

*TALKING THE WALK, The Grassroots Language of Feminism*

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Excerpt Part Three, Chapter 12; “The Road To Wisdom” pp. 109-110

**CHAPTER 12**

**THE ROAD TO WISDOM**

I believe in wisdom, and the journey we all must take to get there. Wisdom is not advice. It is the pursuit of learning from adult life and the creation and use of better ideas; ideas that are superior to the ingrained habits and dogma that prevail in both private and public life. The wise understand the intricacies of human relationships, meaning of judiciousness and the regulation of power. And they understand the necessity of integrating all that women have learned in the recent past into the rest of the world’s knowledge.

The concept of women’s wisdom barely makes an appearance in the common narrative and when it does, it is usually a pejorative. It is perceived as an exception to the rule, that is to say, the surprising or dubious appearance of female thought or action on the scene of patriarchal operations and opinion. It is found in myths and story books, characterized by the “wise woman,” witch or fortune teller—figures who trade in cunning, idealism and fantasy, but seldom sagacity. And in real life, it is preserved for the old grandmother or elder, whose job is to dole out aphorisms and platitudes that are sanctioned within the family circle. If the elder is sharp and articulate and holds a position in the community, she is probably self-censoring; living up to the implicit demand that she should never threaten the male ego, nor undermine other women’s complicity in the maintenance of this charade. So filled with fear and self-doubt are we about our own intelligence and higher powers that we accept the status of weak, inferior and muted, rather than make the case for our own superiority in the knowledge and handling of life’s affairs.

The definition of wisdom is apparently quite illusive. According to Stephen S. Hall, in “The Older-and-Wiser Hypothesis,” *New York Times*, 6 May 2007, psychologists and researchers are trying to figure out not only how to measure wisdom, but to decide what it is in the first place. Hall tells us that the nature of wisdom was first contemplated by Vivian Clayton in the 1960s and 1970s, who was then an undergraduate at Buffalo University and then a graduate student at the University of Southern California. Because of the complexity of the subject, Clayton left academia in 1981. Now a psychologist and beekeeper in Northern California, she wisely reduces the meaning of wisdom to its most elegant form:

You know, bees have been around for hundreds of millions of years, at least, as living creatures . . . And when you work a hive, and you're there with that hive alone, and you hear how contented the bees are, you just have the sense that they have the pulse of the universe encoded in their genes. And I really feel that the concept of wisdom is like that, too. Somehow, like the bees, we are programmed to understand when someone has been wise. But what wisdom is, and how one learns to be wise, is still somewhat of a mystery.

Wisdom is part of the life force. It starts with life propelling us to understand it, and instilling in us the desire to overcome the limitations it brings with its challenges.

### **Accepting Life as an Adult**

The history of women's submission and subordination is not only the story of oppression, but of our underdevelopment. Each of us has a responsibility to transcend our own backwardness and rise to the challenges of mature adulthood. Embarking on this journey means changing the way we think about ourselves. It requires the heightening of consciousness and willingness to overcome the habits of reduced mental functioning and limited ideas of what we should expect of ourselves—and out of life. When you change your mind, your wants and needs change. You place yourself in a different perspective, which in turn changes the nature of your relationship with the outside world. You come to see yourself occupying a stable position and start to live in the context of higher expectations—instead of seeing yourself as a case, in the history of women's chronic underdevelopment.

The passage to wisdom leads to adjustments in our relationships with other people. When we open our minds and create new possibilities, we are...

**End Excerpt *The Road To Wisdom***