# Unit 9: Do we find humanness in Spirituality and Wisdom?

## Overview

The word “wisdom” might stir up images of wrinkled elders, famous leaders, mentors, and counselors. We often associate wisdom with words but also with careful silence. Similarly, the concept of “spirituality” might lead to thoughts of religious or spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama. On the other hand, you might use the word “spiritual” to refer to faith, prayer, and close connection to God. In this unit, you will have the opportunity to explore these concepts from very different perspectives: the words and actions of a black woman’s rights advocate in 1851, and descriptions of contemporary spiritual practices and traditions from First Nations in Nova Scotia, Canada.

## Prompts

Unit 9 will look at two kinds of prompts:

1: The historical speech, “Ain’t I a Woman”

2: The First Nations’ perspective on spirituality in “Planting the Seed: First Nation Spirituality”

## Learning Outcomes

Through practicing inquiry in this unit, you will:

* Examine and evaluate the meaning of wisdom, spirituality, and humanness
* Question the relevance of wisdom and spirituality to living the good life
* Analyze a short speech in its historic context and in the complexities of its historical records
* Interpret meaning-making by looking at First Nations’ spiritual traditions
* Value diverse voices as presented in the two prompts

## Activity Checklist

Here is a checklist of learning activities you will benefit from in completing this unit. You may find it useful for planning your work.

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| 🗹 | **Activities** |
|  | Activity 9.1: Journal in response to the questions presented. |
|  | Activity 9.2: View the timeline in order to situate the speech in the timeline of both emancipation of slaves and the rights of women. |
|  | Activity 9.3: Read the background on Sojourner Truth and the context of the speech itself. |
|  | Activity 9.4: View the background information on one written version of the speech (recorded by feminist and abolitionist Frances Gage). |
|  | Activity 9.5: Watch [the performance](https://youtu.be/2SQNeZKUh38?t=33) of an adapted Gage version of the speech. Read the written speech as recorded by Gage. |
|  | Activity 9.6: Read the background on another version of the speech, known as the “Bugle” version or the Robinson version. Listen to [this performance](https://youtu.be/IDH4RKX428Y) and read the text. |
|  | Activity 9.7: Reflect on what Sojourner Truth shows you about wisdom in particular, but also about spirituality and humanness. |
|  | Activity 9.8: Read the descriptions of First Nation spiritual practices as shared in “[Planting the Seed: First Nation Spirituality](https://novascotia.ca/abor/docs/other-resources/First-Nation-Spirituality.pdf).” Optional: research some of the practices further by looking for videos or images online. |

**Assessment**

Here is the assessment for Unit 9.

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| **Group discussion**: Do we find humanness in Spirituality and Wisdom? | 2% |
| **Inquiry Blog #4** | 2% |

## Prompt 1: “Ain’t I a Woman” by Sojourner Truth

How we use words and when we choose to use them can be just as important as the words themselves. As an example, we will look at the speech, “Ain’t I a Woman” by Sojourner Truth. At first glance, you might wonder what this speech has to do with today’s question. It seems to focus on the rights of women and the rights of blacks. Your challenge is to think about the ACTION of this speech and the CONTEXT of this speech more than the content itself. Think about whether Sojourner Truth acted in wisdom and whether she was influenced by spirituality. Think about her humanness.

### Learning Activities

#### Activity 9.1: Reflection

Begin by journaling for approximately 5 minutes, using the following questions as a guide:

* What do you think we mean by the term “humanness?” Is it different from “humanity?”
* What comes to mind when you think of wisdom?
* How might wisdom and humanness be related?
* Do we need wisdom in our life in order to live a good life?
* What is spirituality?

#### Activity 9.2: Historical Timeline

Briefly view the following timeline of both emancipation of slaves and the rights of women. Don’t spend long on this. It is intended only as a reference point in history in order for you to situate the speech.

**[insert Timeline Plugin or Slides of info]**

#### Activity 9.3: Sojourner Truth

Next, read below the background on Sojourner Truth and the context of the speech itself. Historical context is essential for careful interpretation, and it is especially helpful in terms of our question about wisdom.

Sojourner Truth (born Isabella Baumfree) 1797-1883

* She was born into slavery, probably in 1797. Her parents were slaves of a New York family that spoke a dialect of Dutch, which she learned.
* At the age of 9, she was sold as a slave to John Neely, but she was whipped and beaten for not being able to communicate with her new masters due to language difficulties. She was sold again.
* In 1815, she fell in love with a man who was a slave at a nearby farm. However, the man’s master did not allow the relationship, so they never saw each other again. Her master, Dumont, forced her to marry another man, and they had several children. She had been promised by Dumont to be freed from slavery in 1826, but he did not keep his promise. (New York law would have freed her in 1827, but she couldn’t have known that).
* 1826 – In response to this broken promise of freedom, she ran away (bringing her infant daughter); Dumont illegally sold her 5-year-old son, Peter, when he discovered that she had escaped.
* 1827 – Isabella sued for recovery of her son and won. This was an early case in which a black woman won against a white man in a court. During this time, as she was sheltered and supported by a Christian family, Isabella became a Christian.
* 1829-1843 – She worked as a maid in New York.
* 1843 – God gave Isabella a new name, Sojourner Truth, asking her to be a traveler who would spread Truth throughout the land. She began life as a touring lecturer, working for the abolition of slavery and the promotion of human rights.
* 1844 – Truth began to connect with abolitionists and her role as an activist began to grow. She was considered radical in her views.
* 1850 – Truth published her memoir, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Northern Slave*. Note that she never learned to read or write, so her memoirs were dictated and recorded.
* 1851 – Truth delivered her famous speech at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention.
* For more biographical details, visit [Biography.com](https://www.biography.com/people/sojourner-truth-9511284) and [History.com](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/sojourner-truth)

#### Activity 9.4 Background of the Gage version of The Speech

Sojourner Truth gave a powerful speech, “Ain’t I a Woman” at a women’s convention in Akron, Ohio. She was not an invited guest – she just showed up to listen but ended up getting some air time. The convention itself was a discordant event, with speakers arguing heatedly about the role and rights of women. After the event, two versions of the speech emerged: One recorded by Gage, an abolitionist and suffragette, with considerable creative liberty; the other recorded in the newspaper, *The Anti-slavery Bugle*, with more authenticity to the original.

The first version of the speech we are going to look at was recorded by feminist and abolitionist Frances “Aunt Fanny” Gage. It was written in 1863 (12 years after the speech)

Frances Dana (Barker) Gage (1808-1884) (aka. “Aunt Fanny”) was born to a farming family in Union, Ohio. Her grandmother Mary Bancroft Dana’s liberal views help to instill a hatred of slavery; Her mother would often ask Frances to take items of support to local fugitive-slaves. In 1829 Fanny married James L. Gage, an abolitionist lawyer. In 1851, as an already well-known activist for women’s rights, she was elected president of the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio. She introduced Sojourner Truth, and in 1863 recounted her memory of the speech. A later version of her report was included in an 1881 printed history of woman suffrage. Gage spent her lifetime speaking publically and working for abolition, temperance and women’s rights, and wrote frequently on these topics (under the pen-name “Aunt Fanny”) in newspapers.

For more information on the historical context of the Ohio Convention, see the following timeline **[insert timeline of Slide 10]**

#### Activity 9.5: Watch and Read “Ain’t I a Woman?” – Gage version

Watch [the performance](https://youtu.be/2SQNeZKUh38?t=33) of an adapted Gage version of the speech. This is very helpful in getting a feel for the speech and in becoming familiar with the most popular portrayal. As you watch, consider the use of the words “Ain’t I a Woman” in this commonly known version. What function do these words serve? Does it change the focus or meaning of the speech?

Next, follow Slides 12-16 for the written speech as recorded by Gage. See the notes on each slide for things to consider in your interpretation. Be sure to read the text carefully and take some time to think about it.

#### Activity 9.6: The “Bugle” Version of “Ain’t I a Woman?”

The “Bugle” version or the Robinson version of the speech was written by Marius Racine Robinson (1806 – 1878). Robinson was born to a Calvinist Presbyterian family in Massachusetts. He studied printing as well as theology, and with this background, he formed an “Anti-Slavery Society” in 1834. He was considered radical. In 1836, he married a Quaker who worked for the underground railroad. He continued to promote abolition in various ways and a number of his letters were printed in the Anti-Slavery Bugle.

Listen to [this performance](https://youtu.be/IDH4RKX428Y) of the Bugle version (adapted). Again, the performance will help you experience the speech and the role Sojourner Truth played in the meeting where she delivered it.

Then, read the text of the Bugle version of the speech on Slide 21. Read it carefully and compare it to the Gage version.

For more performances of this speech, feel free to check out the following:

* <https://www.thesojournertruthproject.com/the-readings> - there are 7 other versions presented here (other than Ashna Rodjan’s).
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq3AYiRT4no> Kerry Washington, earlier version.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUdxsQ0Qsrc> – Nkechi Emeruwa – TEDx – contemporary overtones.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XilHJc9IZvE> – Pat Theriault – re-enactment / situationally staged

#### Activity 9.7: Reflection

In your learning journal, reflect on the questions found below. When you meet with your group this week, you may wish to discuss what Sojourner Truth shows you about wisdom in particular, but also about spirituality and humanness.

* What characteristics make someone a wise person?
* How does Sojourner Truth measure up? She was a wise woman? Why or why not?
* Do you see any kind of spirituality in Sojourner Truth through this speech and its situation?
* Does she show you a little more about what it means to be human?
* What does this speech and situation show you about wisdom and spirituality?

*Note that as with all of the first lesson prompts, you will* ***not be graded*** *on these discussions. This prompt will help you explore the topics and will be instrumental in completing the final project.*

## Prompt 2: Planting the Seed: First Nation Spirituality

You have a sense of what it means to be spiritual. This concept is influenced by factors such as your own culture, family, church, and beliefs. Today you will have the opportunity to explore some of the beliefs and spiritual traditions of the First Nations of Canada as a means of understanding another layer of what spirituality means. You may notice that the text we will read also mentions wisdom in addition to spirituality, suggesting that these two concepts are tied together for the First Nation people. The text itself is brief and simple, but it provides an overview as shared by the First Nation people themselves. Their goal is to “plant the seed” so that we may grow as we learn. The document states, “The ‘Planting the Seed’ series is produced by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs and the Elders Advisory Committee.”

### Learning Activities

#### Activity 9.8: Spiritual Practices

Read the descriptions of First Nation spiritual practices as shared in “[Planting the Seed: First Nation Spirituality](https://novascotia.ca/abor/docs/other-resources/First-Nation-Spirituality.pdf).”

Optional: Research some of the practices further by looking for videos or images online. Perhaps there are a few traditions that intrigue you, and it is always helpful to see and hear the experience. See for example the following videos on the [Medicine Wheel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c63PVyPB_zw) or the tradition of [drumming](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqBzdNpnyYY).

## Assessment

### Group Discussion: Do we find humanness in Spirituality and Wisdom?

After completing this unit, including the learning activities, meet with your group and discuss what the First Nation perspective shows you about our question, “Do we find humanness in spirituality and wisdom?” Complete the discussion template (Google Doc) as a record of your conversation and post it.

### Inquiry Blog #4:

Take at least 10 minutes this week to spend time ALONE in nature. As you spend solitary time with God's creation, focus on all of your senses. Take time to truly SEE what is around you, even the tiny details. Smell the earth. Touch the plants and the soil. Immerse yourself in the messages God has given you in the natural world.

On the forum, share about your experience and what it showed you about stewardship, wisdom, and spirituality.

OR

Consider the wise people in your life. What does wisdom look like? As you think about these people, write a fresh definition of wisdom and explain how it relates to the good life.

## Unit 9 Summary

Through the acts and words of one woman, and through the spiritual practices of a vast people group, we have explored ways of understanding wisdom, spirituality, and humanness. The question remains, “Do we find humanness in wisdom and spirituality?” In other words, when we see, experience, or share wisdom, do we experience what it means to be human? When we observe or participate in spirituality, do we have evidence of humanness? Are wisdom and spirituality required ingredients in being human? If we don’t have them, are we not fully human? If we do have them, do we have “the good life?”

## References

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Image Sources:

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* Robinson:
* <http://dbs.ohiohistory.org/africanam/html/page0f88-2.html?ID=5602>
* The Anti-Slavery Bugle (June 21, 1851):
* [https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035487/1851-06-21/ed-1/seq-1/](https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035487/1851-06-21/ed-1/seq-4/)
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