

Wisdom

&

**A Study in Discipline and
Responsibility**

by

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Wisdom

My interest in "Wisdom" has steadily increased with the passing of time, yet I now find myself in my dotage, as far from enjoying this enviable acquisition in my own life as ever. What I have gained instead, is a wholesome and thorough admiration and respect for those many happy mortals who have succeeded in their quest for "her", (*Sophia*)

Since my family and friends are also interested in Wisdom, I would like to help them if possible to understand something of the nature and difficulties we all encounter in our pursuit of wisdom.

My interest in, and knowledge of wisdom, have been greatly stimulated by my study of the Bible, where there is a truly amazing amount of teaching about wisdom deriving directly from source (God) and continuing *ad infinitum* to describe and elucidate all that mere mortals can grasp of this great subject.

I offer these brief notes in the hope that some of my readers of "The Word of the Lord" may find some help in their perusal of them

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Wisdom

What is wisdom?

Shortly after the 2nd World War, roughly in the 60's, (that maelstrom of new ideas and changing values), there appeared a "rash" of rear car window stickers of various kinds. Some were scurrilous, some downright nasty, but all purported to be amusing. At that time, I spotted one that from a religious point of view took my fancy. Its message was: "Wise men sought Jesus - they still do!" The conjunction of the Magi of Epiphany and our often unavailing attempts to find the source of wisdom in this life struck me as being very intriguing.

As the years have passed, (now 85 for me), I have become more and more concerned that I personally, and perhaps many of my readers, recognise but a partial truth in the old saying that wisdom is that which comes of old age. This may often be true, but grey or white hairs are not necessarily the concomitant of wisdom in old age. It is true that experience of life and the world enlarge and sometimes increase our perception and even our understanding, but age is certainly not the measure of our wisdom. "There's no fool like an old fool", we say, and as an 'old fool' myself, I can assuredly vouch for the truth of it!

Even young people I know, who may well be described as being "very learned" in some branches of academic or practical learning, can yet be devoid of that blessed gift we term "Wisdom". I have often heard it said of someone, "He/she is mighty clever but they have no common sense or understanding of people, or even of themselves." We do not need to see newspapers or other media to realise the truth of this, for I know I am not the only one who knows this.

Wisdom goes beyond the mere possession of knowledge, experience and understanding. It is the ability to apply those attributes soundly, in a critical and effective way.

There is a mystique about "Wisdom" which, to judge from the frequent references to it in Holy Scripture, fascinates and often perplexes. Some people say it comes with grey hair and old age but it seems to most of us that it comes, if at all, from a humble and contented attitude to life and is clearly associated with religious ideas and practices.

We all know of clever, well-educated people who have wonderful gifts and skills but appear to us to be lacking not only wisdom but even native wit and common sense. We refer to them kindly as "academics" and value their gifts and friendship.

In ancient Israel much was written about wisdom and folly in quite trenchant and forthright terms.

No doubt from earlier times, but certainly from the time of Solomon, the word "wisdom", or "wise" and its associated ideas appeared very frequently in Biblical writings. In the time of the early monarchy we read of Solomon humbly praying for

divine help in facing the awful responsibility of ruling and leading Israel. The Chroniclers of his time credited him with humility and a determination to seek God's guidance and he becomes in their minds the very embodiment of the wise ruler, the wise judge. Wise sayings abound in the "Proverbs of Solomon" giving rise to the "Wisdom Literature" with wise and pithy statements that most of us find quite helpful and entertaining, but they are serious in intent and full of true wisdom.

The Nature of Wisdom:

1. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" – perhaps better translated: "The awe..." or "respect for the Lord..." God-fearers are those who stand in awe of God, not those who cringe abjectly before Him.
2. Solomon was especially favoured because he humbly prayed for wisdom preferring this gift above gifts of wealth or power.
3. Wisdom is a gift of God greater and better than gold, silver or jewels. Proverbs 3¹³⁻¹⁸
4. Wisdom is God's agent in Creation. Proverbs 3¹⁹⁻²⁶
5. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!"
6. "How did this man (Jesus) get this wisdom?" Matthew 13⁵⁴
7. Wisdom is personified. "She built a house." Proverbs 8 & 9. "She calls out and invites to her table."
8. Get Wisdom and Insight Proverbs 4¹⁻⁸
9. Wisdom comes from on high from God.
10. Her characteristics: pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, without partiality or hypocrisy.

How do we measure up to such standards?

Where does wisdom come from?

The answer to that question is fortunately, for the Christian, simple enough for we indubitably receive our very selves and all that pertains to us, from God.

"All wisdom is from the Lord" It is His creation. It belongs to Him for ever. It is inalienable, inscrutable. It is a gift to all who love Him.

"For those who love and fear the Lord there is glory, joy, long life with plenty of goods and knowledge poured out upon all living children of God."

Wisdom entails discipline, for pride comes before the fall. "Therefore beware of hypocrisy; keep a watch on the tongue, and speak from a pure heart. You who fear the Lord seek to please Him as those who love Him and are filled with His Law. At your latter end you will reap the reward of a long life on this earth."

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"

Since wisdom emanates from God, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It is, however, critical that we understand aright the concept of "fear". The fear of the Lord is not to be equated with a cringing attitude of terror before God, but always in this context a reverent sense of awe and wonder as a man measures, (if he dare), the inadequacy of his reciprocal love and response to God. The fear of the Lord is in the context the right attitude to adopt before his Maker. In this respect, "Ecclesiasticus" reinforces the well-known statements of Proverbs 9 & 10.

Among the many gifts and abilities that we refuse or accept, is the gift of wisdom. The believer has no problem in discerning this proffered gift, the only problem is whether we accept or refuse the gift. There is no point in asking when, where or why the gift is offered - the only question that matters is whether we accept or reject the gift.

When King David died, Solomon was heir apparent to the throne of Israel and Judah. That night God appeared to Solomon and said to him:

"Ask what I should give you" 2 Chronicles I, v7

What an opportunity! Dream or no dream, it matters not, for we are in the realm of reality and truth; for the one who gives is the one who gives all, has all to give and desires to give His all, and whose love and word are steadfast and true.

"O Lord God, give me now wisdom and knowledge..." said Solomon.

"Wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you what you have not asked for" said God.

What a wonderful beginning to the reign of Solomon! Because his desires were unselfish and directed towards the glory of God, God blessed him.

When we crave possessions or a boon from God are we motivated by thankfulness for the blessings of the past, for present mercies and hopes for the future?

The gift of wisdom and knowledge in this present life is the one most sought after and cherished as we seek peace and purpose and true joy in our relationship with God and our family, friends and loved ones and seek to fulfil our desire to love God and our neighbours as ourselves.

For those who love God in this way, the path has been shown to us in Holy Scripture by the lives of believers, saints and those who have followed in the way of Christ.

Freedom to choose:

Wisdom is the knowledge and practice of choosing under God the things that belong to our peace, and herein is the greatest and most wonderful gift of God, that He not only grants us the knowledge, but also the choice and free will in choosing how we shall respond to the love He gives to us and the choice of rejecting His offer, if we please.

Every day all through our lives we must make the decisions on which hang our destiny for "weal or for woe". He grants us guidance if we accept it and by His grace and love, the ability to conform to His loving purposes for our lives.

The Old Testament, the New Testament and the Apocrypha outline for us the issues which the Scriptures contain and these, with oral tradition and the guidance of our family, friends and teachers enable us to make our choice of belief and behaviour.

The Wisdom Literature in Holy Scripture:

It would be tiresome and not very helpful to describe in detail all the injunctions, prohibitions and advice contained in Israel's "*corpus*" of Wisdom Literature, but the most important of these are briefly mentioned below:

It must always be remembered when we are dealing with what we term "ethics", or the "Science of Behaviour" within Israel, that there is a vast difference between the concepts of Israel and most other nations, including our own. Many of the differences are in the insights, convictions and teaching down through the ages of their religious leaders.

The Halakha

Jesus said: "*I am the Way the Truth and the Life*" John 14⁶

When Jesus said these memorable words, so dear to Christian people, he was referring to what was known in Hebrew as "*Halakha*" and is still in modern days held in honour as the basis of Jewish Law. The root meaning of "*halakha*" is "going" or "the correct way" or "the way to go".

"*Halakha*" is the practical application of the 613 (not simply 10) Commandments given to Moses and developed by Jewish rabbis over the centuries.

Within these laws there is no distinction between religious and secular laws, but *Halakha* was originally enforceable as law.

Although in theory there can be no deviation from the practice and beliefs of *Halakha* there is no overall judicial body that can legislate for the whole of Jewry scattered over the world, and so there is no absolute conformity. Nevertheless, modern Jewry recognises the sanctity and upholds the validity of *Halakha* and rabbis consult together and debate and determine locally what modifications, if any, are desirable for *Halakha*.

One cannot but envy, (or at least admire), the relatively happy lot of Jewish communities in which there is a clear and codified system of beliefs and practices for the guidance of those who seek to follow the way of the Truth and the Life under God.

The Ten Commandments of Judaism and Christianity:

It is said that several years ago at a great international banquet some of the guests were boasting of their ancestors and someone said, "One of my ancestors was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. "Really?" said a rabbi seated somewhat further down the table, "One of mine wrote the Ten Commandments". A hush ensued! If you visit some of the ancient churches in Britain you will see very many tablets or painted boards bearing the words of the Ten Commandments for the edification of the Christian worshippers.

Have we discovered the beginning of Wisdom? It could be so!

"See how great a flame aspires
Kindled by a spark of grace"

From that brief summary of the Law, or *Torah*, grew the vast body of material that the Jews have amassed over the centuries and valued as a guide to righteous living and a warning against sinning.

The injunctions and warnings, (both positive and negative) developed in the early days of law giving are still current in Jewish Law.

The following are among some of the more important:

1. To worship the one true God, creator of all living creatures man and beast
2. To worship the one Holy God who loves and sustains His creation.
3. To be careful to walk in His way; to love and honour Him; love one's neighbour, family and friends; guard the tongue from falsehood, boasting and impurity; to exercise discipline; be generous in almsgiving and careful in making friends; cultivate wisdom, pursue her and hold her fast when found; to remember the fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.

Ecclesiasticus by Jesus ben Sirach:

As the Early Church faced the daunting task of deciding which books of sacred writings should be accepted as truly inspired and worthy to be included in the canon of Holy Scripture, there was inevitably some doubt and disagreement over certain books and their acceptability.

By about the close of the first century AD the "canon" was probably closed but there was inevitably some doubt about certain books which were on the "fringes" of the canon.

Among those books, venerated but not as part of the canon in various areas of Christendom, is a number of books (The Apocrypha) in which we find valuable teaching on wisdom. One of those, which has close affinities with the Biblical book

"The Wisdom of Solomon" and the stock of wise sayings scattered among the Old Testament and New Testament books as guides to "Godly living" is the book "Ecclesiasticus" or "The Wisdom of Ben Sirach".

This formidable title may well strike fear into the hearts of those who are not familiar with this particular book and even those who understand the language of the Apocrypha, (the "hidden books"), feel daunted by the mass of alternative textual readings the book contains.

Since only very few English versions of the Holy Bible contain the Apocryphal Book: "Ecclesiasticus", we now consider the modern translation of that book, lest we fail to take account of the interesting and valuable material that it contains. Fortunately, we have today a "Revised English Bible" from which to study the book of Wisdom.

Jesus ben Sirach, the author, avails himself of ancient teaching and practice based upon the vast and impressive store of Jewish material to which he was heir. But he also adds to the concept of Wisdom many new insights and much that, by study of scripture and intuitive psychology, has enriched our understanding of God's world and mankind's response to his Maker.

Whereas there were many ancient proverbs, saws, sayings and facets of wisdom current in ancient and modern days, it is clear that the writer postulates that God Himself is the sole source of Wisdom as the prime-mover and Lord of the Universe. All depends upon and coheres in Him.

This insight and conviction is one that it was not difficult to impress upon the Jewish people, for by instruction and practice from early days in their history, God's rule and reign were more readily accepted among them than in a modern and largely secular society like ours in "The West" and the teaching of such Wisdom is enduring and of perennial relevance.

1. The book "Ecclesiasticus" begins with a clear and forthright statement that "All Wisdom is from the Lord, and with Him it remains for ever".

Nowhere in wisdom literature is it more succinctly stated that such is the origin and role of Wisdom in the Jewish faith.

2. Wisdom was created before all other things and the Lord lavished "her" upon those who loved Him. Wisdom, because of her nature as the giver of love and gifts, is understandably personified as female, (*Sophia* in Greek).
3. The fear of the Lord is glory and exultation, gladness and rejoicing, bringing blessing and a happy end to personal life on the earth.
4. To fear the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom. She is created with the faithful in the womb and she will abide faithful among their descendants.
"The fear of the Lord is the Crown of Wisdom".

Teaching from Ecclesiasticus:

1. **Pride**: Do not boast of your wealth or your ability. Do not say, "I have sinned but the Lord took no heed. I can add sin to sin." Do not be over-confident of His forgiveness, for wrath as well as forgiveness and mercy are with Him and He will surely punish you.
2. **Speech**: Be consistent, quick to hear but deliberate in answering. If you know what to answer, do so. If you do not, put your hand over your mouth. Honour and dishonour come from speaking and the tongue may be your downfall.
3. **Friends**: Pleasant speech multiplies friends and a gracious tongue multiplies courtesies. Have many friends but let your advisors be one in a thousand. Gain your friends through the testing of them, and don't trust them hastily. Make sure they will stand by you in time of trouble. Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter beyond price. Those who fear the Lord will find such and direct their friendship aright.

The foregoing words of advice are very close to the words and spirit of earlier (e.g. "Solomon's Wisdom" and scattered Old Testament Proverbs and warnings in the Old Testament.)

As for "Forgive your neighbour any wrong he has done you; then, when you pray, your sins will be forgiven", is a striking and important parallel to the New Testament sentence; "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" and helps us to date Ben Sirach's closeness to the New Testament in date and context, (i.e. 132 - 110 BC). As the writer continues his description of Wisdom, we see a process developing of personification of Wisdom such as is to be seen in other similar writings where Wisdom is extolled as the "Helpmeet" or "Handmaid" of the Almighty, c.f. Proverbs 8 v22.

The Law & The Prophets

Having profound and loving regard for the Law (The Torah) and the Prophets, I find it difficult to write about "Wisdom" without considering the "Prophets" whose lives and roles in the lives of Israel were so brilliant. Some time ago, I felt that I should combine them in at least a short appreciation of their importance in Israel's religion. I am therefore adding to these notes a brief recognition of the part they have played in Israel's faith. Thanks be to God!

Prophet or "Seer"

A prophet or "seer" is not only a forthteller and guide to our understanding of the complex world in which we live, but one who reveals or opens up the hidden secrets of our hearts and discloses the will of God in our lives. To those who lack spiritual insight and understanding there may be a blessed quietude of consciousness and spirit which we should recognise and respect. We meet in life's stress and turmoil, loving souls who need our help and yet contribute as much to the well-being of our lives as those who lack understanding and need our compassion and help.

It is hardly surprising that earnest seekers after the truth, when they have been blessed by learning about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, recognise Him and call Him a "prophet" even though they cannot accept the doctrine of his divinity. The problem for non-Christians is very acute, especially in the light of the fourth Gospel's explicit statement "I and the father are one".

For Christians, Christ is the "Light of the World" and for those of spiritual insight, prophecy is like the emergence of lights that flare in the darkness of the world in various places at various times, and bring healing, understanding, joy and peace to those who perceive them. These lights have names in the Bible, such as Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the so-called "Minor Prophets", but every age has increased the roll of those who have revealed the mind of God, nameless saints of humble aspirations except to do the will of God. As Ecclesiastes states: "Some there be which have no memorial who are perished... but they have entered into the "Kingdom of God".

"The Kingdom of God" or "The Kingdom of Heaven" is that to which the prophets direct our attention by their teaching and example.

A Study in Discipline & Responsibility

The Old Testament in Hebrew is entitled “The Law and the Prophets and The Writings”.

Although all three are mutually interdependent and in a sense “speak for themselves”, there is in the case of the prophets a problem in modern understanding of Prophecy. The “Torah”, or “Law”, dating back to the time of Moses has been, and still is, sacred in the eyes of Israel and a guide to the faithful in Israel in ancient and modern times. Although it is in essence and spirit sacrosanct and unchangeable, as with all law codes there are modifications in practice in the understanding and application of law codes in a living and developing community.

The Prophets, are for our times and for past, present and future generations not quite so easily understood. This is partly due to a misunderstanding of the popular meaning of the word “prophecy”. The problem arises when, as so often happens, the word prophecy is linked exclusively with the future. It is true that there is this link, but prophecy, rightly understood, is concerned with the past, the present and the future. The Old Testament Prophets were not only “foretellers”, but rather “forth-tellers” declaring the will of God in a forthright manner, predicting the inevitable outcome of mankind’s disobedience, sin and folly, and the inevitable punishment God would mete out - “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”; “Beware the day of wrath”. Through Dreams, Visions, and Messages from God, by prayer, in trances, from contemplation and by introspection, the Prophets delivered their messages. Many prophets were scorned and rejected, many were persecuted, some were put to death, some were false prophets, but all had the vision and message for which they were prepared even to die. “The Lord said to me”; “This is the Word of the Lord”; “I saw in my dream”; “Thus says the Holy One”; “God says... “. All these are some of the introductions to the messages of the Prophets, “The Word of the Lord”.

Prophetic Teaching:

The ancient prophets of the Old Testament, like those who followed them in New Testament times, were at pains to point out to their contemporaries and future generations the “Maker’s Instructions” if we can use such a simile with reverence, awe and love. “This and this are the ways of justice, peace and love”. “What doth the Lord require of thee but to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself?” It is hardly surprising that the Christian Church subscribes to this lofty ideal despite mankind’s failure to follow in the way that leads to peace and to Life Eternal.

Moses described as a Prophet:

We normally associate the name of Moses with the Torah, i.e. The Law or “Teaching” or “Commandments”, but there is a fascinating ending to the book of Deuteronomy which runs: “Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 31). Such was the ancient historian’s assessment of the Prophet Moses in his dealings with the Hebrew people in

their “infancy” as a nation under God’s guidance laying great emphasis upon Discipline and Responsibility.

What then is a “Prophet”? Moses was far more than a philosopher, but one who revealed the will of God; he was in “close contact” with the God of Israel; one who recognised the spiritual dimension of life; one who pleaded passionately for himself and his companions, weak and sinful; one who declared the instructions of the Maker of the World for his people, so dear to God. Prophetic Teaching is concerned especially with Discipline and Responsibility.

From a Christian point of view we must accept the statement that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and his loving purposes for mankind.

From a secular point of view, we acknowledge that not all is well with us in our world. We know that we do not enjoy the peace and joy that we have lost, (or failed to find in our lives). We know that we do not enjoy the joy and peace of mind for which we long.

Depending upon our spiritual insight we feel a sense of guilt which, depending upon our transgressions and our sensitivity can wreak havoc with our peace of mind. “Had Zimri peace who slew his father?” “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The greatest problem with the sense of guilt is that it seems to be self-generating, even when it is only for a lenient offence. It has the tendency to develop into a well-nigh-intolerable pain that haunts the patient and dogs his or her waking or sleeping hours, or both, until it becomes a pathological state. Here the believer who has faith is blessed by being able to confess, and through faith, gain pardon and peace.

Confession and pardon may be granted by those we have wronged, by private prayer, by Church mediation, but however they are granted, if the intent is genuine and sincere, pardon and peace may be obtained. Those of us who have visited and counselled prisoners, know how difficult it is, (yet how necessary), to convince some murderers and those guilty of even more serious offences to accept the truth of the statement that they have not committed the “Unforgivable Sin” (often confused with murder), and may yet gain pardon and peace through confession and God’s mercy and forgiveness.

A Disciplined Life

"My child, from youth choose discipline and when you have grey hair you will still find wisdom" - so says Jesus ben Sirach, Ecclesiasticus 6¹⁸. I am sure that is true, but the trouble is that unless we have discipline forced upon us or we are unusually precocious we may be already so far advanced in selfish or wayward behaviour that even with loving and careful coaching it may be too late to amend our ways.

We are aware that little ones have little or no awareness of what belongs to their and our peace and so need much love and guidance to achieve this. As they grow older they should learn more about themselves and other people, and pass from the "anomalous" stage, (pre-school, lacking discipline), through the "heteronomous" stage, (junior school, accepting the guide-lines laid down by others), to the "autonomous" stage, (self-regulating observance of law), in the development of conscience and sociability with others.

The failure of so many who live self-centred or wicked and evil lives requires that for the sake of all we must endeavour by love, education and encouragement to help them, lest by indiscipline they wreak havoc to others and grow up as anti-social members of society lacking peace, joy and love and denying them to others.

We know as Christians that God who is compassionate and forgiving helps us in dealing with these problems as well as with those who for reasons of innocent impotence fail to mature in Wisdom and Spirit and need His healing and our care.

Growth and Nurture in Early Years of Human Life:

Whether we recognise it or not, and whether we wish it or not, we all live under discipline, not from the "cradle to the grave" but from conception to death. That discipline to which we are all subject begins in the womb, where we are restricted and subjected to our mother's love or rejection, her will, our freewill, our developing genetic make-up from our parents' DNA and various other factors. Here too begin our life experiences good or bad, our physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual variations. When we declare our age, should we not, strictly speaking, add 9 months to the total? We are such complex beings that even cloning cannot ensure that absolutely identical people can be achieved - thank God!

This is not an answer to the Psalmist's question "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou dost care for him? Yet thou hast made him a little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour." (Psalm 8⁴⁻⁵).

As babies and children develop and grow, provided they are not stunted or defective in body mind or spirit or formed into a mould or way of life by well-meaning but misguided or even evil-minded persons, they will, for better or worse, develop a personal character and discipline by which they live.

Those who can see and hold a baby in their hands without being stirred with a feeling of wonder and love must surely have missed, (even if it is not one's own child), the most precious experience and joy that life can afford. Even if, (and why say "even if"?), the little one is not perfect, then that child should be even more loved.

We know that those who baptise or bring to baptism a little child all agree that “there never was such a wonderful child!” - as the parents often aver.

Yet there is something more that must be said, which fills us with concern and a mixture of joy and anxiety, and that is, that as we look at this wonderful “gift of God” we say (with Luke 1⁶⁶), “What manner of child shall this be?” Knowing that the nurture and upbringing of all children in discipline and responsibility is our duty and privilege, we may well consider this a sobering and daunting experience to contemplate!

Marriage and the Prophets:

As though anticipating the teaching of Jesus Christ on fidelity in human relationships and the sanctity of the marriage bond, the prophets had much to say about marriage and discipline and responsibility those two essential virtues that uphold the stability of marriage.

We need to remember, if we are married, that after the first fine careless rapture, however long we have been married every single day our marriage is something to be “worked at”.

There is a need of discipline lest lack of openness with one’s partner leads to resentment and “distancing”.

Marriage is not simply a licence to sleep together, but rather to lie awake in a loving relationship until, holding hands, we find peace and joy overtaking us and sleep coming upon us. Without words, the clasping of a hand is the re-enactment of the giving of the man and wife in marriage and the act is not merely a symbol that “you belong to me, and I belong to you”. The holding of a partner’s hand is an important reminder of what true trust is all about.

Broken Marriages:

One of the most tragic events in the lives of adults and children is when a married couple decide that they must part company, with all the pain and disappointment that will cause them, their children, relatives and friends. Even as the prophets, especially Hosea, lamented the apostasy and infidelity of God’s people to their “husband and lover”, (God), even so we enter into the human tragedy.

Before we are tempted to pontificate about the situation, let us realise that our role is to show compassion not condemnation, and support rather than blame. We cannot enter into the heart and mind of one of the parties, much less of both. It may be that they misjudged their ability to trust, that they can overcome their differences with the help of kind friends or have not learned that we should not “let the sun go down on our wrath” and thereby miss the healing and joy of reconciliation with their partner.

Whatever the cause may be, we can bring our love and support and the assurance that God himself also cares.

How do we respond to the gift of wisdom?

We now face the problem of responsibility, for each of us according to our ability and choice must respond to the proffered gift. In other words, how do we meet or reconcile God's providence with our own wilfulness, sin, pride, folly and disobedience, and our response to God the giver of this great gift?

Having therefore established as far as we are able, the knowledge we possess from our Christian faith, we now grapple with the well-nigh intractable problem of how, in the light of our weakness, sin and ignorance, we so order our lives as to work out those glimmerings of intelligent and God-given wisdom with which God has blessed us. In other words, according to our ability, how far do we follow the example set by Jesus Christ in his wisdom, humility, obedience and trust in God's goodness and love to us, his children?

The classic response seems to me that of Solomon who on the death of David, his father, was offered by God the choice of what we might call the fairy tale offer; "Ask what you wish, and it will be granted". Faced with the prospect of wealth, power, greatness and all that a prospective and ambitious ruler might have snatched at, Solomon chose to ask God for the gift of Wisdom to rule his people wisely, setting at nought all the allure and excitements that a self-seeking despot might desire. Only God, the giver of the gift, could judge the wisdom of Solomon's choice and we know that "it pleased the Lord". The sequel to this choice of Solomon and his subsequent life, led to his career for which he, like all those upon whom greatness is conferred, thenceforward accepted the responsibility of his choice. Before God as Judge, he stands convicted by his deeds and misdeeds as we surely do, trusting in God's mercy and compassion at his "Judgement day".

Who are we to stand in judgement upon Solomon's or anyone else's entry into Life Eternal? Only Almighty God is his, and our Judge; "Lord, have mercy".

Some issues requiring wisdom

1. Advertisements

In a market economy such as ours which relies upon business acumen and the power to persuade people to buy what the shopkeeper has to offer, there is always a well-meaning attempt to satisfy needs and to improve the life-style of the customer. But there is also a tendency to extol the virtues of the goods for sale to a dishonest and extravagant level which may bring about a sale price quite out of keeping with reasonable demands and involves the unwary in financial hardship. Some advertisements come from dishonest and unscrupulous sources, and make a mockery of honest practice, especially those that pander to the "must have" syndrome or the "everyone has one these days" attitude.

It is easy, especially if we have children, teenage or otherwise, to fall into the trap of being "conned" into buying what we feel at heart is not conducive to true peace and satisfaction – indeed for the sake of peace we might even consider by hindsight that we have been, if not feckless, at least unwise. Life is full of pitfalls if we are not constantly alert, (and not all, but some people, are dishonest)!

2. AIDS

This is a tragic affliction which demands our most serious consideration because it afflicts already millions of innocent sufferers. This is something which bids fair to ruin the lives and families of people world-wide. Self-discipline is the only sure way of combating this scourge of mankind while our doctors seek the means of curing, if they can, those who possibly have contracted the virus quite innocently and our nurses bring comfort to the victims.

For those in Britain, the solution lies not in personal discipline but rather in responsibility insofar that the solution to the problem consists in loving care and making possible expensive treatment that can be administered to the sick. We may not be guilty, but we are our brothers' keepers!

3. Alcoholism

Those starry-eyed idealists who fail to read the history of our country correctly will fail also to understand that the problem of alcoholism is not something new. Particularly in the wretched conditions of the poor in the Industrial Revolution there was recourse to alcohol, particularly spirits, to bring some comfort and even joy to the lives of the oppressed classes of society. Alcohol is a gift of God which has medicinal properties, but since we are aware of its dangers, it is something to be used if not with fear and trepidation, then with discipline and discretion. Its effects are such that we must by example and teaching make it plain that to allow excessive alcohol to be consumed by minors and adults is totally irresponsible and reprehensible. Conduct and responsibility are both involved in the use of alcohol.

4. Animals

Perhaps it is because of our close affinity with the animal kingdom that we, particularly in this country, feel so concerned about its well-being. In the Creation Stories of the Bible, Man is quite understandably, because of his rational understanding, made responsible for the creatures of the earth, sea and sky, and responsible to God for them. Those we have tamed and used to help us in our labours we have naturally favoured and used their products and bodies for our use. Although there is a modern and increasing trend towards vegetarianism, most people feel no sense of guilt in taking the lives of animate creatures for food. To a certain extent this is due to repugnance to taking life even of the "lower" animals, but there are many other factors involved. How far down the scale should we go? How do we justify killing? If we personally had to kill the animals, how many of us would have the heart to accept the task of killing them? The only considerations on which all are agreed is that wanton and needless pain should not be inflicted upon the animals, either in raising them or in killing them. In this way, (even perhaps with a lurking feeling of guilt), we make our decisions and hopefully satisfy ourselves that we have fulfilled our moral discipline and sense of responsibility in farming, killing and eating animals.

5. Speed Cameras

“The camera does not lie” Many people wish it did, especially as they grow old and fight shy of the ordeal of being photographed; but our concern is with the beneficial aspect of the laws of the land. We must have all noticed the salutary braking of motorists as they suddenly observe the approach of a police car or speed camera. Are we never guilty of breaking the speed limit or causing a near accident by impatience, discourtesy or lack of attention to safety rules? Are we honest enough to confess that we are not blameless in this respect? As our roads become more crowded, tempers shorter and delays longer so the tragic toll of casualties increases steadily and inexorably. We are surely not so blind or foolish as to join the ranks of those who blandly call the internal combustion engine the infernal combustion engine. It is true that the internal combustion engine has deleterious effects upon our peace and threats to our safety, but it is naïve to suggest that we wreck our means of transport by banning the use of it. God has given us not only the ability to design our modern travel with all the risks involved but also the will to use his gifts with discretion. As life becomes potentially more hazardous so much more vigilant we must be to acknowledge the risks we incur, our shared guilt and our need for strict self discipline and a sense of responsibility towards our fellow travellers. Until we have designed a satisfactory method of taking our children safely to and from school we must regretfully continue to protect them by the provisions we now make.

6. Environment

“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”.

Whereas many of the problems we are faced with can be solved by goodwill and in the march of human progress with God’s help, there are certain critical areas of life where mankind’s folly, pride or greed have wrought serious damage upon a world-wide scale. The most obvious examples of these are the damage to the ozone layer, the deforestation of the land, the depletion of earth’s resources and the resultant global warming which appears to be irremediable and irreversible.

It seems to have taken a long time for the truth of what is happening to sink into our minds, longer for us to admit the truth, and even longer to take steps to deal with the problem and to accept responsibility for the damage already done, and to make amends for desecrating the wonderful world in which we live.

Who is to blame for the mess we are making of God’s world? Without a doubt, we are the guilty ones to whom the world has been entrusted. We must all acknowledge our responsibility and share the guilt and shame. As polluters and despoilers of the earth and its resources we must at least confess our sins and shortcomings and try to make amends by our future conduct and self-discipline and by proving that we can act more responsibly in our future care of the world.

7. Personal relations

Someone has said that *“Hell is other people”*. Such a statement is cynical, even blasphemous, and no one but a confirmed misanthrope could possibly hold such a belief. Personal relations are the very essence of our loving relationships with other people. In the Biblical book, Genesis, we are told that God created man and wife to

live together as “one flesh” for it is not good that we should be alone but enjoy the fruits of human society and intercourse. On many occasions we may hear the elderly married couple say with a smile “*you belong to me, and I belong to you*”, and really mean it. This is what “fidelity” is all about; but unfortunately, the converse is all too common. There are far too many couples whose marriage ties have been broken by their infidelity to one another. It is not meet and right that we should condemn them because unless we can replicate their lives and experience, who are we to judge between them? God alone is our judge and he is merciful and compassionate and Jews and Christians trust in His judgement.

In all our weakness and sin in all our failings and shortcomings, we know we have one who judges righteously and in mercy and compassion. This does not mean that we are given licence to maltreat one another, to neglect the poor and needy, the old, the bereaved, the orphans, the disabled, those who lack the ability to order their lives aright, but to show self-discipline in our own personal lives and responsibility among our fellows. Our duty and privilege is to help and love them and to minister to their needs.

8. Sport

On a much lighter note we pass now to the consideration of the state of sport in our country and how the dual themes of “discipline and responsibility” play their parts in the leisure we enjoy.

First we must take note of the positive, helpful and enjoyable facets of sport which have enhanced the physical and emotional prowess of our people and brought joy and happiness to millions of people who either participate in the sports or watch others doing so. Having paid credit for this, we must in all fairness acknowledge that there are occasions when indiscipline and irresponsibility have marred sporting occasions on the field and amongst spectators. Discipline and responsibility are key words on and off the field whatever the sport, and must be observed. One of the saddest incidents reported was seeing at a football match a middle-aged spectator clapping a member of the visiting team on a brilliant piece of footwork and receiving a rebuke from the “home fans” amongst whom he was seated. Such an unsportsmanlike incident brings no credit to anyone, and shame to the offenders. It is true that this sort of thing is rare, but partisanship if carried to an excess, has on occasions ruined not only matches but led to indiscipline and breaches of the peace around sports stadia and escalated into running fights especially when alcohol has been drunk to excess.

It is said that sport has been ruined by too much money changing hands in transfer fees, wages and the paraphernalia of sport. Who is to blame for this? We think that the answer to such a question is that we are collectively guilty but what do we do about it? As with such questions the answer is that we don't want to be involved and can find many rational excuses for doing nothing. As said years ago, “*All that is needed for evil to flourish in the world is for good men to do nothing*”.

9. Idolatry:

Many of the world's great religions are concerned to combat the teaching of their adherents who fall into the blasphemous error of worshipping overtly or secretly idols. In common parlance today we still find people, old and young, intelligent or otherwise, worshipping "pop idols" or false and unworthy objects and personalities instead of God. By the first century of the Christian era the Jewish people had received by tradition and teaching many salutary warnings about the dangers of idolatry and many admonitions to follow "the way of righteousness" in their daily living (*c.f.* Halakah).

CONCLUSION

We would not like this "excursion" to end on a negative or pessimistic note, for as Christians we should all be optimists concerned for the coming of the "Kingdom of God" upon this earth because "*God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to the end that all that believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life*" and that that life should be full, free and abundant. a gift of His love.

Christ: "The Bright Morning Star" (Revelation 22¹⁶)

*"Christ is the Morning Star
Who when the night of this World is past
Brings to His Saints
The promise of the light of Life
And opens everlasting day"*

Baeda in Apocalypsim

"The Bright Morning Star" is the Lode Star that attracts and leads by day, and the Pole Star is the Lode Star that guides by night the navigator and all who seek their way in the dark. ("Lode Stone" is the magnetic stone that has the power to attract.) We still refer to these stars and use them as of old.

There is great joy in seeking and finding, and often, especially in good company, finding greater joy in travelling hopefully than in arriving! "What do we seek?" we often ask. Jesus often asked the question, for He cared.

If you have followed the text of "Wisdom & Prophecy", (hopefully evaluating the Jewish and Christian insights and knowledge), we assume that you have understood the joy and sense of security that followers of these faiths have gained from the practice of their religions and their hopes for the future.

Discipline in Godly living is the essential factor and sure path in following God's way on our pilgrimage through life. For the ancient and modern day Jew and Christian, the Bible is the Word of the Lord and provides all the answers to the question, "Why do wise men still seek Jesus?"

Although the Halakha of the Jews is binding on those who accept and honour its strictures and regulations, it must be borne in mind and stressed that, like Christians

and peoples of other faiths, we find that God has also granted us the freedom to live according to our own chosen predilections. Through prophecy particularly, we learn God's ways and will for us and His judgement on our behaviour. He does not coerce or condemn us, but through His servants, the Prophets forewarns us of what may be the consequences of our obedience or disobedience, pleading with us to follow the paths of peace and joy in His service.

Summary of the Law

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

"The first commandment is this:

*'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
With all your soul, with all your mind
And with all your strength.'*

The second is this

'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The way to "Life Eternal" God has shown us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

"The reverence of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"

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