

Wisdom

**Intelligence, learning, knowledge, understanding,
intuition, common sense, being a lifelong learner**

“Dare to be wise!”

Friedrich von Schiller

Once, over a two-year period, I rode more 4,000 miles on a stationery bike. I know I traveled that far because there was an odometer attached to the handlebars. On the one hand, my body and mind benefited from the exercise. On the other, I had ridden a distance equivalent to the width of the United States . . . and had gone nowhere and learned nothing.

Wisdom goes beyond the distance you travel in life or the facts you accumulate along the way. It's possible to visit every country in the world and have an encyclopedia in your head and still not be wise. To be wise means to gather all of your experiences—everything you've done, seen, and heard, everywhere you've gone, everyone you've known—and build positive meaning from them to apply to your everyday life.

Wisdom is the responsible use of knowledge and experience. It's a journey, not a destination. If you're wise, you keep learning all your life. Wisdom is a beginning, not an end. If you're wise, your door is always open to new knowledge, new experiences, new roads to travel. Wisdom has no boundaries or fences. If you're wise, you're not afraid of new ideas, because you know that you can always decide to accept or reject them.

The Wright Brothers were determined to fly—in spite of the teasing, harassment, and skepticism

they encountered along the way. People often told them “If God wanted people to fly, he would have given them wings.” It may be hard for you to believe that people once thought this way, especially if you've ever ridden on an airplane. But if you watch the news and listen, you'll hear people saying similar things about the inventors, experimenters, and dreamers of today. Some people are afraid of the unknown; they aren't sure where great leaps in knowledge will lead. But knowledge should never be feared, because knowledge itself is seldom bad. It's the way people use (or misuse) knowledge that can sometimes be harmful. Having sound judgment is another part of being wise.

Many people throughout history have been called “wise” or credited with having wisdom—people like Albert Schweitzer, Mohandas Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Helen Keller, Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson, the Dalai Lama, and others. Even some fictional characters are considered wise—like Lisa Simpson of “The Simpsons.” Being wise should *not* be confused with being a wisecracker, wiseacre, wisenheimer, or wise guy (Bart Simpson would head that list).

What might it mean to *you* to be wise? Your definition might be different from someone else's definition. You might want to ask various people you know—your parents, teachers, religious leaders, friends, and other people you trust and respect—what wisdom means to them.