

**Touchstones Project**

**Small Group Discussion Guide**

**Wisdom**

**Hope**

**Preparation:** (Read the *Touchstones Journal* on the themes and the questions below.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** “Wisdom is a state of the total being, in which capacities for knowledge and for love, for survival and for death, for imagination, inspiration, intuition, for all the fabulous functioning of this human being who we are, come into a center with their forces, come into an experience of meaning that can voice itself as wise action.” *M.C. Richards*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake), adapted

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story**: Take turns reading aloud parts of the following wisdom story.

*Anansi and the Clay Pot* (667 words)

In the time before time, the people struggled to live. They survived by picking berries and other fruit in order to live. They did not know how to build huts for shelter, weave cloth to make clothes, make farming tools in order to grow food, or even make fire. They were miserable and complained all of the time.

Anansi, the spider, was known as a trickster. He could weave webs in all kinds of shapes. Some would look like food like a squash or a cornstalk. Hungry, the people would grab at the “plant,” only for the web to collapse into the air.

Anansi, who was very curious, traveled far and wide around. And because he paid attention, he learned a great deal. He knew more than the people, but he did not know everything. What he knew was someone who had all the knowledge and wisdom, and that was Nyame, the God of heaven. In the language of the Akan people of Ghana, Nyame’s name means “the one who knows and sees everything.” The moon represented Nyame’s female side, and the sun represented his male side, and like them, he was very distant from the people. What was not well known was that Nyame was Anansi’s father.

Now, because Anansi could travel anywhere, he would often visit Nyame. While there, he would try to get near Nyame’s clay pot because that is where Nyame kept all the knowledge and wisdom. One day, Nyame decided to give Anansi the clay pot on the condition that Anansi share the knowledge and wisdom with everyone.

Anansi took the pot. Every time he lifted the top and looked in, he got more excited about what he saw and learned. Anansi decided that he would not share what was in the clay pot with the people. But where to hide it? He finally decided to hide it at the top of a tree. He could weave a web to hold it to a branch, and the leaves would hide it. He chose a Baobab tree that was 2,000 years old and very big.

Anansi started climbing, but doing so and holding onto the clay pot was impossible. He kept sliding back to the ground.

His daughter was outside watching Anansi struggle. “Father,” she asked, “why don’t you tie the pot to your back so all of your legs are free for climbing?”

Anansi considered what she asked for a moment and finally agreed that doing so was best. But he was not happy. He, Anansi, who had the clay pot with all the knowledge and wisdom in the world, did not need to take advice from a child. But he did, although he was very unhappy. He spun enough strands to braid a rope and tie the pot to his back. Anansi began to climb, and now it was easy. Up he went, but he kept sputtering. The higher he climbed, the madder he became and the more Anansi shook with anger because he should have known to tie the clay pot to his back.

When Anansi reached the top, he untied the clay pot, but his anger overwhelmed him, and he threw the clay pot to the ground. Down, down, down it went. When the clay pot hit the ground, it shattered into pieces, releasing all the knowledge and wisdom in the world, which began flowing outward in a thousand streams in a thousand directions. It all went here, there, and everywhere. All the people got some knowledge and some wisdom, but no one could get it all. It meant that people had to share in order to learn enough to make clothes, grow food, create fires on which to cook, and so much more.

Looking down from the heavens, Nyame just smiled. He knew his son and knew he was selfish. Anansi had done just what he expected. He was the one who was tricked. Now, people have knowledge and wisdom, but they have to share to live well.

Source: Touchstones

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group

Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

“Wisdom is the right use of knowledge. To know is not to be wise. Many …know a great deal, and are all the greater fools for it. There is no fool so great a fool as a knowing fool. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom.” Charles Spurgeon

“Knowledge is knowing that a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad.” Brian O'Driscoll

“We don't receive wisdom; we must discover it for ourselves after a journey that no one can take for us or spare us.” Marcel Proust

“Our shared values define us more than our differences. And acknowledging those shared values can see us through our challenges today if we have the wisdom to trust in them again.” John McCain

“The saddest aspect of life right now is that science gathers knowledge faster than society gathers wisdom.” Isaac Asimov

“There's a beauty to wisdom and experience that cannot be faked. It's impossible to be mature without having lived.” Amy Grant

“Before you become too entranced with gorgeous gadgets and mesmerizing video displays, let me remind you that information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom, and wisdom is not foresight. Each grows out of the other, and we need them all.” Arthur C. Clarke

“They will envy you for your success, your wealth, for your intelligence, for your looks, for your status but rarely for your wisdom.” Nassim Nicholas Taleb

“When Don Quixote went out into the world, that world turned into a mystery before his eyes. That is the legacy of the first European novel to the entire subsequent history of the novel. The novel teaches us to comprehend the world as a question. There is wisdom and tolerance in that attitude.” Milan Kundera

“I was tired of seeing the Graces always depicted as beautiful young things. I think wisdom comes with age and life and pain. And knowing what matters.” Louise Penny

“When we walk out of our boundaries, we find out that knowledge is not a completion or a windfall, but a long process of revisions or adjustments. Likewise, we recognize that wisdom results from the painful filtering of experiences we collect on the bumpy path of life.” Erik Pevernagie

“Patience is a form of wisdom. It demonstrates that we understand and accept the fact that sometimes things must unfold in their own time.” Jon Kabat-Zinn

“To finish the moment, to find the journey's end in every step of the road, to live the greatest number of good hours, is wisdom.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

“You can never know everything. Part of what you know is always wrong. Perhaps the most important part. A portion of wisdom lies in knowing that. A portion of knowledge lies in going on anyway.” Robert Jordan

“There are times when wisdom cannot be found in the chambers of parliament or the halls of academia but at the unpretentious setting of the kitchen table.” E.A. Bucchianeri

“There is so much noise on the Internet, with would-be prophets daily haranguing their audience and megalomaniacs trying to push bizarre ideas, that eventually people will cherish a new commodity: wisdom.” Michio Kaku

“If it's knowledge and wisdom you want, then seek out the company of those who do real work for an honest purpose.” Edward Abbey

“Wisdom tends to grow in proportion to one's awareness of one's ignorance.” Anthony de Mello

“Wisdom says we are nothing. Love says we are everything. Between these two our life flows.” Jack Kornfield

“Wisdom is being able to see the world for what it is, rather than what you want it to be.” Patrick F. Rooney

“Empathy nurtures wisdom. Apathy cultivates ignorance.” Suzy Kassem

“By three methods we may learn wisdom: First, by reflection, which is noblest; Second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is the bitterest.” Confucius

“Turn your wounds into wisdom.” Oprah Winfrey

“The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind.” Khalil Gibran

“Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk.” Doug Larson

“Every …[person] is a damn fool for at least five minutes every day; wisdom consists in not exceeding the limit.” Elbert Hubbard

“Age is a hell of a price to pay for wisdom.” George Carlin

“Wisdom ceases to be wisdom when it becomes too proud to weep, too grave to laugh, and too selfish to seek other than itself.” Khalil Gibran

“To acquire knowledge, one must study; but to acquire wisdom, one must observe.” Marilyn vos Savant

“Wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age. Sometimes age just shows up all by itself.” Tom Wilson

“We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom.” E. O. Wilson

**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions).*

**Reading:** “We walk the shoreline of life day by day, and sometimes the experience will catch our attention and demand to be noticed, like some beautiful shell that startles us with a reflection of how beautiful our own souls can be, or a piece of wreckage that refuses to let us forget how broken we are. The daily journey of life brings its own nuggets of wisdom.” *Margaret Silf*

**Living the Questions**

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Can you recall a moment in your life when you felt particularly wise? What was the situation, and what did you do that demonstrated wisdom?
2. Who is the wisest person you know, and why do you consider them wise?
3. Was wisdom a value that you were raised with? If yes, how? What are some of the ways that we might help children value acquiring wisdom?
4. How do you balance intuition and rational thought in making wise decisions?
5. In what ways do you think wisdom is related to justice and fairness?
6. What role do you believe wisdom plays in leadership?
7. How does wisdom help you navigate difficult times?
8. What role does failure play in the development of wisdom?
9. What advice would you give to someone seeking to become wiser?
10. Wisdom does not seem to be valued by society today? Why? What role can UU congregations play in valuing and cultivating wisdom?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice (**Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words**

Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*