



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred in
Our Everyday Spaces



March 2020 - Wisdom

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Wisdom?

This month, we're doing two sage things together: reminding ourselves of the many unexpected ways wisdom presents itself and re-asserting our trust in our wisdom as parents.

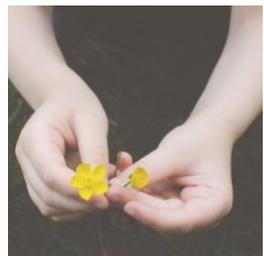
I want to start with that second task, because for many of us, it's most pernicious. Somewhere along the way--or maybe right at the beginning of the parenting journey--we gave in to doubt and second-guessing, and we began to look outside of ourselves, our mentors and role models, and our loving communities to discover wisdom "out there" somewhere.

Seeking the wisdom of experts in books, magazines, and trusted websites is good. But there are other, sometimes less explored ways to find wisdom: Asking among known and respected people in our communities; Checking in with one's body; Listening for that small, still voice within; Looking to the natural world; Seeking in spirit-nourishing resources--images, readings, poems, lyrics. These are less-explored terrains in the landscape of wisdom-seeking, and this month, we're going there together.

We're testing each other's wise powers of deduction in a somewhat odd position in "At Play." We're pondering some unusual ways wisdom might manifest "Around the Neighborhood." "At the Bedside," we're hearing a head-scratching story about teeth and the tongue that will get you and your children thinking about wisdom in a new way.

We know you'll have fun this month, and we hope you'll also experience renewed confidence in your ability to guide your children well. Remember that all of society grows wiser for the action you take, reflections you make, and adaptations you create with your children and their friends. Wisdom is found, and wisdom is made, and this month, we're doing both as a savvy circle of Soulful Home families!

Teresa, on behalf of the whole Soul Matters team.



At the Table

Exploring Wisdom Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

1. Which animals do you think of as wise, and which do you think of as foolish? Why do you think you have those ideas?
2. Would you rather be wise or friendly, if you had to choose just one?
3. We often think of professors or ministers as wise, but other workers are also wise in not-always-noticed ways. In what ways might a daycare provider be wise? A carpenter? A guitar player? A farmer? A plumber? A construction worker? A salesperson?
4. Do you think plants and trees have wisdom? If so, what might it be like? And how do you think they share it with other plants and animals? And us?!
5. Are people born wise, or do they learn wisdom?
6. How can you tell good advice from bad advice (in other words, what's wisdom, and what's not)?
7. Whom do you think of as a really wise person among your family's circle of friends?
8. Do wise people go around saying how wise they are? (If not, how do you KNOW they're wise?)
9. Do you think it's easy to live wisely? Why or why not?
10. What's the most "un-wise" thing that is happening in our world today?
11. Is wisdom the same as knowing facts? How are they different?
12. Is it ever wise to admit that you don't know the answer?
13. What is a wise thing you know today that you didn't know a year ago?
14. Have you ever heard a wise voice rise up from inside you?
15. On a scale of 1 to 10, how wise were you today? What did you do or not do that made you give yourself that score?

Ways to Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice that together, how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving your well-known world in new ways. Take our monthly treasure hunt list with you on your trips to the grocery, walks around the neighborhood or bike rides, and transform your everyday travel into a family adventure.

A Treasure Hunt for Wisdom

What does wisdom look like? How does it sound? Where does it live? We're surrounded with reminders of wisdom, and this month, we'll go hunting for them together. With wisdom in mind, can you find...

Category of wisdom	Example	Your Find
The wisdom of slowing down	A snail	
The wisdom of seeing the big picture	A kite	
The wisdom of planning ahead	Someone dressed perfectly for the weather	
The wisdom of staying together	Geese honking as they fly by	
The wisdom of hanging back and watching	A hiding animal (a cat, raccoon, mouse)	
The wisdom of double-checking	A checklist or checkmark (hint: check billboards!)	
The wisdom of admitting you're wrong	An apology in a cartoon, TV show, or real life	
The wisdom of asking for help	A phone number to call for assistance, posted in public	
Your pick?		



At Play

Playing Games with Resilience

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme. We offer a brief framework to introduce the game and another to reflect upon it, so that the insights learned in play can stay with us throughout the month and beyond.

Option A: Upside Down and Give Me 12!

In tarot reading, card number 12 is often called “The Hanged Man,” and it features a figure suspended upside down, a vantage point that allows one to examine the familiar in a new way. Isn’t that a fun way to tap into wisdom? Looking from new angles, allowing ourselves to become disoriented so that new patterns emerge, using silliness and surprise to open up new possibilities and ideas.

Sometime this month, or a couple of times this month, figure out the best way to be *literally* upside down with your child. That may look like lying on a bed, with your heads tilted back off the edge, resting your head on plush pillows as you do headstands against the wall, lying head-down, face-up on a steep hill in your neighborhood, etc. And from this odd and interesting position, play 12 questions, a modified version of 20 questions that begins with carefully chosen clues. Here’s an example:

“I’m thinking of an animal whose babies are born the size of a lima bean, who eats mostly one kind of leaf at every meal, and who sleeps 22 hours a day.” (Answer is koala, and guesser has 12 questions to get there.)

Or, “I’m thinking of a job where a person drives a vehicle with no doors, carries heavy things, and is almost always hurrying.” (Answer is delivery truck driver.)

Be creative with your clues so that your child is invited to consider the animal, object, job, friend, etc. that you’re thinking of in a new way. (And with younger children, if you need to add a few clues as you go along to help them stay engaged, feel free!)

Remind each other that learning, discovering, and gaining wisdom often happens when we intentionally stretch ourselves to the edges of our comfort zone so that new understandings can reach us!

Note: The picture to the right comes from the beautiful tarot deck, Gaian Tarot, created by artist Joanna Powell Colbert, and is used here with permission. You can view and purchase the entire set at her website, www.gaiantarot.com.



Option B: Squirrels in the Oak Trees

Oak trees are often associated with wisdom in European mythologies. And, we know that the best wisdom is that which is informed by many different sources. So in this game, played together with another family or two, we're going to pretend that half of the group is squirrels, and the other half--minus one or two--are oak trees. (So if you have ten people playing, six people are squirrels and four are oak trees. Nine people: five squirrels and four trees, etc.)

The oak trees plant themselves around your play area, spread out. When one of the oak trees calls "Go!," the squirrels scamper, and each one has to link elbows with an oak tree. Only one squirrel per tree. At the end of the bustling, there should be one or two squirrels remaining.

You can simply start the round over again here (possibly mixing up squirrel and tree roles) or, if it works with the dynamic of the group, you can ask the remaining squirrels to answer a question before the round begins again. Riffs on some of our "At the Table" and "On the Porch" questions could work for this:

- What's the wisest piece of advice anyone has ever given you?
- In what way are you wiser now than you were a year ago?
- Are animals wise? How do we know?
- Are we born wise, or do we grow wise with experience?
- What piece of nonsense did you believe for a while, until you learned better?
- What's the wisest thing you've ever heard your parent say?
- What's the most unwise thing happening in our world today?



On the Message Board

A Monthly Mantra

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us re-focus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities. Write them on sticky notes to put in your car, on kitchen cabinet fronts, in lunch boxes, on computer screens and, of course, on your family message board. Share them out loud at home and out in the world, where and whenever the need arises.

March’s Mantra: What wisdom does this hold for me?

Sometimes we recognize wisdom right when we encounter it, but more often, it takes careful reflection, a little more life experience, or a good amount of time passing before we come to understand the deeper truth and meaning of what we’ve been part of or witness to.

Still, we know that our experiences--especially the challenging ones--are places where our wisdom is grown. This month, we invite you to keep the mantra in front of you whenever you find yourself facing something unusual or mildly unsettling: What wisdom does this hold for me?

Asking the question in and of itself can help us shift away from reactionary thinking and into more critical thinking. It also reminds us that when our beliefs or assumptions get shaken up a bit, it can be an opportunity for us to re-examine old ideas to either be sure they still fit or change them.

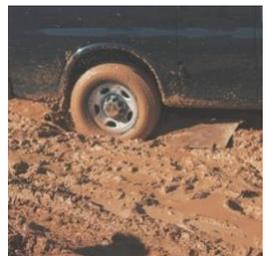
Realizing that you’re late on something you really, really wanted to do on time... “What wisdom does this hold for me?”

Noticing a couple or a parent and child arguing in public... “What wisdom does this hold for me?”

Discovering that a beloved, historic building in your town is getting torn down... “What wisdom does this hold for me?”

Disagreeing with a friend or acquaintance on a core belief of yours... “What wisdom does this hold for me?”

Again, you may only seldom have an answer, but the question is signaling a readiness to welcome epiphanies and realizations wherever they may be found, even in your challenges.



At the Bedside

The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

The Last Lesson of the Teeth and the Tongue: A Wisdom Tale from China

Laozi was a Chinese philosopher who lived around the 5th century B.C. Laozi was a wise person, and like most wise people, Laozi had teachers whose thoughts and opinions he valued. One of his teachers, Chang Cong, was very old, and very sick, and likely to die soon. Laozi journeyed to visit his teacher one last time.

(Why do you think he wanted to visit his teacher one last time?)

When Laozi arrived, he saw that his teacher was indeed unwell. Laozi sat at his teacher's bedside, and thanked Chang Cong for all the lessons and wisdom he had shared with Laozi during his life. "Is there anything last piece of wisdom you want me to know?" asked Laozi.

Chang Cong opened his mouth wide, and then closed it.

"Was my tongue in my mouth?" asked his teacher.

"Yes," said Laozi.

"Were my teeth in my mouth?" asked Chang Cong.

"No, not one tooth," said Laozi.

(Did you know that sometimes people who are very old lose their teeth? It's true. Older people nowadays often get replacement teeth, but not everyone does.)

Chang Cong said to his student, "Do you know why I asked you to look in my mouth?"

Laozi thought. Finally, he said, "Yes. Your teeth were hard and rigid, and they are gone. Your tongue is soft and supple, and it remains."

Chang Cong smiled at his student. "That's right. Just like the soft, flowing water of a stream will wear down the hard and rigid edges of stones, until the stone disappears altogether and the stream flows on, so, too, will a gentle approach outlast and wear down stubborn resistance."



(What else can you think of that is soft, but strong? Something hard, but not lasting? Hard candy and cough drops melt in our mouth. Snakeskin is thick and protective, but to grow, the snake has to break free of old skin through patient, subtle movement. What else?)

Chang Cong seemed happy that his old student had understood his message. “That is all that I had left to teach you,” he said, and closed his eyes.

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Curious Questions to Ask

- What did you like most about the story?
- What kinds of things do you get stubborn and rigid about? What things are easier for you to be flexible with, and go with the flow? Which of the two approaches come most naturally to you?
- If you could go back and visit one of your old teachers after you’re grown up, who would you like to visit? What would you guess would be a piece of wisdom they’d share with you?
- When somebody tells you something, how do you know whether or not it’s wise? How do you think Laozi knew that what his teacher was saying was wise?

Note: Of course, developmentally, many of our children are concrete thinkers. “Wait a minute!” they might say at Chang Cong’s open-mouth demonstration, “Teeth stay even after you die, but your tongue decomposes!” Of course, this is literally true. In this story, and many wisdom tales, metaphor helps us to imagine the wisdom that literal approaches cannot communicate as powerfully. This might be a good chance to talk with your child about figurative language and things that are “truer than true,” such as myths, legends, and some wisdom tales.

Throughout the month, look for other ways to glean wisdom nonverbally, or through words that conjure images. (Our “Around the Neighborhood” section has lots of fun suggestions for doing this!)

Also note: There is a lovely, longer, and illustrated version of this story in the book [*Harmony: A Treasury of Chinese Wisdom for Children and Parents*](#), by Sarah Conover and Chen Hui, illustrated by Ji Ruoxiao.



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Resilience Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk over the soulful parts of parenthood.

Author and activist Parker Palmer talks about the value of bringing a “[third thing](#)” into conversations among partners or small groups--words, pictures, music, etc. that can act as catalysts for deeper sharing. We present that idea as “a sip of something more,” a monthly source of nourishment that tantalizes and brings to mind a new insight, memory, or feeling.

A Sip of Something More:

The poem on the left is included in its lovely and powerful original form. On the right, we’ve expanded the pronouns “we” and “us” to include a specific and relevant antecedent: “we parents,” and “us parents.” Read the poem on the left through once, aloud, then read the altered version on the right.

<p>Not Just the What, But Also the How <i>Rev. Karen G. Johnston</i></p> <p>Wise ones say: we can be good, good enough, and imperfect, all at the same time.</p> <p>Wise ones say that we can listen to understand, not necessarily agree, and be moved by a truth, that does not make sense to our lived experience. And let it change our world. They tell us also to raise up those who are trodden upon. To cultivate humility when the world would rather we grow certitude in our hearts.</p>	<p>Wise ones say: we parents can be good, good enough, and imperfect, all at the same time.</p> <p>Wise ones say that we parents can listen to understand, not necessarily agree, and be moved by a truth, that does not make sense to our lived experience. And let it change our world. They tell us parents also to raise up those who are trodden upon. To cultivate humility when the world would rather We parents grow certitude in our hearts. Wise ones remind us parents</p>
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<p>Wise ones remind us we can recognize that those who do harm do not always intend to; and that it is still ours to reckon with the impact. They tell us that we can say “I don’t know” and “I’m not sure,” and still be warrior, still be whole, still be leader. In fact, the kind of leader we long for. Wise ones tell us to pay attention to not just the what, but also the how. May this be the meditation of our hearts. May this be the words of our mouths. Not just the what, but also the how. May we be the wise ones today, and every day.</p>	<p>we can recognize that those who do harm do not always intend to; and that it is still ours to reckon with the impact. They tell us parents that we can say “I don’t know” and “I’m not sure,” and still be warrior, still be whole, still be leader. In fact, the kind of leader we long for. Wise ones tell us parents to pay attention to not just the what, but also the how. May this be the meditation of our hearts. May this be the words of our mouths. Not just the what, but also the how. May we parents be the wise ones today, and every day.</p>
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How did it shift your feeling about or understanding of the poem to hear yourself being addressed directly, in your role as parent?

- Note: We’re using the term parent here broadly, but if it’s more intuitive for you to use the word grandparent or godparent or another term, please feel free to substitute. We’ve highlighted the term for ease of replacement, if desired.

What single phrase or word stuck out to you as you listened to the poem? Why do you think that caught your attention so intensely?

In what ways do you feel good, good enough, and imperfect as a parent?

How has saying “I don’t know” helped you to lead and co-lead your family in ways you knew were right and wise?



Spiritual Snacks to Share

In addition to your “third thing,” bring one or two of these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don’t treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most, using them as bite-sized opportunities to dive deeper into the role of parent, partner, and person of spirit and conscience.

Which Question is “Yours”?

- What’s something you know now about wisdom that you didn’t know when you were a new parent?
- What role does intuition play in your parenting?
- Have you learned more in your parenting from calm introspection, listening to wise ones or surviving one of life’s storms?
- What piece of parenting nonsense did you hold on to the longest?
- What was the wisest decision/choice you made as a new parent?
- What is the wisest thing you’ve watched your parenting partner do or heard them say?
- It’s been [said](#), “Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know.” Which of your problems, messes, mistakes or pieces of pain in your parenting just never seems to go away?
- What one piece of advice on parenting do you wish you hadn’t ignored?
- What has been the most unlikely source of parenting wisdom in your life?
- What has your child--as an individual--taught you about life?

- When is a time that questioning the status quo or conventional advice about parenting led to the wisest move for your family?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Wisdom Recorded: (Your!) Life’s Little Instruction Book

In the early 1990s, there was a bestselling book called *Life’s Little Instruction Book*. It was written by a father to his son, as his son left home to start life as an independent young adult. The book had a mix of profound wisdom and practical wisdom, serious wisdom and silly wisdom.

If you had a book of wisdom, what would you put in it? What kinds of things would you *hope* would be in it?

Using a tutorial such as [this one](#) or [this one](#), create a small book together. (You can also purchase small, blank books inexpensively at many bookstores and big box stores.)

Make the title of your book something like, “My Book of Wisdom.” If you like, you can decorate your cover with symbols of wisdom.

Decide together as a family what pearls of wisdom are definitely going to be in the book and write those in first. Keep it varied. It’s totally fine to have something like, “Try new things at least once,” next to “If you get gum in your hair, use peanut butter to get it out.”

Unlike the bestselling book that inspired this, which had only one author, we are going to happily seek wisdom from others in our community. Once you have a good list of wisdom from your family on your pages, go out in your neighborhood and community and ask others what wisdom they’d add to a “little instruction book” for living life well. You can attribute their wisdom to them beneath the tips they offer, like this:

“Always put your shoes on when you go for a car ride. You never know when you might have to get out and walk!”

-- Ms. Huxley, down-the-street-neighbor, age 76.

Be sure to seek out wisdom from people whom you think might have a different perspective on life, due to their age, upbringing, personality, family dynamic, etc. As a people of spirit, we know that the book could not be complete unless we include the wisdom of as many different life experiences as possible.

Undoubtedly, as you hear others’ wisdom, you’ll be inspired to keep making additions on your own, too; that’s great! A book of wisdom has to be a work-in-progress, because we’re always learning and growing.



Images as Windows to Inner Wisdom

A common spiritual practice among some Unitarian Universalists is to pick a card-of-the-day from a tarot deck, oracle deck, or other image deck to meditate upon and glean wisdom from. This practice appears in many different spiritual traditions and can help us access the wisdom that is beyond words, that speaks directly to our subconscious, or inner child, or both.

As our mantra suggests this month, you might draw a card each morning with your child, and ask of yourselves, “What wisdom does this have for me today?”

Some great decks include:

[Gaian Tarot](#) (featured on our “On the Message Board” page)

[Animal Totem Tarot](#)

[Natural and Earth Science Flash Cards](#) (You can use just the images for our activity.)

[Kaleidadope Tarot](#)

And if you want to try this idea out before you buy anything, and you are willing to sit side-by-side with your kiddo over breakfast with an electronic device between you to do this activity together, check out the free app [Tarot Sampler](#) by publisher The Fool’s Dog. Note that this sampler includes two decks we’ve recommended above, and a few others that feature beautifully diverse skin tones, ethnicities, and bodies, but most of the images are slender, typically-abled white people.



Blessing

Wisdom is as wisdom does, dear families, and you are DOING it. In your parenting, you are compiling a generational store of wisdom: good experiences, good conversations, good ways of being, good ideas, good stories, and good relationships. May you recognize this gift of wisdom that you are giving your young ones and future peoples, and may you, in turn, be blessed by the wisdom of your children--a delightful and often surprising bounty! May they keep your own knack and knowledge fresh and joyous.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family and for you...

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is on [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
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*You are free to use any of this material verbatim in worship, newsletters
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