shape in how we *live* our lives,
that we might remember again that,
"we are here to see what needs to be done..."

May this be true, in your life and in mine.
Amen & blessed be.