

Positive Judaism Study Guide #1: Inspired Living: Wisdom and Love

Aristotle said, “knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom. The Psalmist expands on this suggesting that the highest goal is “wisdom and discipline.” This study guide explores the category of wisdom from a biblical perspective and explores the strengths that support acquiring and utilizing knowledge to bring about positivity and well-being.

Wisdom	Cognitive strengths that support the acquiring and utilizing knowledge: perspective, curiosity, creativity, love of learning, and critical thinking
Creativity/Yetzirah	Thinking of novel ways to conceptualize and do things. Being original and having ingenuity.
Curiosity/Sakranut	Having interest and the desire to explore and discover new topics. Being open to new experience.
Judgement/Din	Able to be discerning and shift thinking and redirect in light of new information. Being a critical thinker.
Love of Learning/ Torah Lishma	Desire to master new skills and knowledge through formal and informal education. Being driven to gain knowledge.
Perspective/Da'at	Having a broad mindset and the ability to provide wise counsel to others and self.

I. Wisdom

“The Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel:

For attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding and insight:

For acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;

For giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young -

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance -

For understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

(The Book of Proverbs 1:1-7)

II. Open Mind and Perspective

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding—
indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.
(Proverbs 2:1-5)

Shema Yisrael, Listen israel with your mind open
(Seforno, Medieval commentator on Deut 6:4)

III. Curiosity

Four Sons at Passover. The Seder refers to four sons: One wise, one wicked, one simple and one who does not know how to ask a question. What does the wise son say? What does the wicked son say? What does the simple son say? And the one who does not know how to ask?

We must help children understand why we do such things at the seder. By telling them “it is because of this” they will come to understand that we celebrate Passover at that time when the matzah and maror are placed on the table. We are explaining to him what it is that makes this moment special for telling the story of the Exodus. In this way one is able to open a discussion of the uniqueness of this evening – with unique symbols that prod our interest and curiosity. In a sense, we point out the symbols and the specialness of the night so that every child will become interested and curious. (Kos Shel Eliyahu on Pesach Haggadah)

IV. Creative

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| 1 In the beginning of God's creation of the heavens and the earth. | א בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: |
| 2 Now the earth was astonishingly empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water. | ב וְהָאָרֶץ הַיְתֵה תֵהוֹ וּבְהוֹ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: |
| 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. | ג וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר: |
| 4 And God saw the light that it was good, and God separated between the light and between the darkness. | ד וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: |

V. Love of Learning

“Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and your gates.” (Deut 6:6-9).

“My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your mind retain my commandments; For they will bestow on you length of days, years of life and well-being.” (Prov 3:1-2).

* Optional Discussion Questions

1. How is the idea of wisdom presented in Psalm 1 and what is the value of having wisdom?
2. Why does an open-mind lead to increased well-being in a person's life?
3. Why is the trait of curiosity important in the development of a healthy character?
4. In the first few lines of the Bible, God is presented as a creator? What can we learn from this in the way that people live their lives?