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THE ART OF WISDOM

Abstract:

Who doesn't want to be wise? Wisdom is a concept mentioned often throughout life but rarely do we have any inclination of what it is, where it comes from, or how to improve our own. In order to further understand what wisdom is and the role it plays in human society a more detailed exploration of what constitutes wisdom is necessary. Wisdom changes as we age, and a more careful examination of how the change occurs over time is required. Wisdom is often elusive and though to be absolute or rigid but research into Eastern and Western perspectives of wisdom, brain plasticity, personal human development, and human culture have revealed wisdom to be thoughtful, evolving, relative, and contextual. This paper aims to unearth and classify four elements composing wisdom, discuss the two major types of wisdom, and illustrate how the arts and humanities increase the quality of wisdom a culture produces.

Keywords:

wisdom, arts, humanities, Hinduism, mindfulness, neuroplasticity, personal human development, personality, culture, psychology, decisions, adult development

Introduction

Who doesn't want to be wise? Wisdom is a concept we hear often throughout our lives but rarely have any inclination of what it is, where it comes from, or how to improve our own. It's a universal experience of the human condition to meet someone we consider wise – or at least be aware of someone others consider wise – and desire to one day possess the respect and power wisdom seems to command. Our first contact with wisdom was probably our parents teaching us the things we needed to know about the world we found ourselves in or a teacher who seemed to handle complex questions with ease. The wisdom we granted these individuals fluctuated the more knowledge we gained and the more life we experienced, but the fact remains that at most stages of life we elevate certain people to an admired position due to our perception of their ability to deal with the complex challenges of being alive. The notion of wisdom implies familiarity with how life functions as well as the use of more efficient decision-making as life goes on.

Wisdom is best described “as an expert knowledge system about the fundamental pragmatics of life, including knowledge and judgement about the conduct, purpose, and meaning of life” (Baltes and Freund, 2003, pp.27). Learning the fundamental pragmatics of life takes time because we arrive in established societies and must learn the rules to discover what methods lead to success or failure. Following Erik Erikson's work on the Life Cycle and 8 Stages of Psychosocial Development as a “prescribed sequence of physical, cognitive, and social capacities” (1982, pp.28) we all experience a developmental pattern during our lifespan, though each experience is unique and subjective. As individual experiences overlap to form collective patterns the structure and culture of societies is created as “each new human being receives and internalizes the logic and the strength of the principles of social order” (Erickson, 1982, pp.81). As we age and continue to go through stages of development the more aware we become with patterns of social order, ranging from but certainly not limited to family life, academic opportunities, economic necessities, and vocational expectations. The more exposure we have to those patterns the more familiar we become with them and – hopefully – the more successful we become at navigating them cognitively and emotionally. A culture needs wise people or people it considers wise to guide and mentor the next generation through unknown territory since “older adults have been found to solve emotionally salient problems better than younger adults and to be more likely to view interpersonal problems from multiple perspectives” (Carstensen and Charles, 2004, pp.80). Goals become more achievable and answers more recognizable because knowledge of the patterns involved are increasingly perceived with a greater understanding of the larger scope of existence. Wisdom is not only about knowing what you are doing and why you are doing it at the individual level, but also how those decisions entwine with the socio/cultural context.

Wisdom takes many forms in human civilization and has numerous characteristics and is often perceived as a core or kernel of knowledge that has universal application transcending time and place. Belief in the accuracy of this knowledge is the basis for some religions. Campbell (1949, pp.35-36) explains the universal appeal of wisdom when investigating the hero myth writing,

“Everywhere, no matter what the sphere of interest (whether religious, political, or personal), the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying of the world; and what happens in the interval of the hero’s nonentity, so that he comes back as one reborn, made great and filled with creative power, mankind is also unanimous in declaring. We shall have only to follow, therefore, a multitude of heroic figures through the classic stages of the universal adventure in order to see again what has always been revealed. This will help us to understand not only the meaning of those images for contemporary life, but also the singleness of the human spirit in its aspirations, powers, vicissitudes, and wisdom”.

Though wisdom is desired it is often portrayed as passive in the sense that it does not seek but is sought and waits for questions to provide answers to, like The Buddha or a revered spiritual leader sitting atop a mountain. In these contexts wisdom is something resembling a Platonic absolute we can strive towards but never truly obtain. Wisdom is often intangible or difficult to translate because its formation is based on unique experiences and environments that are difficult to replicate across the vastness of the human condition.

Wisdom is not just knowing the right answer to any question but a mental process and a mindset to be used when working towards achieving a goal. Though wisdom is often elusive there is enough research to permit elements of wisdom to be classified so that it can be better understood not only where wisdom comes from but also how one’s perception and application of wisdom might be further improved. This paper will integrate four components as the basic elements composing wisdom – mindfulness, neuroplasticity, personal human development, and culture – show how wisdom not absolute but thoughtful, evolving, relative, and contextual, discuss the two major types of wisdom, and ultimately show how the arts and humanities increase the quality of wisdom a culture produces while also driving human progress.

The Four Elements of Wisdom

Mindfulness

The spectrum of wisdom is wide, perhaps too wide to ever have a completed study of it. Eastern and Western perspectives of the function wisdom performs highlight different approaches but also reveal commonalities of wisdom across cultures. Western notions of

wisdom tend to foster a desire for efficiency as it relates to productivity and time, more specifically the time-saved. Gladwell (2005, pp.14) captures this desire in *Blink*, where he argues how split-second decisions made based on first impressions of the adaptive unconscious are equally as valid as decisions given serious contemplation, writing, "Decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately". Eastern notions of wisdom tend to involve academic study and are more gradual, metaphysical and timeless. One of the Yogas in Hinduism is called *jnana yoga*, and *jnana* typically means knowledge or wisdom, defined as "method of achieving salvation (*yoga*) principally by the pursuit of intellectual knowledge (*jnana*)" (Varenne, 1976, pp.234). Varenne goes on to write "the aim of *jnana-yoga* is indeed to achieve liberation" (1976, pp. 14).

In yogic practice the notion of mindfulness involves separating the self from the mind in order to better understand the mind's mental processes and how it responds to the world. This separation of the self from the brain is important because in Hindu culture the self contains Divine essence while the brain does not and, while not exactly similar, the Western concept of the soul is a link between the two. Mindfulness relies on an awareness of consciousness by the self through the mind. Part of the practice of meditation is learning to treat the mind (some might prefer 'brain') as a mental organ whose function is to think.

"The function of the mind is to represent things, to organize, to make symbols, to put things into words and categories, and then to re-sort and reorganize. In fact the mind lives to arrange everything noteworthy, both inside and outside of the categories it creates, and to 'make sense' of it all. No matter what our thoughts, doubts, fears, theories, or images of reality might be within the endless stream of observable material, it can be a difficult task to objectively observe the field of our own mind. It is with the very mind that created the patterns, the same mind that is generally unaware of its background field of assumptions, that we must observe the patterns, the field, and the assumptions. It is like the eye trying to see itself". (Freeman, 2010, pp.27)

The brain constantly organizes and creates patterns as well as recognizes them, and awareness of this dynamic process leads to heightened uses of judgment about how to handle the volume of patterns being created and observed by an individual. Freeman (2010, pp.2) explains further,

"[*Jnana yoga*] is an infinitely refined search into the way the mind works, in combination with how perception and feelings work. It is the yoga of insight into the actual nature of our mind and reality. In *jnana yoga* we foster the capacity to discriminate very precisely between that which is true, eternal, joyous, and that which is completely impermanent, superficial, and even delusionary".

Given a goal to achieve or an obstacle to overcome wisdom is about using refined judgement to discriminate very precisely between what is important and necessary to reach the desired goal and what is extraneous, unnecessary, and possibly debilitating.

Mindfulness also requires an awareness of and an embodiment in the present moment, and the definition of mindfulness as “the awareness that arises through intentionally attending in an open, accepting, and discerning way to whatever is arising in the present moment” (Shapiro, 2009, pp.556) is appropriate. With regard to wisdom however one must simultaneously attempt to embody the present moment through mindful practice – “The systematic practice of intentionally attending in an open, caring, and discerning way, which involves both *knowing* and *shaping* the mind” (Shapiro, 2009, pp.556) – and even mindful practices (meditation, breathing exercises, yoga, sitting quietly, many others) while also projecting actions and their consequences forward. Wisdom is thoughtful because it harnesses the power of the mind by requiring the combination of an acknowledgement in present circumstances with a calculation of what might be the product of particular decisions or their absence and an analysis of previous experiences. Mindfulness is the awareness of not only of what the mind does – how it organizes, functions, thinks, manages emotions, and categorizes the world – but also how that awareness can be used to interact with and understand the world through the process of determining what’s true and what’s false, what to do and what not to do, what matters and what doesn’t.

To begin understanding how mindfulness works one could ask the following questions: What patterns do you recognize? What patterns do you create? How do you interpret those patterns? Do you understand what affects your perception of the world? Can you see your individual experience in the larger context of existence? To borrow from Freeman mindfulness is about using the mind to see the mind, and applying that awareness toward one’s definition of liberation.

Neuroplasticity

Within brain science of the later 20th century a new theoretical field emerged called “neuroplasticity” which investigates the malleability of the brain from birth to old age. Neuroscience researchers discovered the brain’s areas are not concretely wired as is revealed when the brain demonstrates a plasticity to overcome injuries, adapts individual perceptions and perspectives based on experiences, and alters existing neural pathways through new information integration. The neuroplasticity theory stands in contrast to the historical view of “localization” – that within the brain each component served a specific function, much like the parts of a car: the alternator controlled the nerve system, the engine breathing and circulation, the computer reason, and the air-conditioning sweating and, most importantly, that none of these parts were interchangeable. Norman Doidge

presents stories of the foremost researchers and their patients' journey's into neuroplasticity in his book *The Brain That Changes Itself*. Paul Bach-y-Rita (a "neuroplastician") used neuroplasticity to help Cheryl Schiltz, a woman who lost her sense of balance after a post-operative antibacterial infection, by sensory-substitution using a device that re-routed balance signals to the brain through her tongue. Doidge describes the story of Michelle Mack, a woman born with only a functional right brain hemisphere, who can remember concrete details and perform calculations with almost savant-like speed but has difficulty with abstract thought. Though she only has one functional hemisphere and certain disabilities are unavoidable Ms. Mack is still able to speak and read efficiently, functions normally controlled by the left hemisphere. Doidge (2007, pp.2) explains neural pathways and how they relate to brain function writing,

"A brain system is made up of many neuronal pathways, or neurons that are connected to one another and working together. If certain key pathways are blocked, then the brain uses older pathways to go around them...These 'secondary' neural pathways are 'unmasked,' or exposed, and, with use, strengthened. This 'unmasking' is generally thought to be one of the main ways the plastic brain reorganizes itself".

Everything we do has a neural pathway dedicated to it – waking, eating, reading, cooking, or creating – and the ability of the brain to create new neural pathways is essential to our ability to learn new things. As neuroplastician Michael Merzenich explains in the book the brain "doesn't simply learn; 'it is always learning how to learn'" (Doidge, 2007, pp.47).

Much of the notion of wisdom is the ability to make a decision, more specifically which decision to make given a certain context or situation, and it is important to have some understanding of how the brain uses neuroplasticity in this process. There has been exhaustive research in psychology and evolutionary biology on the motivations behind human decision-making, and one product of that research has highlighted the difference between heuristic (instinctual) and deliberative (intentional) decisions. Both heuristic and deliberative decisions rely on the brain's ability – consciously and unconsciously – to sift through information to determine what is relevant or irrelevant. This ability evolves over time and becomes sharper as decision-making becomes more familiar. Levine (2009, pp.291) describes the rules governing heuristic and deliberative decision-making-processes writing,

"In any event, the capacity of humans to generate and to learn both heuristic and deliberative rules has clear evolutionary value. Heuristic rules enable decision makers to bypass task-irrelevant information and make rapid choices in repeatable and relatively simple contexts. Deliberative rules, on the other hand, enable decision makers to make sense of complex contexts that often include novel and possibly task-relevant information".

Heuristic decisions include the type Gladwell discussed in *Blink*, decisions that seem more instinctual than cognitive and involve bypassing irrelevant information in order to simplify rapidly. Deliberative decisions on the other hand involve including relevant information in order to understand complexity, a process that becomes more refined as one learns to differentiate between what could be relevant or irrelevant. Deliberative decisions also refine the ability to grasp that a situation does not necessarily need to be simple in order to be understood, a process that becomes easier to manage emotionally as more decision-familiar neural pathways are added over time.

How neuroplasticity relates to wisdom lies in the brain's ability to incorporate new information and experiences unconsciously (i.e. new neural pathways) into the conscious knowledge base one creates going through life. From a scientific standpoint brain neuroplasticity is what makes wisdom possible. Wisdom is evolving because new neural pathways are added from new life experiences as decisions are repeatedly made, which is why we are able to use previous experience as the foundation for making future decisions.

Personal Human Development

When it comes to the formation of personality there is extensive psychological research but what is most relevant here is the debate on nature vs. nurture with regard to how much of our identity is genetic and therefore outside some control and how much of it is formed by the environments we grow up in. In her study of developmental psychology Carol Hoare (2006, pp.9) writes,

“Inquiring whether heredity or environment is more essential to the development of a particular behavior ‘is akin to asking whether the length or the width is more important in determining the area of a rectangle’. The best view emphasizes essential contributions made by and key interactions between and among genetics, environments, contexts, experiences, intentional choices, and inclinations”.

It's natural to wonder about who we are and that exploration begs the question of whether who we are is something fixed we're trying to grow into – hence the popular “finding oneself” movement – or if we are something dynamic changing over time. “People do not develop according to fixed paths that are determined by a genetic blueprint. Personality develops through more complex casual processes that feature dynamic transactions between people and the sociocultural environment” (Caprara and Cervone, 2003, pp.62). The description of the formation of personality as casual and dynamic is important because this implies it happens slowly over time – a lifetime even – and are in part formed through a reciprocal relationship with the environment. What is of immediate concern to the individual is how much of their personality is under their control, namely

how much power someone has over the formation of their personality. Caprara and Cervone (2003, pp.64) describe this as a self-regulating process writing,

“The study of self-regulatory processes, and of reciprocal relations between the self-regulating individual and the social environment, indicates that people contribute agentically to the development of their personalities. People are not passive. They are proactive. By selecting, interpreting, and influencing the environments they encounter, people contribute to the development of their own capacities and tendencies”.

In this sense personality is something we are actively, purposely, and intentionally involved in the development of; we are the agent of change. However unaware we are about the unconscious formation of personality it is important to be aware of how much power we have to shape our personality. The more an individual understands the influence they have over their own personality and what that personality is the better mindset that individual is in to make a wise decision. Wisdom requires selecting, interpreting, and influencing be done by the personality in order to achieve a desired result.

The process by which each personality performs those functions relies on the capacities and tendencies of each individual, which is why personal human development is integral to understanding wisdom – each person’s version of wisdom is unique because each personality is unique. Every person is unique genetically and has different life experiences on which to base their decisions, which is why making a “wise” decision does not have a formula where one adds some of Element A to a dash of Element B and a sprinkle of Element C – personalities approach existence and interpret their experiences differently. Wisdom is relative not only individually but also situationally – one could appear wise in one circumstance and an utter buffoon in another, mostly due to the experiences of one’s life, how one has interpreted those experiences, and the command one has taken over the formation of their personality. However, this is not to say that wisdom cannot be accepted or applied from one person to another purely on the basis of relativity. Such an approach is folly if for no other reason than one cannot assume the challenges another has experienced or that another is not more familiar with a similar or same life pattern.

Also worth mentioning in personal human development is a characteristic of capability that derives from personality tendencies, specifically how well information is retained and the effectiveness of the information’s application. These tendencies are no doubt a combination of genetics and environment and rely strongly on the decisions one makes throughout life as well as what lessons are extracted from successes and failures. For example, while someone in their 20s might be more open to new ideas the decisions they make are made with less wisdom because their personality has not had as much time to develop, they do not have many decision-making neural pathways, and they probably aren’t as mindful as someone in their 50s. However, if someone in their 50s has not

improved the way they make decisions since their 20s by incorporating the lessons one has the opportunity to learn in a 30-year span, then there might not be much wisdom there either.

Culture

If personal human development is the individual element of wisdom, culture is the collective element. No one is born wise but becomes so through time, experience, and the utilization of personality potentials expressed through the culture the personality is formed in. As human beings we are born into various environments and receive norms and values from family and/or society and, referring to the length/width argument made earlier, the effect of our environment is undeniable on the course of our life. “We become cultured through training in various activities, such as customs, arts, ways of interacting with people, and the use of technologies, and the learning of ideas, beliefs, shared philosophies, and religion” (Doidge, 2007, pp.287). Doidge’s “culturally modified brain” (2007, pp.288) is also appropriate here because whatever our individual personalities may be culture is the system our personalities are reacting to and learning from: “the brain and genetics produce culture, but culture also shapes the brain” (Doidge, 2007, pp.288). Culture is where we learn norms, meaning, roles, mindsets, and responsibilities through interaction, and the products of that interaction affect the way in which we develop.

“Expressing culture as shared activities and meaning systems that are implicit in processes fundamental to daily experience and action... show how cultural mores, norms, and practices organize individual development. These are apparent in, for example, imitation and role modeling, habits, instruction, and patterns of collaboration”. (Hoare, 2006, pp.19)

No one is wise or becomes so in a vacuum. Among many things, culture is what helps us organize our personality, gives meaning to relationships, educates us to understand the larger world, and provides the patterns for us to recognize and try to navigate through. Culture gives not only the mindset with which we interpret the world but also the perspective through which we begin to discover our place within it, and awareness of both is essential to understanding wisdom. The plastic brain makes culture by establishing – among many things – how we educate the next generation, which gives them mindsets, meanings, values, and roles, which affects how they interpret the world and use things like creativity to make choices. Wisdom needs culture not only as the method of interaction by which we teach others how to make better choices but also the environment in which culture can be envisioned to be improved upon. In this way culture stays as adaptable as the plastic brain.

“Wisdom, then, forms the most general cognitive, emotional, and motivational space of goals and means within which specific realizations of living a good life can proceed. In this sense, wisdom gives direction to the nature of adaptive fitness that people are expected to move toward. At the same time, wisdom is dynamic and open to individual, social, and cultural variations in life circumstances”. (Baltes and Freund, 2003, pp.29)

One of the most important concepts in this explanation that has been referred to throughout this paper is the idea that wisdom needs a direction – a goal – to be applied towards in order to be effective. Wisdom is contextual because it takes place within a culture while simultaneously being a product of that culture. For wisdom culture performs two major functions – it helps create the personality that has the potential to express wisdom while also providing the environment in which a goal can be imagined and a direction a personality can apply the wisdom required to achieve it.

Reverent Wisdom

Up to this point the major type of wisdom I have been discussing is the wisdom of experience as understood and applied by the human brain. All the elements – mindfulness, neuroplasticity, personal human development, culture – are based on the idea of a mind evolving over time, over the journey we experience during our lifespan. Everyone starts with little or no wisdom because we have no experience, and as we triumph and fail we see life patterns and get better at navigating them and more efficient at executing our desires until we hopefully reach a point where others begin to ask us how we seem to handle complexity so effortlessly. This is the wisdom of human experience and something to be desired and respected and worked towards. Though wisdom is thoughtful, evolving, relative, and contextual there is some fundamental wisdom about existence, a deeper reality we can't comprehend intellectually but feel, and feel drawn to. This yearning leads to questions like “Why am I here?” and “What is my purpose?” and more importantly an instinct to search for answers to those questions and why religions provide answers to the same questions. There is another major type of wisdom – reverent wisdom – that transcends human understanding and control but we believe is there. Some call this God, or Allah, or enlightenment, or ultimate Reality, or nirvana, or “The Force”, or many other things. Eliot (1948, pp.33) even defined “the culture of a people as an incarnation of its religion”. These belief systems all derive from the same instinct to understand reverent wisdom. This type of wisdom comes close to being an absolute but transcends human understanding of what absolute is.

Though reverent wisdom is difficult to explain we do have some sense of what we want it to look like, and this highlights an important characteristic of wisdom. Teachings of some of the major figures of history – the founders of some religions – embody the mindset we want reverent wisdom to impart, hence the fact that those individual versions of wisdom

are portrayed as having application centuries after their creation. Reverent wisdom is the power of the unknown we can't grasp intellectually – it is the intangible element. However, we might be able to see it in others. Throughout this paper words like “granted”, “seemed”, “perceived”, and “portrayed” have been used to describe wise people. This is because wisdom is something we bestow on others based on our judgment of their judgment, their presence, and choices they make. In other words wisdom is given, not claimed. Though wisdom is something we struggle to achieve individually it is something we are able to recognize in others, which is why one of the fastest ways to be considered unwise is to claim to be wiser than other people think you are. Wisdom is like cooking or academic writing – one can claim to be a great chef or an eminent scholar, but those titles have more credibility the more others agree with them, and the same is true of wisdom. At the macro-scale wisdom is about how an individual handles a choice, and while in our own minds we all would like to think we make good decisions all the time, any honest analysis will prove the belief false. It is now election season in America and part of that process is a national – international perhaps – judgment about how, given extraordinary powers, an individual would handle complex problems and the choices their judgment would induce them to make. At one level an election is how wise an electorate perceives a candidate to be, a measure of how much wisdom an electorate gives a candidate. This characteristic of wisdom is worthy of further investigation.

The Arts and Humanities

What relationship does wisdom have to the arts and humanities? Since the humanities is the study of other people there is an incredible amount of wisdom to be gained through learning what other people have done by discovering what lessons can be derived from those experiences. Referring to the earlier discussion of culture, we are social creatures and learning does not take place in a vacuum; even the auto-didact who teaches him/herself does not do so through individual experience alone. In the last century B.C. Cicero (2001, pp.93) explained why it is important to study the arts and humanities writing,

“We must read poetry, acquire a knowledge of history, and select teachers and writers of all the noble arts, read them attentively, and, for the sake of practice, praise, expound, correct, criticize, and refute them. We must argue every question on both sides, and on every topic we must elicit as well as express every plausible argument”.

To learn about political and military strategy, leadership, and oratory we can study Sun-Tzu, Alexander the Great, and Cicero; to learn about literature, story-craft, and poetry we can study Shakespeare, Dante, and Hemingway; to learn about science we can study Newton, Einstein, and Curie; to learn about art we can study Da Vinci, Rembrandt, and

Picasso. These individuals are excellent examples of how the arts and humanities drive human progress.

The most wonderful thing about these subjects is these are not the only people to learn from. The arts and humanities are an endless train of personalities and experiences meaning can be derived from if we have the wisdom to try to understand how their contexts fit into our own or what about them appeals to us. We learn about mindfulness through the awareness other people have gained, neuroplasticity through the science other people have discovered, personal human development through the research other people have conducted, and culture through the societies other people have established. The arts and humanities increase the quality of culture being passed on because they broaden the wisdom an individual might possess through exposure to multiple histories, mindsets, opinions, and values. Wisdom is learned through interaction with the world and with other human beings – living and dead – and the arts and humanities provide an opportunity to increase one's exposure to the full depth and breadth of the human experience.

Conclusion

There is much left unsaid. Ideas about wisdom are constantly evolving, especially in a global environment where cultures blend and wisdoms meet. Though there is an indefinable amount of wisdom to be derived from experience that knowledge has a caveat. Eliot (1943, pp.26) captures this warning beautifully in the *Four Quartets* writing,

“There is, it seems to us, at best, only a limited value in the knowledge derived from experience. The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies, for the pattern is new in every moment and every moment is a new and shocking valuation of all we have been”.

Eliot (1943, pp.27) mentions wisdom a few lines later, writing,

“Do not let me hear of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly, their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession, of belonging to another, or to others, or to God. The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless”.

These are powerful words and how Eliot describes patterns is note-worthy: patterns exist but can also deceive; they may be familiar but are always new. Over-reliance on patterns can lead to good and bad habits, and too much of one pattern falsifies our reality because we fail to recognize what is new and fresh in the world, and every day is a new and fresh world. Eliot describes how much wisdom can be learned through failure, something those of us who have failed often can attest to the power of. Where has fear kept someone from belonging to others, from loving another, from being humble? Only by acknowledging weaknesses can weaknesses be turned into strengths, which is a good start down the path of wisdom.

As a child life seems easy and relatively stable because you're young and don't yet grasp the complexity the world contains. As you get older it seems like the world just moves from one form of chaos to another, and the more you learn and responsibility you take on the worse it seems to get. Knowledge of the elements of wisdom discussed here – mindfulness, neuroplasticity, personal human development, and culture – increases one's understanding and perception of wisdom while providing an opportunity to refine one's own wisdom. Though it is often elusive and seemingly absolute wisdom is thoughtful, evolving, relative, and contextual, and will always be a new and shocking valuation of all we have been.

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