

Book Review ILLUMINATION: Learning the Way of the Sage

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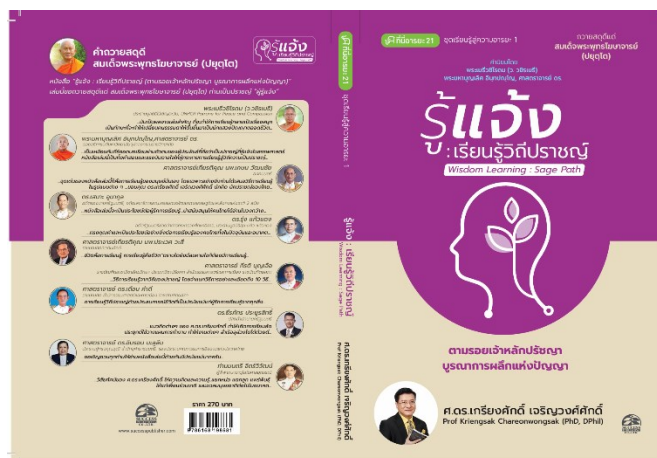
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"Knowledge flourishes and multiplies when nurtured by those who love to learn. Knowing without learning renders all knowledge futile."

In today's world, where information is easily accessible, rapid, and affordable, learning can occur continuously—from everyone, everywhere, every object, every moment, every encounter, and every concept. However, this constant learning is futile without an understanding of how to learn. If one lacks the method of learning, one cannot fully develop and expand the acquired knowledge.

How, then, can we learn effectively? The book “Illumination: Learning the Way of the Sage” offers an answer, providing insights into how to peel away the layers of thought to become a lifelong learner and a true learner. More importantly, it guides one to become an enlightened and civilized individual. When we possess a wise approach to learning, it leads to living a life of wisdom, value, and meaning—maximizing the full potential of being human.

The book “Illumination: Learning the Way of the Sage” is written by Prof Dr Kriengsak Chareonwongsak, a renowned thinker and author of over 200 books. This book is another noteworthy work for those who wish to cultivate a life characterized by a habit of learning. It takes

readers on a journey to learn the ways of sages—those who are supreme learners, masters of philosophy, and wise sages whose thoughts have crystallized. These include both Western and Eastern sages throughout history. Undoubtedly, by learning from these paragons of thought, we will acquire the best, most effective, and most impactful methods of thinking and learning, benefiting our lives, communities, societies, and nations.

The book consists of 11 chapters:

1. From Philosopher to Sage
2. Philosopher vs. Sage: The Similarities and Differences
3. Learning the Way of the Sage: Questioning the Four Life Orders
4. Learning the Way of the Sage: From Love to Pursuit
5. Learning the Way of the Sage: Becoming a 'Proactive' Lifelong Learner
6. Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning with Humility
7. Learning the Way of the Sage: Cultivating Awareness through the Dhamma - Wisdom – Knowledge - Thought Process
8. Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning to Use Reason
9. Learning the Way of the Sage: Letting Wisdom Lead Faith
10. Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning through Experience
11. Epilogue: Learning the Way of the Sage: Self-Knowledge

Chapter 1: From Philosopher to Sage

This chapter begins by defining the term "philosopher" as an ordinary individual who has a profound love for the pursuit of wisdom, rather than merely seeking knowledge. When a philosopher's thoughts crystallize, they transform into a sage. If this crystallization occurs in minor matters, they are referred to as a "minor sage" (jula-prashya), while in significant matters, they are known as a "great sage" (prashya-tibodi). A sage, therefore, is someone whose wisdom has fully matured, allowing them to clearly perceive the essence of knowledge and truth within a particular subject.

Furthermore, sages possess certain characteristics that are consistent across different individuals. These include being knowledgeable, having comprehensive understanding,

maintaining a moral standpoint, employing sound reasoning, understanding oneself and others, and making decisions that are truly good, beautiful, and true.

Chapter 2: Philosopher vs Sage—The Similarities and Differences

While philosophers and sages share certain similarities, they also exhibit distinct differences. A philosopher encounters what is known as knowledge, whereas a sage discovers wisdom. Philosophers are on a continual quest for wisdom, while sages have already attained it. Philosophical crystallization occurs through thought alone, but for sages, it is a synthesis of thought and experience. Moreover, a philosopher may find satisfaction upon uncovering truth, whereas a sage finds fulfillment only when they encounter goodness. This is the fundamental distinction between a philosopher and a sage.

Chapter 3: Learning the Way of the Sage: Questioning the Four Life Orders

This chapter discusses how humanity has been engaging in philosophical questioning for millennia, even before the term "philosophy" was coined. This tendency arises from human curiosity and the inclination to question the world around us. These questions typically revolve around four interconnected orders:

1. The Divine Order (supernatural forces),
2. The Natural Order (living and non-living entities),
3. The Communal Order (human coexistence under authority), and
4. The Human Order (the inner self: body, mind, and spirit).

Since these are the realms with which humans interact, philosophers have historically posed questions concerning these orders. They have developed hypotheses, such as the nature of the universe and the existence of God, and pursued answers to gain a deeper understanding of both the visible and invisible aspects of existence.

Chapter 4: Learning the Way of the Sage: From Love to Pursuit

Learning the way of the sage begins with love for four key aspects, which lead to the pursuit of four stages:

1. Love for knowledge leads to the pursuit of knowledge.

2. Love for truth leads to the pursuit of truth.
3. Love for wisdom leads to the pursuit of wisdom.
4. Love for goodness leads to the pursuit of goodness, which is the deepest form of love.

This is the process of learning for a philosopher. Each stage involves different methods, with thought process as the core. As learners move through each stage, they develop increasing levels of awareness—from awareness of information, to awareness of knowledge, expanding to awareness of wisdom, and ultimately reaching the highest level: awareness of goodness. This process is explained in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 5: Learning the Way of the Sage: Becoming a 'Proactive' Lifelong Learner

Both philosophers and sages place immense value on education and recognize its importance, serving as exemplary models of students who truly appreciate the significance of learning. For instance, Eastern philosophers such as Confucius and Western thinkers like Aristotle demonstrate how we can adopt a proactive approach to learning. A proactive learner is one who actively engages in the pursuit of knowledge, rather than passively receiving information. Passive reception of knowledge alone is insufficient for applying what has been learned to real-life situations.

This chapter extends beyond the individual learner to also encompass teachers and the educational system. For one to become a proactive lifelong learner, educators must ignite the passion for learning within their students. Teachers should embody the qualities of learners themselves, continuously learning alongside their students. Moreover, the educational system must play a crucial role in kindling intellectual curiosity, encouraging students to use reason, accept diversity, remain humble, maintain emotional stability, and strive towards meaningful and valuable goals.

Chapter 6: Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning with Humility

It is an undeniable truth that humility is one of the twenty essential life characteristics leading to success. It serves as a fundamental foundation for human beings, enabling continuous learning and self-improvement throughout life. Humility, of course, stands in stark contrast to arrogance. The consequences of arrogance have never led anyone to attain genuine knowledge, true wisdom, or authentic virtue. This is why philosophers practice humility, constantly

acknowledging the limits of their knowledge. They let go of ego and biases, open their minds to learning and listening, and refrain from clinging to their own thoughts or experiences. Even if a flaw is as minor as 1%, they willingly accept it with grace. Everyone can learn humility through these practices because humility is the path that leads to wisdom.

Chapter 7: Learning the Way of the Sage: Cultivating Intuitive Awareness through the Dhamma – Wisdom – Knowledge – Thought Process

Philosophers reflect on various matters to determine whether they are genuinely true, beautiful, and good, through a thought process that connects data to knowledge, knowledge to wisdom, and ultimately leads to the discovery of goodness. This reflection leads to four distinct processes: the process of thought, the process of knowledge, the process of wisdom, and the process of dhamma. This model is known as the Dhamma – Wisdom – Knowledge – Thought process.

To develop these processes, one must begin by cultivating intuitive awareness inherent within the self, including the body, mind, and spirit. If fully developed, this results in the emergence of Araya-Jnana (the enlightened sage characterized by wisdom and goodness). These processes involve awareness of information, knowledge, wisdom, and ultimately, the highest form of awareness—goodness.

Physical Intuitive Awareness (Instinct): This is developed through observation via the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). By diagnosing and scrutinizing one's perception, one becomes aware of information.

Mental Intuitive Awareness (Judgment): This is developed through comprehensive thinking, encompassing four dimensions: practical thinking, systematized thinking, positive thinking, and constructive thinking. As a result, one attains Buddhi-Jnana (Ingenuity) (awareness through the control of emotions by spirit and reason), evolving into one with Aromana-Jnana (Infatuation or awareness of intentions) and ultimately Wittaya-Jnana (Intelligibility). For the mind to think thoroughly, Sati-Jnana (Internment) must be cultivated, resulting in Vijarana-Jnana (Intuition), awareness of knowledge.

Spiritual Intuitive Awareness (Insight): This is developed by understanding the three aspects of the mind: 1) Conscious Mind: awareness of time and place; 2) Moral Consciousness: awareness of life's value; 3) Ideological Consciousness: living with purpose and ideology. The

integration of intention and consciousness in these three aspects leads to awareness in wisdom, ultimately culminating in *Punya-Jnana* (Intelligence) (foundation of wisdom) and *Sampajanna-Jnana* (Intellection) (foundation of understanding), paving the way to *Araya-Jnana*. This is achieved through the unification of Moral-Consciousness Awareness and Ideological-Consciousness Awareness, resulting in the awareness of goodness—true goodness, beauty, and truth in all matters.

Chapter 8: Learning the Way of the Sage: Mastering the Use of Reason

To walk the path of a sage, one must learn to enhance their use of reason—employing reasoning in various matters with clarity and robustness, grounded in a rational stance supported by truth. The cycle of reasoning typically involves observing nature, identifying general principles, formulating hypotheses, examining causes and reasons, and presenting theories, ultimately leading to debate and discourse.

In this chapter, learning the way of the sage can be achieved by developing the ability to ask questions that lead to clarification of ideas or to test outcomes. Furthermore, one can cultivate rational thinking through debate, which requires thorough preparation with comprehensive data, constructing well-reasoned arguments that link all aspects together, selecting key points that support one's stance, anticipating counterarguments, addressing one's weaknesses, and presenting ideas in a logically coherent manner.

Chapter 9: Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning to Let Wisdom Lead Faith

Faith is the freedom to learn beyond the beliefs one holds. It is not about abandoning faith but having freedom from the fixed beliefs one clings to. Clinging solely to one's own faith can trap one in old knowledge and experiences, preventing broader learning. This chapter emphasizes that allowing wisdom to guide faith leads to understanding and openness to diverse perspectives. It is crucial to challenge one's own beliefs, not to be dogmatic. Even if one lives by and grows up with a particular faith, it must be examined for truth. Ultimately, if the object of faith is true, rigorous examination will affirm its truth. If it is false, no amount of examination will make it true. This realization helps us decide whether to continue believing in it.

Chapter 10: Learning the Way of the Sage: Learning Through Experience

Philosophers are always courageous. They dare to question, seek answers, and examine the truth, refusing to remain in ignorance. They learn through observation as observers, gaining experience through their own efforts, such as learning from enlightened individuals (those who are considered gurus or sages). This learning can be direct, through conversations and questioning to resolve doubts, or indirect, through reading and studying various sources, which helps to expand knowledge endlessly. Learning through experience in the sage's way is an essential method for discovering the light of wisdom.

Chapter 11: Conclusion - Learning the Way of the Sage: Understanding Oneself

Another crucial aspect is learning to understand oneself. Without self-awareness—without knowing one's strengths and weaknesses—one cannot lead their life to its fullest potential. Therefore, understanding oneself involves knowing the body, mind, and spirit, with the spirit being the deepest part that guides one's life with ideals. This means developing and using one's unique traits and identities to contribute maximally to the greater good, which is a higher goal than merely seeking physical pleasure. It involves observing oneself, understanding oneself, and continually assessing oneself through conscious mind, moral and ideological consciousness. Additionally, one must practice living in alignment with philosophical principles and continually improving the body, mind, and spirit throughout life. This constitutes true self-understanding and provides the greatest benefit to the society.

The book "Enlightenment: Learning the Way of the Sage" by Prof Dr Kriengsak Chareonwongsak is a valuable resource that everyone should read. We do not need to spend a lifetime experimenting to find the best way of thinking, as this book consolidates the wisdom of intellectual sages. Though it is only about 200 pages long, it is filled with valuable insights from around the world and from the life of Prof Dr Kriengsak Chareonwongsak. By learning from this exemplary way of thinking, we can quickly develop into individuals who love learning and know how to learn effectively.