

FAQ's about Wisdom and Wisdom School

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1. What is Wisdom?

First, let's talk about what Wisdom is not. It is not a curriculum, a philosophy, a metaphysical system, or a set of esoteric ideas. An underground stream running through all the great spiritual traditions, it is not exclusively identified with any of them, and it can wear the theological and devotional garb of all of them.

Wisdom fundamentally describes a higher level of human consciousness characterized by a supple and alert awareness, compassionate intelligence, a substantial reduction in the "internal dialogue," and the capacity to engage reality directly, without the superimposition of mental constructs and categories. It is the original Integral Knowing.

Wisdom is not about knowing more, but about knowing deeper, with more of you participating.

It is fundamentally accessed through spiritual practice.

2. What is a Wisdom School?

It is a gathering designed to support this breakthrough to a new level of consciousness through a balanced daily rhythm of prayer and meditation, cognitive learning, and practical physical work.

Since time immemorial Wisdom schools have formed at times of great spiritual and cultural transition as a crucible of transformation and a meeting ground between ancient, time-tested practices and emerging spiritual insight. The core principle is the assertion that Wisdom cannot be accessed by the mind alone; it requires a transformation of the entire being.

3. Are Wisdom Schools "Christian?"

As the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhart once observed, "No being without a mode of being." Though Wisdom is deeper than any one spiritual tradition, it only expresses itself authentically within the particularity of a given tradition. It is not a synthetic "transcendent unity of all religions," to be extrapolated from the various traditions and embraced as a path in its own right; it can only be accessed through a specific gate. From that gate, it leads from the surface to the depth dimension of whichever tradition it illuminates. There, at that depth dimension, the transcendent unity does in fact brightly glow, but it can never be accessed by the mind, only by the heart. Wisdom is always and only the finger pointing to the moon.

In the Wisdom Schools that I lead, the gate is Christianity. While our schools are deeply informed by the wisdom of all sacred traditions, our anchor is in the Christian mystical tradition, and our spiritual practice is firmly grounded in the classic Christian disciplines of contemplative prayer, lectio divina, and chanted psalmody. The great Benedictine model of "ora et labora"- "prayer and work"-furnishes our basic template for transformation.

4. How is a Wisdom School different from a retreat or a seminar?

Precisely in this dimension of balanced movement from prayer to work, from intellectual stimulation to silence-and back again. Wisdom School has more talking than a meditation retreat, more silence and physical embodiment than a seminar. The Wisdom model suggests that it is not through specialization in any one mode (contemplative silence, thinking, bodywork) that one learns Wisdom, but through the ability to move smoothly and rhythmically through all these modes without getting stuck in any one of them.

5. How long do Wisdom Schools last?

Typically Wisdom Schools run for five or six days, but this is more a matter of expediency than of principle. In addition to single session schools, there are also a two- session and three-session schools, and plans are underway for a longer school in summer 2013.

6. Where are Wisdom Schools held?

Currently they are being offered in all quadrants of the United States: Southwest (Tucson, Arizona), Southeast (Valle Crucis, North Carolina), Northeast (Hudson Valley, New York), North Central (Collegeville, Minnesota), and Northwest (Seattle, WA). There are also periodic schools in Western Canada.

There is also a seasonal Wisdom School in Aspen, Colorado, offering weekly classes and seminars from Christmas to Easter. But it is not residential, so attendees must make their own arrangements for accommodations.

7. What kinds of Wisdom Schools are offered?

There are basic Wisdom Schools, offering a foundation in Wisdom practice and exploring core Christian texts from a Wisdom perspective. There are also special Wisdom Schools, delving more deeply into a specific text or practice area and open to anyone who has completed a basic Wisdom School. From time to time we also offer an advanced Wisdom School, focusing particularly on deepening formation for Wisdom leadership.

In addition to Wisdom Schools per se, there are also teaching retreats and meditation retreats intended to deepen practice in specific areas, and also to offer participants an immersion in the profound

transformational energy of the Christian liturgical year, particularly around its high points in Holy Week, Advent, Ascension-to-Pentecost, and All Saints.

8. If I've already been to a basic Wisdom School, is there any point in signing up for another?

Yes, for two reasons. Since Wisdom is formational more than cognitive, you will inevitably hear the "same" material in a whole different way, at a whole new level of your being. And second, budding Wisdom teachers learn through apprenticeship and service; there are no "certification" programs because Wisdom can only be its own certification! Returning students serve as de facto interns, helping newcomers to acclimate more quickly to the program and sometimes taking small leadership roles as work team captains, liturgists, and discussion group facilitators.

9. Why do Wisdom Schools fill up so quickly?

Refer back to question 2 on this one. Wisdom Schools tend to constellate at times of great spiritual and cultural transition, and our present era is certainly one of these times! As traditional forms of Christian teaching and transmission—churches, seminaries, monasteries—are all in crisis and people are hungering for authentic spiritual formation in a world desperately in need of new vision and deeper staying power, Wisdom Schools offer a vibrant meeting ground of roots and wings: time-honored, deep practices combined with a new expansiveness of vision and practical skills to take home with you. No wonder they're popular!

Please see www.contemplativewisdom.com for a list of upcoming Wisdom Schools with Cynthia.

Please see the Events Calendar at www.contemplative.org for a full list of Cynthia's public events, including Wisdom Schools, retreats, and speaking engagements.