



# South Fraser Unitarians

*What does it mean to be a  
People of Wisdom?*



SFUC Thematic Packet  
March and April 2021

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# What Does It Mean to Be a People of Wisdom?

When the topic of wisdom comes up, so do the usual images. Walls and walls filled with dusty old books. Elders with the wisdom of many years carved into the wrinkles on their faces. Diplomas framed and filling one's office wall. Endless letters placed in front and behind your name (Dr., PhD., LCSW, JD, Rev., etc.)

The message: wisdom is about accumulation. If you want to be wise, you need to pile it on. More knowledge. More experience. More books to read. More gurus to follow. More degrees to get.

But then words like this sneak into the conversation:

*Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification. Martin H. Fischer*

*There is no need to "acquire" the knowledge of God. There is only the dropping of the illusion and forgetfulness. Omid Safi*

*Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials. Lin Yutang*

It's a reminder that the math of wisdom is often the opposite of what we think. It's more a game of subtraction than addition. Often, accumulation of knowledge doesn't get us closer to wisdom; it's just in the way. There's a sorting, simplifying and stripping away that needs to occur. It's about unknowing as much as knowing.

Just think about how deeply we get tangled up in those cultural messages about money and success. Or the way degrees, IQs tests and SAT numbers get mixed up with status rather than the pursuit of truth. Or the way political parties, religions and even science claim to have *all* the answers. Maybe this is why the Sufi poet Hafiz wrote:

*The Beloved sometimes wants  
To do us a great favor:  
Hold us upside down  
And shake all the nonsense out.*

And with all the nonsense shaken out and stripped away, maybe what we notice most is not so much the pearls of wisdom themselves, but the sources of wisdom we've forgotten.

When reason and logic hog the spotlight, the wisdom of the body rarely enters the room. When week-long retreats with the newest guru define the path to wisdom, we stop asking what our failures and mistakes are trying to teach us. When "experts" sit in the center, the wisdom of those on the margins is lost.

So many untapped sources. So much wisdom waiting to be known.

Makes one think that maybe the wisest question of all this month is: "Where have I not looked before?"

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A - Leaning into Sikh Spiritual Practices

The Sikh is not to be anonymous. Choose something of significance to wear as a spiritual emblem for a period of time (you get to choose whether it's a day, a weekend, a week). Spend some time reflecting on not being able to be anonymous about your faith? Do you enjoy the ability to be anonymous in our Unitarian Universalist faith? Do you think it could result in greater commitment to your faith if you wore a visible symbol of it at all times? Would your visible emblem of faith be the flaming chalice, or something else? Have you ever worn such in public-a chalice pendant or t-shirt?

## Option B - Leaning into Islam Spiritual Practices<sup>1</sup>

The word Islam means “peace” and “submission” or the peace found in the submission to God. One of the ways Muslims practices their faith and seek to find that peace is through Salat (one of the 5 Pillars of Faith) that requires praying five times a day. These times are before dawn, mid-day, late afternoon, after sunset and after dark (night). In preparation for their prayers Muslims perform a cleansing ritual called wudu.

The invitation is for you to, as a young Muslim student put it “At fixed intervals, no matter how busy you are, all of a sudden you have to take out a few minutes and your remembering, OK, why am I really here?”<sup>2</sup> Try one of the following for just one (1) day, hopefully that will inspire you to want to do more.

- 1) Try to pause 5 times in the day, clear your thoughts and focus perhaps on gratitude for the day or feeling connected to the web of existence or choose your own focus.
- 2) Every time you wash your hands (these days we are all doing this at least 5 times a day right) be intentional and cleanse also your thoughts, hold a focus as suggested in #1.

## Option C – Widening the Circle of Concern

Join Rev. Samaya on Saturdays from 1-2 pm with your Black Lives Matter signs or any other sign promoting racial justice. For one hour we stand in front of Sunnyside United Church, our usual service location when it's safe to meet in person, letting our community know that we take our mission statement seriously to heart when we say that we care by working for a just and sustainable world.

Come to your group ready to share what the experience meant to you and how it helps to widen the circle of concern you have for the world.

## Option D – The Best Advice You've Ever Received

Wisdom is a gift. We pass it on to each other like a precious jewel. None of us want others to make the same mistakes we did, so we generously share our advice.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: (Buddhist monk and Zen master Thich Nhat Hahn, “Cultivating Compassion: How to Love Yourself and Others” Tricycle Magazine, Spring 2015, see link)

<sup>2</sup> Religion.blogs.cnn.com

In other words, wisdom connects us. It's not just something we collect to uplift ourselves. It's something we pass on so we can all make it through together. Or to put it another way, wisdom and kindness are more closely linked than we acknowledge.

To honor this, we're invited this month to remember the wisdom we've received.

To help, we've assembled some awesome videos and articles to jog your memory.

### **Here are your instructions:**

1. Make time to meditate and reflect on the videos and articles below.
2. Let them take you back in time to the best advice you got from others.
3. Then, out of all those memories (and pieces of advice) pick the one you think is most relevant to you currently. Pick the one your life right now needs you to remember.
4. Come to your group ready to share your journey.

### **Add Ons:**

- Make this exercise richer by asking someone close to you about the best advice they received. Maybe even interview a few folks. It's not only a great way to help them remember the gifts of wisdom they've received, but it's also a sneaky way for you to get some more great advice passed on to you! :)
- You might also listen to the videos for new wisdom you need to hear. As you watch and listen, ask yourself, "Is any of this advice, the wisdom I need right now?"

### **Must Watch!**

1. Best Advice You've Received | 0-100: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZfsyrNKhNTE>
2. The Most Important Lesson You've Learned | 0-100: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2GsSy8LNXg>
3. How to Age Gracefully | CBC Radio: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sycgL3Qg\\_Ak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sycgL3Qg_Ak)
4. 12 Truths I Learned from Life | Anne Lamott: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X41iulkRqZU>

### **More If You Have Time...**

- Wisdom from great writers on every year of life - TED Talks, Joshua Prager - [https://www.ted.com/talks/joshua\\_prager\\_wisdom\\_from\\_great\\_writers\\_on\\_every\\_year\\_of\\_life?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/joshua_prager_wisdom_from_great_writers_on_every_year_of_life?language=en)
- Lessons From a Lifetime of Bad Advice - [https://www.ted.com/talks/nicole\\_wilson\\_lessons\\_from\\_a\\_lifetime\\_of\\_bad\\_advice](https://www.ted.com/talks/nicole_wilson_lessons_from_a_lifetime_of_bad_advice)
- 9 Learnings from 9 Years - [https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/10/23/nine-years-of-brain-pickings/?mc\\_cid=637ca026b4&mc\\_eid=04e3c8a6e2](https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/10/23/nine-years-of-brain-pickings/?mc_cid=637ca026b4&mc_eid=04e3c8a6e2)
- 100 Pieces of Advice from 100-Year-Olds - <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/54286/100-pieces-advice-100-year-olds>

## **Your Question**

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the single question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being a part of a people of blessing means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work"? Where is that question trying to lead you?*

1. Leaning into Sikhism: The key to all behaviour in Gurdwara is grace. Whatever you do, maintain your grace. What would it be like to extend grace to each and every action you do throughout your day?
2. Leaning into Islam: Can you have the discipline to pause 5 times a day to focus on peace or connection.
3. Who is the wisest person you know? Which of their lessons might be worth remembering today?
4. What's something you know now about wisdom that you didn't know when you were 18 years old?
5. How much do you trust the wisdom of your intuition?
6. Whose wisdom most often leads you on your way? The wisdom of your head? Your intuition? Your heart?
7. Have you learned more from calm introspection, listening to wise ones or surviving one of life's storms?
8. What piece of nonsense did you hold on to the longest?
9. What was the wisest decision/choice you made as a young adult?
10. What was the wisest decision/choice you made as a parent?
11. When do you wish you had been wiser about love?
12. 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 just never seems to go away?
13. What one piece of advice do you wish you hadn't ignored?
14. What has been the most unlikely source of wisdom in your life?
15. When did you first feel wise?
16. When was the last time you were wise enough to admit, "I don't know"?

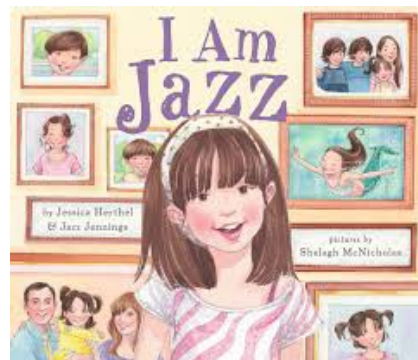
# Family Faith Formation

## Books and Readings on Wisdom

**I am Jazz** by Jessica Herthel (Author), Jazz Jennings (Author), Shelagh McNicholas (Illustrator)

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BF5D2lsPfsU>

“The story of a transgender child based on the real-life experience of Jazz Jennings, who has become a spokesperson for transkids everywhere.” - Amazon



## Family Activity

### The Wisdom of Simplicity: Make a Kite

**Option #1:** A simple activity is building and flying a kite. You can make one for under \$1 out of a plastic garbage bag, two dowels, tape and string. Here are the instructions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-u5Aa3BkCQg> For a group, we recommend making some premeasured templates so the children can use them as a guide to cut their bag to the right shape, instead of measuring it. Reflect on how the building of the kite teaches you the wisdom of careful following of instructions.

**Option #2:** We recommend this “Color a Sled Kite” as “the best ever for RE kids and young youth!” It allows you to design the image yourself, and it flies well in little wind. Order these beforehand @\$7.50. <https://intothewind.com/kites/foil-sled-kites/color-a-sled-kite.html>

P.S. There is an inexpensive small box of crayons provided in the kit. We suggest also using permanent markers on the Tyvek surface of the kite for more satisfying graphics.

## Family Movie

### Song of the Sea

<https://www.commonsemmedia.org/movie-reviews/song-of-the-sea>

“... But what really makes Song of the Sea such a winning and delightful film is its focus on the two siblings, the use of traditional music, and the stories within the story. Ben is the keeper of his mum's stories (all of which are true, we learn), and Saoirse is the keeper of the song that will set the fairy spirits free from their imprisonment. It may sound a bit complicated, but in the context of the movie, even young kids will understand what's going on and how the various stories interconnect.” - Common Sense review. Theme Connection: There is wisdom in stories. Stories teach us how to live a good life.

## Companion Pieces

### *Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection*

*The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of belonging.*

## Word Roots & Definitions

The oldest source for wisdom comes from the Proto-Indo-European root *weid* meaning "to see." This term is associated with the Sanskrit *veda* "I know."

The Greeks since Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics distinguished two different kinds of wisdom: phronesis, or practical wisdom, and sophia, or "transcendental" wisdom. To complicate things from a Stoic perspective, while phronesis is one of the four cardinal virtues (the others being temperance, courage, and justice), many Stoics thought — together with Socrates — that these are all aspects of one underlying virtue, which they referred to as wisdom. *Massimo Pigliucci*

Phronesis is a moral and intellectual virtue rooted in a natural and human capacity "to do the right thing in the right place, at the right time in the right way" (qtd. in Carr 39). In general, "The Greek word translated as 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom' is phronesis, which conveys a general sense of knowing the proper behavior in all situations" *I-Learner*

## Wise Words from Sikhism

Reading No. 599, [Singing the Living Tradition](#)

Why do you go to the forest in search of the divine? God lives in all, and abides with you too. As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror, so the Divine dwells inside everything; seek therefore in your own heart. *Tegh Bahadur*

Guru Nanak: 'Truth is higher than all; but higher still is truthful living.'

Guru Nanak's blessing: 'Do not say that the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran are false. Those who do not contemplate them are false.'

"Recognize all mankind whether Hindu or Muslims, as one. The same Lord is the Creator and Nourisher of all; Recognise no distinction among them. The monastery and the mosque are the same; So are the Hindu worship and the Muslim prayer. Men are all one." Quote no. 8966, Guru Gobind Singh Ji

"Truth is the highest of all virtues, but higher than truth is true conduct." Quote no. 8965, Guru Gobind Singh Ji

"In this life our actions are the ink and mind the paper, we inscribe on it the two writings of good and evil. Quote no. 8962 Guru Govind Singh Ji

## Wise Words from Islam

None of you is a true believer until you wish for your brother what you wish for yourself. (Bukhari, Muslim)



Goodness and Evil cannot be equal. Repay evil with what is better; then he who was your enemy will become your intimate friend. (Qur'an 41.34)

Go sweep the chamber of your heart. Make it ready to be the indwelling-place of the Beloved. When you depart, He will enter it. In you, empty of yourself, He will display all His beauty. (Shabistari, Muslim)

Righteousness is not a matter of turning your faces to the east or west; but this is righteousness – to believe in God, the Last Day, and the angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to use your resources – out of love for Him – for your family, for those without family, for those in need, for the refugee, for those who ask, and for setting slaves free; to practice prayer and giving in charity on a regular basis; to keep all promises you have made; to be steadfast and patient in pain and adversity and throughout all periods of distress. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing (Qur'an 2.177)

## Wise Words on Wisdom

Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life. *Sandra Carey*

There are many ways to seek wisdom. There is travel, there are masters, there is service. There is staring into the eyes of children and elders and lovers and strangers. There is sitting silently in one spot and there is being swept along in life's turbulent current. Life itself will grant you wisdom in ways you may neither understand nor choose. *Kent Nerburn*

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. *Albert Einstein*

The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise. *Alden Nowlan*

There is a wise being living inside of you. It is your intuitive self. Focus your awareness into a deep place in your body, a place where your "gut feelings" reside. You can communicate with it by silently talking to it, making requests, or asking questions. Then relax, don't think too hard with your mind, and be open to receiving answers. They are usually very simple and relate to the present moment, not the past or the future, and they feel right. *Shakti Gawain*

Your time is limited; so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary. *Steve Jobs*

You can tell whether one is clever by their answers. You can tell whether one is wise by their questions. *Naguib Mahfouz*

Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens. *Jimi Hendrix*

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

The value of the average conversation could be enormously improved by the constant use of four simple words: "I do not know." *Andre Maurois*

I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body. Then I realized who was telling me this. *Emo Phillips*

Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification. *Martin H. Fischer*

Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials. *Lin Yutang*

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*

Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know. *Pema Chödrön*

Turn your wounds into wisdom. *Oprah Winfrey*

The Beloved sometimes wants  
To do us a great favor:  
Hold us upside down  
And shake all the nonsense out.  
*Hafiz, translated and interpreted by Daniel Ladinsky.*

There are seasons, in human affairs, of inward and outward revolution, when new depths seem to be broken up in the soul, when new wants are unfolded in multitudes, and a new and undefined good is thirsted for. There are periods when...to dare, is the highest wisdom. *William Ellery Channing*

Listen: a wisdom within you calls to a wisdom beyond you and in that dialogue lies peace. *Rev. Leslie Takahashi*

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

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. *1 Corinthians 3:19*

The best teachers are the ones who show you how to use your heart. *Brian Andreas, StoryPeople*

## Music

We create two different playlists on the theme each month: one in Spotify and another in YouTube. We organize these lists as a journey of sorts. So, consider listening from beginning to end and using the lists as musical meditations.

Click [here](#) for the Spotify [Wisdom](#) playlist.

Click [here](#) for all [Spotify playlists](#).

Click [here](#) for the YouTube playlist on [wisdom](#).

Click [here](#) for all the [YouTube playlists](#).

## Online: Videos & Podcasts

### Wisdom - What makes the wise wise?

Video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox8XlcUppbo&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ox8XlcUppbo&feature=emb_logo)

Text: <https://www.theschooloflife.com/thebookoflife/wisdom-a-short-guide/>

Wisdom is woven from many strands...

### The Wisdom of Animals - School of Life

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=98&v=6VGfrDGY8sc&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=98&v=6VGfrDGY8sc&feature=emb_logo)

### Yoda vs Spock

<https://onwisdompodcast.fireside.fm/4>

“Are emotions simply bugs in the system that prevent us from taking wise decisions? Or do they play an essential role in guiding us towards the wisest path? In short, should we be like hyper-rational cool-headed Mr. Spock, or more like the emotionally sensitive Master Yoda? Are emotionally intelligent geniuses necessarily more moral than the rest of us?”

### Wisdom, Class & Inequality

<https://onwisdompodcast.fireside.fm/6>

“How much of a role does your class play in preventing wise decision-making? Are upper and middle-class people especially bad at making wise decisions? Why does more education equate to less wise reasoning in interpersonal affairs? And just how good are we at spotting someone’s class from their shoes or even eyes?”

### Krista Tippett on Wisdom - Fuller Studios

<https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/krista-tippett-wisdom/>

Krista Tippett, founder and host of public radio’s program On Being, reflects with Dr. Labberton on her decades of conversations with cultural leaders and the role of wisdom in shaping public discourse.

### 9 Life Lessons - Tim Minchin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoEezZD71sc&t=722s>

What do you get if you mix wit and wisdom - and a bit of joyful cynicism? Just watch...

## Books

**Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes** by Maria Konnikova

“Bridging ample anecdotes from the adventures of Conan Doyle’s beloved detective with psychology studies both classic and cutting-edge, Konnikova builds a compelling case at the intersection of science and secular spiritualism, stressing the power of rigorous observation alongside a Buddhist-like, Cageian emphasis on mindfulness.”

As Konnikova writes, “Our intuition is shaped by context, and that context is deeply informed by the world we live in. It can thus serve as a blinder — or blind spot — of sorts. ... With mindfulness, however, we can strive to find a balance between fact-checking our intuitions and remaining open-minded.”

**The Intelligence Trap: Why Smart People Make Dumb Mistakes** by David Robson

“In this primer on how to grow wise, David Robson provides an enlightening array of answers to three questions: “Why do smart people act stupidly? What skills and dispositions are they missing that can explain these mistakes? And how can we cultivate those qualities to protect us from those errors?””

**Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants** *Robin Wall Kimmerer*

Named a "Best Essay Collection of the Decade" by Literary Hub

“As a botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer has been trained to ask questions of nature with the tools of science. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she embraces the notion that plants and animals are our oldest teachers. In Braiding Sweetgrass, Kimmerer brings these two lenses of knowledge together to take us on “a journey that is every bit as mythic as it is scientific, as sacred as it is historical, as clever as it is wise” -Elizabeth Gilbert

**30 Lessons for Loving: Advice from the Wisest Americans on Love, Relationships, and Marriage**

*Karl Pillemer*

“Drawing on interviews with seven hundred long-married elders, 30 Lessons for Loving delivers timeless wisdom from a wide range of voices on everything from choosing “the one” to dealing with in-laws, money, children, and, yes, sex.”

Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson, *Mitch Albom*

## Movies

[The Big Lebowski](#) - The wisdom of [the Dude](#) lives on!

[The Farewell](#) - Navigating between the wisdom of the East and the West while facing death... and life, and love.

[The Mustang](#) - On the wildness of self-wisdom

[Moneyball](#) - When conventional wisdom is all wrong...

[Cloud Atlas](#) - “The minute you stop trying to find wisdom, it will find you.”

## Future Themes

Theme packets will be posted to our website, [surreyunitarians.ca](http://surreyunitarians.ca), on the Thursday prior to the theme starting. If you'd like to join a small group, please contact Rev. Samaya. Small groups typically meet:

- the third Monday evening of each month (except in November when the group will meet on the last Monday evening of the month); and
- the fourth Wednesday afternoon of each month.

Themes for the 2020-2021 year have been set! Look forward to the following:

May and June– What does it mean to be a people of play?



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