

The Roles of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding in Health

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Knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are three terms that are often confused with one another. In casual conversation, this may not have much significance, but when the actual terms are grasped, the differences are profound. Since this is the case, definitions are in order. For the purpose of this article, these three terms are defined as follows:

Knowledge - Intellectual attainment. At its most basic level, it is the gathering of information. It is needed to gain the necessary vocabulary for the realization of Wisdom.

Wisdom - The incorporation of Knowledge into each cell of the body. It is the actualization of Knowledge.

Understanding - The manifestation of Wisdom in the physical world. It becomes our reality.

These definitions provide an orderly and logical way to apprehend the interrelationships among these three terms. Why is this important? It is my opinion that our modern, technologically based civilization (and healthcare system) is attempting to bypass truly incorporated Wisdom by seemingly going directly from Knowledge to Understanding, with dire consequences.

More on this later, but first let's look at what the definitions really entail. Perhaps the most important, initial point to notice is that there are verbs for knowing and understanding, but not for wisdom. In other words, we can say, "I know" or "I understand," but we don't say, "I wise." We can certainly say, "I am wise," but this is a different expression entirely. What this implies, then, is that while knowing and understanding are actions (after all, a verb is an "action word," according to our grammar school teachers), wisdom is a state of being. Let's look at that again:

**Knowledge and Understanding are actions.
Wisdom is not. It is a state of being.**

This has profound implications for our health. What is incorporated into our bodies via information becomes our reality, and our Wisdom is the linchpin.

Looking at the definitions again, the one for Knowledge is probably closest to what is commonly seen. We read or hear or experience something, and we know it. The definition for Understanding also follows from what we experience. Once we understand something, we can apply it to our lives. We can use it. The tough one is Wisdom. Since it isn't an action, we can't do anything with it. We have to be with it. It simply has to accumulate and, through its aegis, we move through the world with maximal effectiveness. Well, here's where the wheels come off the cart for our modern world.

Very few people are willing to sit with their knowledge to allow true wisdom to accumulate. We are bombarded constantly with a great deal of information. Nothing in the definition says that the information we gather needs to be of a high quality, or even useful or beneficial. Look at what we experience on an average day. We are inundated with trivia; advertising; lurid details of the lives of our manufactured celebrities; political spin; new threats, fears, and terrors; amazing advances that will make life a paradise any day now; things that we have to have to be desirable, clever, or envied; etc. The list can go on for pages. All of this, depending on what we attend to, becomes our knowledge base.

A very important factor in the conversion of Knowledge to Wisdom is repetition, both conscious and unconscious. If what is repeated to us, and what we take in, is the pap that passes for information in our everyday world, this becomes the Wisdom of our cells. Don't make the mistake of thinking that Wisdom is only some highly vibrational state. That's merely the sense of the word in its everyday usage. There's a great deal of garbage that gets incorporated as Wisdom in our bodies. This Wisdom, whatever its quality, sits in the body and begins to manifest as our Understanding. It is an automatic process and echoes the ancient dictum: As you think, so you are.

So what to do?

Fortunately for us, we have a strong built-in discriminative faculty. We all know that the prevailing opinion is not always the best opinion. In fact, prevailing opinion can often be based in fear, greed, or ignorance. We can weigh the merits of things and toss out those that we see as harmful or irrelevant. This is fine as far as it goes, but our discriminative faculty would become immediately overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information coming at us if we were conscious of it all. Of necessity, most of the information that impinges on us enters unconsciously. To manage this information, discipline is needed.

This discipline takes the form of the ability to center and relay the most nourishing messages possible to our cells, to ourselves. Centering at its most basic requires the ability to place oneself in the present. This means being fully in the here and now. It is often a monumentally difficult task. Thankfully, even brief periods of being fully present will have deeply beneficial results. It is beyond the scope of this article to give a full exploration of centering. However, there are many excellent books on the subject. Suffice it to say that the ability to center is basic and necessary to take full advantage of our remarkable abilities as humans. Failing this, our bodies will incorporate wholesale what the culture pours into us.

The messages that we give ourselves are the stuff on which our perception of reality is based. It seems to make sense, then, to let only the best messages through. This is not an appeal to ignore the pain and suffering of the world, or for each of us to become a Pollyanna, or to mutter "feel good" messages non-stop. Popular offerings like *The Secret* make this seem like that's all one needs to do. If that were true, we'd all be incredibly attractive, wildly rich, inconceivably successful, fully actualized beings. Look around. It just ain't so.

On the contrary, the messages we give ourselves are convoluted and tainted by eons of human evolution. We carry within us the accumulated beliefs of those that went before us. It's not just the "Uh-oh, I'm sounding just like my mother" messages. Those are the easy ones. The tough ones are those that have filtered down through the generations, including racial (human race, that is), cultural, familial, and mammalian. Plowing through all this may seem like an impossible task, but the mystics through the centuries have had the right idea. Commune with a Higher Source. This doesn't have to be any particular idea of a given god, but it does mean that through this union with the highest parts of ourselves, we can become ever more free of those limiting bits of Wisdom. The proof is in the fact that those who work at achieving this become less stressed, more optimistic, more joyful, and healthier.

The prevailing approach to health care in our culture is based largely in a rapidly growing, technologically based, system. As a result, Knowledge grows constantly but Understanding is faulty, as Wisdom is not truly considered in the equation. Look at it this way. In this system, scientific achievement is prized and is carried on at a rapid rate, while the incorporation of these advances is plied without the true accumulation of Wisdom. Therefore, many unforeseen circumstances occur, such as serious side effects of interventions or long-term degradation of the environment, and in such a way that society is frequently called upon to catch up in some fashion. Regrettably, this catching up is usually done using the same system that caused the problem to begin with. "Science will save us," is the usual refrain, either spoken or unspoken, that is put forth by governing agencies which are in large part influenced by the science that is self-servingly called upon to save us. It is a difficult spiral to stop, but one which must at least have the brakes put on it.

Sadly, here is where evolution has run amok. The evolution of Knowledge far outstrips that of Wisdom. When this happens, a false Understanding is put forth into the environment. This is what leads to the unforeseen consequences that result when Knowledge is rashly applied.

Alternative health care, properly appreciated, eliminates this problem by allowing the individual to incorporate the Knowledge of the intervention into the body in such a way that the cells obtain the Wisdom to function as they should.

In alternative medicine the phrase "the Wisdom of the body" is often used. Even among practitioners of alternative medicine, this phrase can easily be misunderstood and applied in a cavalier fashion. Truly, the body has Wisdom and an important part of this Wisdom is not only innate, it can be called upon when needed to facilitate true healing. The idea that there is Wisdom in the body goes hand in hand with the idea of balance. Balance is often invoked by alternative medicine practitioners as the means through which healing can occur. However, even many alternative practitioners have little appreciation of the depth of what they're saying.

All too frequently, alternative practitioners are seduced into practicing variations of the prevalent, Western, technological model of intervention. They would like the perceived power of so-called heroic medicine (and its insurance payments). They can be at a loss when their patient/client wants to know how long it will take to feel better. Interventions that seek to restore balance are often slower to show results. Why? Because the body is incorporating the Wisdom of the treatment. The body is receiving the information, cooperatively responding to it, and working with it. It is not being forced into a situation; it is being coaxed into it. Once the information is incorporated (Wisdom), then the Understanding that manifests as a new reality can blossom.

Western medicine seems to tell the body, “Here, take this. I’ll explain it all later.” Unfortunately, it is akin to the police breaking down the door to the house and bowling over its occupants in order to save them from an intruder. After the intruder is chased away, the police leave, not giving the occupants suggestions for ways to avoid another break-in. What Wisdom is gained there? The occupant assumes, “I can’t protect myself. I’m helpless in the face of these threats.”

Slowly, there is a change happening, even in the Western medical world. More emphasis is being placed on self-care. However, this is happening in part because current mainstream interventions are not effective for chronic conditions. These conditions are the Understanding manifested by a body Wisdom tainted by a poisoned environment, personal neglect, and self-imposed ignorance. Again, it falls to each of us to build the best Wisdom for ourselves.

Alternative approaches to medicine offer some hope, but ultimately each of us is the best physician for ourselves. We must see to our health with the best Knowledge possible, untainted by hype or a complete reliance on magic pills and cure-all technological medicine. From this Knowledge, Wisdom grows, manifesting as cells that are vibrant and truly alive. That vibrancy manifests in a healthier Understanding, giving us the best possible physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual functioning.

The following is for mystical geeks only. Feel free to read it, but only cursory explanations are given. For a better grasp of this, read one of the many fine books on the Qabalistic Tree of Life.

The ideas of Knowledge, Wisdom, and Understanding are clearly delineated on the Qabalistic Tree of Life. The sphere of Chokmah (the father principle) is also known as Wisdom, while Binah (the mother principle) is also known as Understanding. Binah is further associated with Saturn, the planet of limitation, since, of necessity, physical manifestation requires a limiting process. Binah receives energy from Chokmah (the Zodiac of many possibilities) through the path of the Empress (fecundity). Therefore, all physical existence flows from Wisdom through Understanding, and into existence.

The sphere of Da’ath is known as Knowledge. It is a controversial concept in Qabalah, and is considered a “hidden” sphere that spans the abyss between Kether and Tiphareth, connecting with each of them. While it does not connect directly with Chokmah or Binah,

it can represent the highest mind aspirations of Tiphareth (the perfect human) reaching toward eternity (Kether as the first emanation). Thus, it touches Kether, which then feeds into Chokmah, making the sequence complete – Knowledge, Wisdom, Understanding. I don't claim to be able to explain it all, but I believe it is a very fruitful avenue for meditation. Take it in, but be sure to bring it out.