Last week we talked about the confusing and often overlapping use of Wisdom, Knowledge and Understanding. They are not the same qualities. We spoke about knowledge as a collection of facts, useful in trivia games and jeopardy. Knowledge is useful on the earthly plane to the extent it is relevant to what we are doing right now. We talked a lot about Understanding last week and our ability to dig a little deeper to get to that intuitive level of knowing. Understanding is the ability to use principle and to grasp how spiritual laws act in synergy with each other in right use. This week we get to explore Wisdom.

Charles Fillmore starts out the chapter on Wisdom in his Twelve Powers book by debating whether wisdom or love is greater. He associates love with its sense conscious, emotional side and argues that wisdom might be the better choice. He concedes that love wins when all else fails but you can see the intellectual Chuck leaning towards Wisdom over Love. He goes on to say, “When we awaken to the reality of our being, the light begins to break upon us from within and we know the truth; this is the quickening of our James or judgment faculty. When this quickening occurs, we find ourselves discriminating between the good and the evil. We no longer accept the race standards or the teachings of the worldly wise, but we “judge righteous judgment”; we know with an inner intuition, and we judge people and events from a new viewpoint.” Fillmore says that judgment is both a “mental act of evaluation through contrast and comparison” and “spiritual discernment through coming into a greater realization of ourselves”.

I think Chuck struggles, as we all do, with his basic human nature. He is an intellectual; a mental activity guy. Although he loves and obviously admires his wife Myrtle, he begins by being a skeptic about the whole “go with your gut” “intuition” approach. He thinks Eve got everyone in trouble. So it’s hard for him to talk about wisdom without going to the head. And there is nothing wrong with intellect! Hey, I am 50/50 right brain/left brain. It's just that spiritual principle is about listening and aligning with Spirit and that is not always an intellectual process. Fillmore mentions that upon the quickening of our judgment faculty we know longer accept and rely “upon the race standards and teachings of the worldly wise”. To go against what we are taught and what others advocate and do requires us to cease to look outside ourselves for the standards of behavior. We must discern what is right in our own being. We must listen for the still, small voice.
This was exactly the dilemma for Pocahontas. Follow her father’s advice, the wisdom of tradition, or follow her heart and the ideas of these new people. Take the safe route or accept the challenge of being a peacemaker and trail blazer.

Which brings me to an interesting point about wisdom: there are no right or wrong choices. Fillmore talks about discerning between good and evil. But that is not the same as right and wrong. Good is that which we discern as in alignment with Spirit and Evil is that which we discern as out of alignment with Spirit. The discernment works the same way for us as for our judgment of the actions of others. Sometimes we are on target and sometimes, maybe not so much. This judgment and discernment is not about condemning one way and praising the other but about choosing our own way. We must discern what is right for me and right for this moment. Choices I made in my twenties may have been appropriate for then and may not be the choices I would make at this point in my life. Judgment and Understanding are spiritual faculties we gain experience using. Our abilities to align with spiritual principle and our faith in our abilities to be Spirit in expression grow with practice. Well, ideally they do.

Sometimes something gets in the way of our spiritual judgment. Something elusive, powerful and invisible. FEAR. Fear steers us in the outer direction, away from our inner directed spiritual judgment. Fear says, “What if you’re wrong?!!” For most of us, it is hard to imagine something worse that being wrong. Ego will insist until its last breath that we are right. We feel shame, embarrassment, and self-criticism when we are wrong. We would like to avoid this at all costs because it is uncomfortable. Who wants to be uncomfortable? We love the beach but we like to avoid sitting in a wet bathing suit filled with sand. Right?? So Fear’s biggest weapon in challenging our ability to discern based on something other than race standards and worldly wisdom is “What if you’re wrong?” There are other weapons. What about going against the advice of people we love or even admire? Pocahontas was going against her father but Grandmother Willow, the wise tree, advised her to follow her heart. Was she going to disappoint one of them? Was she trying to be what her father wanted her to be, even if that was not her authentic self? These are traps we fall into because it’s what is familiar. And to go along with that, there is the gallery of “What will others say?” When our wisdom is guided by the outer world, we become concerned how that outer world will react to our choices.
Frankly, I think this is what got Unity in trouble in the 1900’s enforcing segregation of the races on its private grounds. And no matter how flagrantly this cuts against our teachings of honoring the Christ in all, it drove the wisdom of the leaders well into the 1950’s. We were “fitting in” with our community—with no real legal and certainly no moral reason why. We were being inauthentic to our true self.

I am sure that occurred to individuals before Johnnie Coleman took a stand as a ministerial student. Yet she was the first to discern what was right for her in that time and place and to say, “I will live off campus no more. If it means I am not longer welcome in the program, so be it.” Her courage and discernment with Spirit prompted her white classmates to join her and declare they would leave the program unless Coleman was allowed to live on campus with them. And so ended segregation at Unity Village. The era of fear was over and we, as a Movement, were free to live our principles to greater expression. As we look back, it seems logical, even easy. Imagine what it was like in that moment, with segregation still the norm in Kansas City and most areas in the United States.

Is there a fear inhibiting your judgment right now? Do you look to the outer world standards, the opinions of your friends, the voice of “what if you’re wrong”? Or are you listening to Spirit? Are you quietly, not in the heat of emotion and passion, trying to discern what would Spirit have you do? Allow yourself to recognize the fear. Look at it! Then know that Spirit in you is greater than your fear. Breath into the power of Spirit flowing through you. You do not have to rely on your ego or personality or even your knowledge. You have access to Divine Wisdom! Use it to free yourself to live more authentically as your true self.

There is a country song with the line, “How am I ever going to be old and wise if I’m never young and crazy?” Do we have to make mistakes to gain wisdom? Fillmore asks if we must experience evil to appreciate good? Is the school of hard knocks the only path to wisdom? In Twelve Powers we read, “In the body, conclusions are reached through experience; in intellect, reason is the assumed arbiter of every question; in Spirit, intuition and inspiration bring the quick and sure answer to all the problems of life.” So maybe our path to wisdom depends on what kind of wisdom we want. Physical, emotional wisdom does come through painful lessons of experience. Touch a hot stove and get burned. Allow lust to rule your choices and live in Heartbreak Hotel. Or if you are like Charles, try to reason your way through every choice.
Make your list of pro’s and con’s and give a numeric value to options and believe there is a formula to navigate life safely and without discomfort. Now I’d like to quibble just a bit with Fillmore’s statement about intuition and inspiration. He says it brings “the quick and sure answer”. Well, it’s a sure answer but not always quick, in my experience. Or maybe not always a complete answer. Like I discern the choice in front of me is not right but what is the next step? Where is the choice right for me? Spirit can be a bit vague at times.

But if there are no wrong choices, how come some turn out so painful? Think about some choices you made in which you did not like the outcome or the path it led you to or the experiences you had. What did you learn about yourself, about relationships, about life? I have two theories about painful experiences and really both depend on our willingness to go deeper and learn from the experience. The first theory is that the challenge is an indicator my choice was less than wise—guided by some outside focus or fear. This requires me to examine my motives and admit how I came to the choice I made. It gives me the opportunity to become more Spirit directed—and wiser. The second theory says, if I made a conscious choice after a time of seeking spiritual direction and I experience a challenge, it is an opportunity to learn something I couldn’t learn any other way. It doesn’t mean there isn’t another way to learn, it just means that where I am in consciousness has set up the dynamics in the Universe to present the lesson in this way. You know those times when we have invited the cosmic 2X4, even without knowing it! I hate that but it happens. And again, it is an opportunity to become wiser.

Fillmore says it is possible to avoid the school of hard knocks and gain wisdom by seeking to walk in Spirit, aligning each thought and choice with the guidance of the still, small voice. While I believe in the possibility of this, I wonder about the multitude of factors that would have to fall into place for this to be manifest. Like how we are parented. How we gain access to this information. For most of us, this is one option we begin to integrate into our life when we know the power and guidance of Spirit beyond a superficial level and we have had that quickening of our faculty of judgment. We use this path to wisdom more and more as we grow into our authentic, loving, peaceful self. We use this path to wisdom more and more as we become more consciously present to our thoughts and actions.

Here is our affirmation for this week: I quiet my mind, align with Spirit and access Divine Wisdom to guide my choices.