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Wisdom

Wisdom and Experience

Wisdom is something one must find on one's own as it cannot be taught as seen through Siddhartha's hardships and challenges, my own experiences as a teenage boy, and an essay on wisdom by Dennis Duncan. Siddhartha at first does not seem to understand what his Brahmin teachers are teaching him. Much like a young child not understanding his parents' teachings. It is not until Siddhartha, like the child, grows and experiences life more does he understand the teachings.

As seen through Siddhartha wanting to leave the Brahmins, the young Brahman b learn anything further, as Siddhartha begins to discover wisdom cannot be taught but must be found on one's own. Siddhartha is loved dearly in his village and has both caring parents and a dear friend in his life, however Siddhartha begins to feel that there is more to life and wants to find what life has to offer, "Siddhartha had begun to harbor discontent. He had begun to feel that his father's love and the love of his mother, even the love of his friend Govinda, would not always and forever suffice to gladden him, fulfill him. He had begun to suspect that his venerable father and his other teachers, all wise Brahmins, had already given him the richest and best part of their wisdom" (Hesse, 5). Siddhartha has everything one could need in life, but still yearns for more from life and wishes to leave his village and find more to life. Siddhartha since leaving the Brahmins has joined and left the Samana's, and now received the opportunity to speak and learn from the Buddha. Siddhartha immediately acknowledges that the Buddha has reached enlightenment, but after reading his doctrine understands that at this rate Siddhartha will not reach the end goal of enlightenment by just purely following the doctrine, but instead by going on his own journey without a doctrine or teacher as experience is unable be passed down "You have found redemption from death. It came to you as if you were engaged in a search of your own, upon a path of your own; it came to you through thinking, through meditation, through knowledge, through enlightenment. Not through doctrine did it come to you. No one will ever attain redemption through doctrine! Never, O Venerable One, will you be able to convey in words and show and say through your teachings what happened to you in the hour of your enlightenment, much is contained in the doctrine of the enlightened Buddha. But there is one thing it does not contain: It does not contain the secret of what the Sublime One himself experienced, he alone among the hundreds of thousands. This is why I am continuing my journey, not to seek a different, better doctrine, for I know there is none, but to leave behind me all teachings and all teachers and to reach my goal alone or perish" (Hesse, 30). Siddhartha understands that in terms of doctrine, the Buddha's is the best, but Siddhartha after reading the doctrine understands that if he were to follow it Siddhartha would learn how to live a good life as a good person but will not learn or understand about the Buddha's experience of reaching

enlightenment. Siddhartha at this point of the novel has gone through many trials and tribulations, but finally reached enlightenment. After Siddhartha took over as the ferryman, Govinda came to Siddhartha to get across the river. After crossing the river and spending the night in Siddhartha's hut, Siddhartha and Govinda begin to speak about their lives and at the end of the conversation Siddhartha tells Govinda to kiss him on the forehead "Bend down here to me! Yes, like that, closer! Even closer! Kiss me on the forehead, Govinda! When Govinda, perplexed and yet drawn by great love and foreboding, obeying his words, bent down close to him, and touched his forehead with his lips, something wondrous happened to him. While his thoughts were still lingering over Siddhartha's old words, while he was still fruitlessly and reluctantly attempting to think away time, to imagine Nirvana and Samsara as one, while a certain contempt for his friend's words was even then battling inside him with tremendous love and reverence, this happened: He no longer saw the face of his friend Siddhartha; instead he saw other faces, many of them, a long series, a flowing river of faces, by the hundreds, by the thousands, all of them coming and fading away, and yet all of them appearing to be there at once, all of them continuously changing, being renewed and all of them at the same time as Siddhartha. He saw the face of a fish, a carp, its mouth wrenched open in infinite pain, a dying fish with dying eyes, saw the face of a newborn child...saw the face of a murderer, saw him stick a knife into a person's body... he saw corpses laid out, still, cold, and empty... he saw the heads of wild animals... he saw Gods... And Govinda saw that this smiling of the mask, this smile of Oneness over all the flowing figures, this smile of simultaneousness over the thousand births and deaths, this smile of Siddhartha was precisely the same, was precisely the same trill, delicate, impenetrable, perhaps kind smile of Gautama, the Buddha, as he himself had seen it a hundred times with awe. This, Govinda knew, is how the Perfect Ones smiled" (Hesse, 126). Siddhartha has reached enlightenment, and at this moment understands perfectly that wisdom nor experience can be passed on by words and tells Govinda to kiss his forehead. Once Govinda's lips contacted Siddhartha, Govinda saw and felt everything Siddhartha was feeling and felt the enlightenment inside of him, understanding immediately he too was enlightened like the Buddha.

Growing up as a teenage boy has led me to understand that wisdom is gained through both painful and happy experiences and one's ability to learn and grow from those experiences. As a human, the only thing promised is death. Growing up adults will tell children to thank God for the day, say a prayer for waking up as it is a blessing, and so on. However, the children might not fully understand what the adult is trying to tell them. I for example did not fully understand it either. Similarly, Siddhartha did not fully understand the teachings of the Brahmins "They knew everything, these Brahmins and their holy books, everything... they knew infinitely many things- but was there value in knowing these things?" (Hesse, 6). Siddhartha understands his teachers are wise, much like a child to his parents, but doesn't fully understand yet the reason behind their teachings. Much like a child not understanding his parents' teachings, both the child and Siddhartha will soon understand the teachings through painful experiences. Until the recent loss of my grandmother, it was not until then that I realized everyday is truly a blessing. The same goes for enjoying every moment spent with your loved ones. I believe that I did not understand this idea either until I happened, and I lost my grandmother. The loss of my grandmother was the first loss of someone I was close with, as she would spend many months of the year staying with us in our house ever since I was a baby. The loss helped me grow to fully understand that the time spent with loved ones is precious, and that it can be taken at any moment. Siddhartha understands this feeling of grief when his son ran away from the hut to live his own life "Sadly he sat

down, felt something dying in his heart, felt emptiness, no longer saw any joy before him, any goal “(Hesse 106). Siddhartha’s son may not have died, but his son was, like my grandmother, a very close loss to him. Siddhartha then begins to naturally feel grief at the loss of his son and feels a similar emptiness I felt. However, there are happy experiences in life as well as painful ones. When I was younger, I used to play basketball for my middle school. My dad was always big on basketball and would sometime help me practice getting ready for games. My dad loved the behind the back basketball move. For many games he would tell me to use it, but I never fully understood why and never did. Until I finally decided to try it one game. In that game I was running down the court with the ball when a defender came up to try and stop me. When the defender came up, I used the move my dad was trying to teach me and it worked, letting me run to the basket for an easy layup. Siddhartha has a similar experience with Govinda, when he asked his best friend to kiss his forehead “When Govinda, perplexed and yet drawn by great love and foreboding, obeying his words, bent down close to him and touched his forehead with his lips, something wondrous happened to him” (Hesse, 125). Siddhartha had his little father teaching his son moment, when he asked Govinda to kiss his forehead. At first, Govinda was shocked and did not understand what Siddhartha was telling him, but when Govinda finally listened it was a wonderful feeling for both. At first, I didn’t fully understand the importance of the move, but after using it I fully understood why he was trying to teach it to me. Wisdom is something that must be put into action, like Govinda kissing Siddhartha’s forehead. I don’t believe it is possible to pass on wisdom purely by words. I believe a teacher can try teaching a pupil, but the pupil fully understanding the lesson would not be possible until he puts the lesson into action gaining the experience and wisdom following the completed action.

Dennis Duncan defines knowledge as “more than just an accumulation of facts” and that wisdom is more effectively gained through observations and experiences rather than from training and education. Dennis Duncan argues that knowledge is more than just facts, that knowledge is a buildup of experiences and observations. Danny Duncan summarizes Simon Winchester’s *Knowing What We Know* as a run-through of “several millennia’s worth of epistemology”. In the novel by Simon Winchester’s, it begins by a child being stung by a wasp “It begins with the authors childhood shock at a wasp sting. This is a powerful kind of experimental learning, more painful but more memorable” (Duncan, 2). Duncan refers to a novel where a child was learning from experience. The child in the novel was stung by a wasp, and the child now gained the painful knowledge of understanding not to play with or around wasps anymore. Living in 2023, most people have access to fascinating reads full of knowledge, but the reader would not gain wisdom unless it is put to action “Each tale is interesting and elegantly told, but the synthesis which will turn them all from information into wisdom is left almost entirely to the reader” (Duncan 10). Duncan provides examples of great books full of information, that if used correctly will give a reader an abundant amount of knowledge. However, just reading the information is not enough to gain wisdom, the reader must put the information to use for wisdom to be accumulated. Duncan believes that the world is full of data, but it is important how the reader uses the data “Information, knowledge, wisdom: it is a distinction, an anxiety, that we might recognize as we wase haltingly through a world awash with data” (Duncan, 7). With the internet being available worldwide to millions, an indefinite amount of data and information is out there within reach to many. However, it is up to the reader how they use the data, and how they implement it in their lives.

In conclusion, data nowadays is widely available to all, it is dependent on the reader to put the data to use to gain wisdom. Wisdom is not able to be passed down, and requires experience first, before wisdom is able to be attained. Wisdom is something one must find on one's own as it cannot be taught as seen through Siddhartha's trials and tribulations, my own experiences as a teenage boy experiencing life, and an essay on wisdom by Dennis Duncan. Wisdom is available to all, but not all will attain wisdom. Wisdom requires one to actively put it to use, to gain experience. As Siddhartha learned, experience is the secret to enlightenment, not wisdom.

Work Cited

Duncan, Dennis. "The getting of wisdom." *Spectator*, vol. 351, no. 10156, 22 Apr. 2023, p. 38. *Gale In Context: High School*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A747111059/GPS?u=san60135&sid=bookmark-GPS&xid=311a3997. Accessed 25 Sept. 2023.