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KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM, Part 2

You've heard the clichés about the marriage counselor who's going through a divorce or the accountant who's filing for bankruptcy. We continue to smile at caricatures such as these because they're based on an undeniable truth: human beings don't always practice what they preach. To wit, knowledge acquired doesn't always translate into knowledge applied.

This brings us to the relationship between knowledge and wisdom. One of the interesting differences might be the extent to which either of them fundamentally changes who we are as a person. It should be evident, for example, that merely acquiring technical knowledge, *i.e.*, knowing how to program a computer or analyze DNA samples, has little to do with a person's character. What is less apparent is that merely reading books on spirituality will not transform one into a likeness of St. Francis of Assisi overnight. While gaining knowledge pertaining to the spiritual life is important, true wisdom comes from the mindful application of that knowledge to our daily actions.

The Voice of the Silence offers this simple but enduring advice: "Be humble, if thou wouldst attain to wisdom." When we are overly conscious of our intellectual achievements, we create a subtle impediment to the attainment of wisdom. An eighteenth-century English poet, William Cowper, put it this way: "Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much; wisdom is humble that he knows no more." The 14th Dalai Lama, for example, may know as much about Tibetan Buddhism as any living scholar, but his genuine sense of humility is never overshadowed by his vast amount of learning.

We can compartmentalize and isolate our knowledge from the way we live our daily life, but wisdom, never. A scholar may possess an impressive intellectual inventory within his chosen field of study and still be prone to selfishness, jealousy, and other defects of character. In his book *Seeking Wisdom*, Theosophical author N. Sri Ram summed it up this way: "When we try to understand the nature of wisdom, we will find that we cannot separate it from life."

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