

## REFLECTION: A 'Handbook' on how to do it

### **Introduction:**

What bother with a manual on Reflection on how to do it? After all, we surely all know what it is to reflect without need of coaching. For those who do not know it all or who don't fully see the benefits of reflection, below are pointers that some might find helpful.

### **WHAT TO DO**

*There is much in this website that will help one to reflect. Here are some suggestions:*



1. **Wallow in a SANCTUARY**, perhaps with meditative music, candles etc.
2. **Read poetry in POETS CORNER** or think about the **SCHOLARSHIP** - see how noted philosophers have trodden this path, and what they advise.
3. Consider how people see their ideal place in life in **PERSONAL CREDOS**.
4. Consider how advances in **SCIENCE** may have bearing on core beliefs.
5. Look for relevance to you at the **GUIDING PRINCIPES** of this Institute.
6. Take on board platitudinous wisdom like *'Don't cry over spilled milk'* and *'Count your blessings.'* These can be mantras for daily repetition.
7. **Read passages at the foot of this article.** Whether or not you agree with them they are likely to help induce a reflective state of mind.

People used not to need coaching as to how to Meditate. They just 'did it'. Nowadays there is guidance on how to Meditate, an industry that comprises for instance breathing techniques with attendant rituals.

Mindfulness with millions of devotees world-wide can help some savour what life has to offer rather than being 'elsewhere else' in one's thoughts. It can be countered: 'Is one not always in one's mind, wherever one is?' A practical offshoot of mindfulness rarely mentioned is that it combats absent-mindedness. There usually is a practical dividend to the right sort of thinking.

And so to **Reflection...**

The art of Reflection enhances a useful and innate tendency.

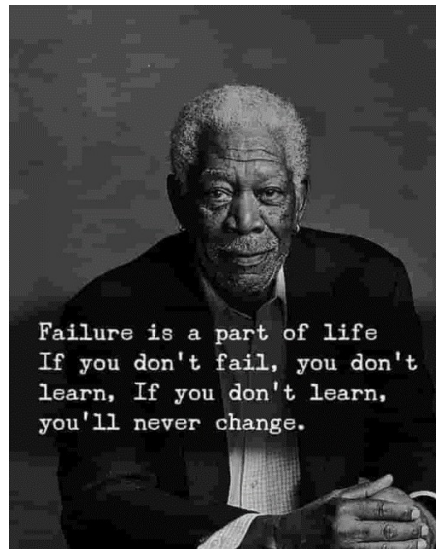
There is a tendency in our thought processes not to dwell on things we know. This can result in our not taking them as seriously as we might have done if we'd had to work hard at understanding them.

**Thinking is an activity of the mind.** This is where, to us, in us, everything happens. As a result of this activity in the mind practical consequences follow as to how to live a life and what to do in given situations. The Institute is about this. Reflection is an individual life choice. We are in control of our mind or like to think that we are.

### **How does one set about reflection or enhancing reflection?**

The watchword is 'attitude'. A state of calm well-being comes with the territory. It tends toward a balanced attitude, a way of standing outside the gadabout slew of whatever confronts us in our quotidian paths. The aim is to be tranquil, contemplative, with a perspective that helps put all aspects of one's life in proportion.

Raise the mind to an empyrean that aligns with your view of your place and purpose in life. Rise above worries or pettiness of the day-to-day. This may not be easy but it is worthwhile. A right attitude and thinking brings results in how to live our lives and in decisions we take. This is true also for those who think with good reason that we learn from mistakes. Going wrong is a precursor to eventually going right. One's thinking can see through to what can be bettered.



**How do we approach - with humility - acquiring the right attitude to reflection?**

### ***The underlying approach***

Little of what follows is as easy as it might seem.

Reflection is a mental or cerebral state of mind. Mental attitude is in thought processes more than in a physical preparation. There should be an understanding that 'reflection' is an activity in itself that is to be valued and prepared for, not just a thing that anybody automatically does or can do without thinking, forethought or appreciation.

A change in perspective can have profound, beneficial, practical consequences.

There should be a wish to concentrate on things that matter to one. A wish for clarity of mind, as the Gayatri mantra advocates, should be included on one's Wish List. The idea is by introspection without distraction to assess the overall, balanced picture.

A comfortable posture helps. Anything that negates negativity helps.

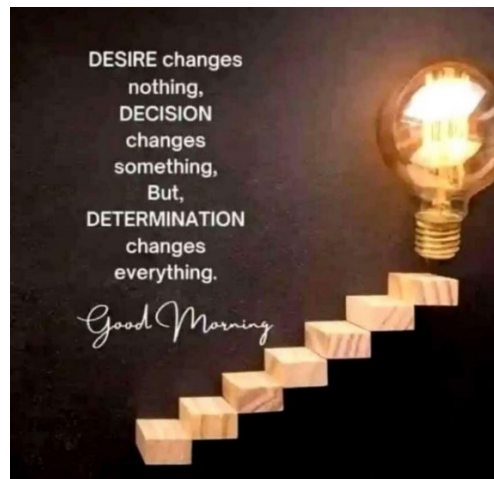
It is increasingly felt that positive thinking - sending of positive information to oneself - helps attract the positive energy of the universe.

There is no requirement to theorise.

It is a salve for angry, emotional thinking or behaving - an enemy within. To best fight that, as with any enemy, it should first be fully Identified. A determination to counter to a maximum degree being overwrought or consumed by practical difficulty is part of the preparation.

The wish to accomplish this or any task is half the battle to seeing it through to success. The clothing of what tends to be regarded as mental events in the imagery of practicality - as 'a task' rather than 'an idea' - is part of the mental preparation. There should be the deeply-felt wish to reach a calm balanced outlook. One seeks

being happy in life, contentedness with one's lot. **Do you sincerely want this?** *'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, try again!'*



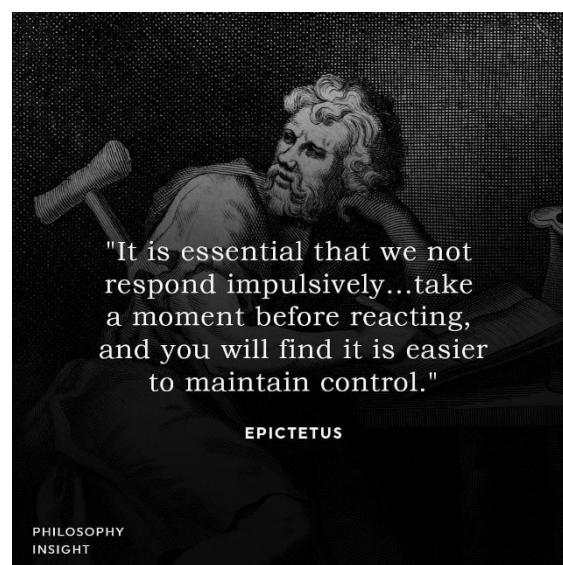
The smallest change in attitude in time can bring large changes in thinking and action.

Once the goal is clear, a path is signposted.

**What is your best path?** This question is one of many good starting points.

*'It takes something more than intelligence to act intelligently'*, as Dostoyevsky said

Reflection as a predominating attitude seeks to reclaim mental terrain that used to be the norm of those who simply wished to Meditate. Not for our forebears wanting solace in meditation were there prescribed, variegated forms of body exercises. A nod in the direction of taking physical steps might be dressing up for church, settling down in a quiet nook or setting aside time for fruitful thinking even just rumination. Mental rather than physical preparation was and is advised to put one in the right frame of mind.



*'...Grant that this ... day, given by Thy Fatherly kindness, be not lost to my fellow creatures or myself, may it be one of the useful days of my life ...shield my heart from evil passions... endeavouring to exalt my mind and purify my soul ...The mind... released from the material cares of life..., drawing that delicious sustenance from Thy Divine precepts which gives strength, wisdom and happiness...'*

Suchlike thoughts are calming, without need for instance of going out of one's way to, say, control one's breath. The above lines are from a Judaic prayer and preparation for prayer but the drift is much the same as needed for reflection regardless of religion or spirituality. Great thinkers have covered most nooks of deepest thinking regardless of what garb or belief clothed their thought.

**Whatever de-stressing turns you on to the right mental plane is for you to see.** There are many suggestions given on this website. It will help you form the habit needed and we are creatures of habit. The story of a brilliant Cambridge scholar who prepared for critical exams by going fishing is not just apocryphal.

**The precise form of words is not the crux.** Any stance that is true for an individual in fundamentals is much the same. Words in themselves in any case hardly give one an idea of underlying reality and may be illusory. Knowledge of essential truth in any case is given to few, if any, to know.

**Self-reliance and self-discipline** are keys to the right-minded attitude. Some people may need more assistance, professional or empathetic, than others. Practice may be needed to achieve quietness of mind and a holistic way of looking at life. A detached perspective - your hard-won ideas rather than the hand-me-downs of other people's' thoughts, or taking for granted a background culture - is within your grasp.

**Be a master, not a servant, of your own thinking** as far as possible and you will be the happier for it and society will be the better for having you in it.

**It needs unflinching honesty with oneself.** Be honest with yourself; no one but you is listening. Reflection is a solitary occupation.

**'Practice',** it is said, **'makes perfect'**.

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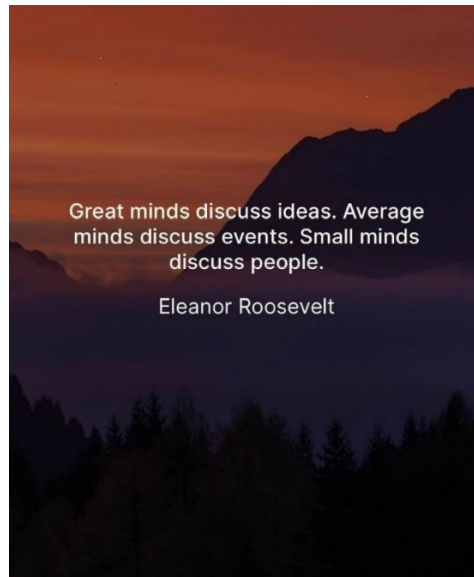
**A person who wishes to reflect can choose his area of interest or concentration if it does not immediately suggest itself.** At different times, ideas may change.

- (a) Is your wish to reflect on your personal past? Reflecting on this sometimes may be likened to the charm felt by a tightrope walker who, after crossing an abyss, looks safely down into it or a long-distance runner in the changing room after his exertions who experiences a sense or surge of relief.

Was Socrates right in toto or in part to say: *'the unexamined life is not worth living.'*

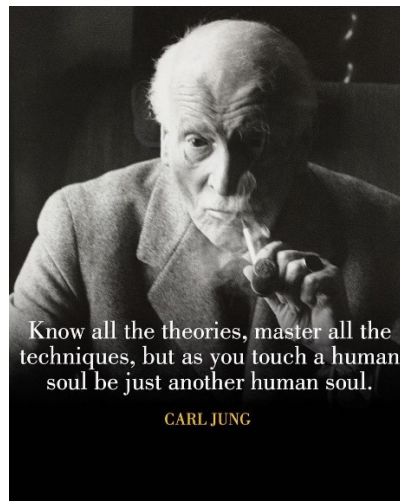
- (b) Do you want to ask 'What is life about'? People often think along such lines in adolescence but why presume that we did all our fundamental thinking by the time we reach adulthood? It is a civilised thing to do, to ask oneself what one's life, and the panorama of life, is about.

(c) Is it to consider what one wishes to achieve in life; and how to do it?



*As with all illustrations on this website, the precept above is not inscribed on a tablet of stone.  
The question as always in this institute is: 'Do you agree with it?'*

(d) Do you want to think about your relationships with other people?



(e) Do you want to 'Know thyself', the injunction of the Delphic Oracle? This, again, is not as easy to accomplish as it might look.

(f) Do you want to consider any about yourself or anyone else?

*If you ignore reality you should not ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.*

The more one looks into almost any idea or task the more complex it can appear. The attainment of a settled view in which one can have confidence often comes

through a careful consideration of it even if the end result may not be far from the starting point.

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There is very much that has been written that can help induce an attitude of Reflection. The purpose of such texts may not have been specifically to reflect as such but they will help induce a state of reflection. Many of these passages in literature can be part of your 'handbook' to a contemplative mind. The best and most uplifting examples help anyone become better-balanced.

Think this through, quietly looking out for what is tailor-made for you.

### **What do *you* wish to reflect on?**

What type of reflection will help best to get you to your chosen goal?

Reflection is a wide category. We all know what it is but do we do it; do we recognise the beneficial results and go out of our way to put them into practice?

To speak in broad category, **there are two main types of reflection:**

There is what might be termed **a ruminant type of reflection**. This is often with the purpose of trying to tease out what is really going on in the subconscious. That can be an effect even if it is spelled out as the intention. Carl Jung writes: *'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.'*

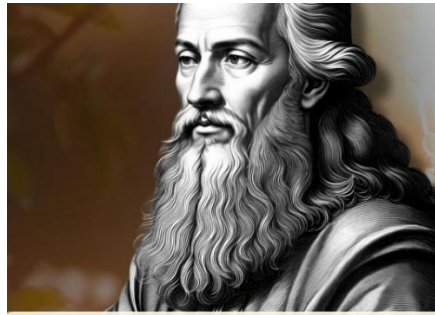
There is interest in letting the mind wander this way and that, observing what emerges.

It is best if the conscious mind does not waive its nature or responsibilities. We are human first and foremost. If the mind is bolting or moving off in all directions rather like an unruly elephant, then the mahout, or elephant driver, should try and cajole it back on track. It is often the emotions that overwhelm and they are not conducive to calm reflection. If nothing else, they should be seen for what they are, again. Its best to master them if that is what is considered on reflection to be the best course. Aids to meditation, the soft music, the incense, the candles and so forth enumerated non-exhaustively in, say, the Sanctuary on this website may play a helpful role.

This is the state of mind most likely to breed the products of intuition; the ideas that come from 'one knows not where'. This process is to be distinguished from that of 'thinking' (unless thinking is broadly defined).

Some intuitions vanish on surfacing, like dreams, some entrench themselves. See them for what they are, perhaps get them down on paper, that they may best be inspected in the broad light of day.

There is a primarily **cerebral type of reflection**. We wish, say, to unravel a problem or come up with a solution as to which direction to take at a crossroads' or at a deeper level come up with guidance as to how to live our lives. It can be about what type of a person we wish to become - on a day-to-day or more panoramic basis - or a general decision on what main course to follow in a specific context. Do we wish to change? Thought precedes action. We wish to think our way towards the right solution, a way forward in life. *'Look before you leap'* is mantra of reflection.



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" The mind's true work lies in the power to choose, reject, desire, repel, prepare, intend, and affirm. A corrupted mind is a barrier to the fulfillment of its own potential. "

~ EPICETUS ~

Emotions need not be downgraded to an unimportant part of the mix. An emotional reaction is not necessarily wrong *per se* - though may depend on the type of emotion. Love is different from anger. We are human and so have emotions but at the end of the day the more undesirable of them ideally should be kept in check and fully justified not just 'felt'. Anger is very rarely a good counsellor but, that said, sometimes a show of anger on a public stage may help push over an obstacle. Reflection should precede action. If the course of action decided is to follow this route - anger usually is a last resort - it will gain through a feeling of conviction that is buttressed by careful planning.

How to think about our destiny? One can feel that some deep things must be true; to be persuaded of their truth, especially with statements in conclusion, needs a degree of probing and consideration that tends to toward the cerebral. It is if to summon up an outsider - in oneself - to look in on the questions one throws up.

There should be as little distraction as possible. Avoidance of digression or misleading by-ways tends to take practice. People might be distracted by the roar of an aeroplane or loud music when, say, trying to solve a mathematics problem but anyone who has prepared for an exam knows the drill. Nerves and fear should be kept at bay. There is little point thinking about how good it would be to pass an exam when trying to tease out a solution to a problem in the exam paper. Concentrate on each step along the way. The goal that started you off originally might be to pass the exam but that isn't the way to get a particular question right. But if you tell yourself when playing chess that getting a move right is a matter of life and death, you are less likely to make a mistake. It also helps to try and enjoy what you are doing.

### **Conclusion**

Who are you, really? Which are the traits or different aspects of your 'I' that you would like predominate above others and be your better self, whoever it may be? Why are you here on this earth? Wouldn't you like to know, or at least have some idea? How might your considered thinking affect how you live your life?



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***Below are some passages that may help one reach a reflective state of mind:***

Best is to pick your own favourite passages, ones that speak to you.

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**(A) *Bertrand Russell's advice when facing others of a different opinion***

It is important to learn not to be angry with opinions different from your own, but to set to work understanding how they come about. If, after you have understood them, they still seem false, you can then combat them much more effectually than if you had continued to be merely horrified. I am not suggesting that the philosopher should have no feelings; the man who has no feelings, if there be such a man, does nothing, and therefore achieves nothing.

No man can hope to become a good philosopher unless he has certain feelings which are not very common. He must have an intense desire to understand the world, as far as that is possible; and for the sake of understanding, he must be willing to overcome those narrownesses of outlook that make a correct perception impossible.

He must learn to think and feel, not as a member of this or that group, but as just a human being. If he could, he would divest himself of the limitations to which he is subject as a human being. If he could perceive the world as a Martian or an inhabitant of Sirius, if he could see it as it seems to a creature that lives for a day and also as it would seem to one that lived for a million years, he would be a better philosopher.”

- *Bertrand Russell, The Art of Philosophizing and other Essays (1942), Essay I: The Art of Rational Conjecture, pp. 23-4*

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**(B) *Ernst Gombrich* writes:**

‘A strong wind is blowing and there are little crests of foam on the waves. Look carefully at the millions of shimmering white bubbles rising and then vanishing with each wave...for a brief instant they are lifted on the wave’s crest and then they sink down and are seen no more. We are like that. Each one of us, no more than a tiny glimmering thing, a sparkling droplet on the waves of time which flow past beneath us into an unknown, misty future. We leap up, look around us and, before we know it, we vanish again...and what we call our fate is no more than our struggle in that great multitude of droplets in the rise and fall of one wave. But we must make use of that moment. It is worth the effort.’

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**(C) *Ella Deloria* writes:**

'We Indians know about silence. We are not afraid of it. In fact, for us, silence is more powerful than words. Our elders were trained in the ways of silence, and they handed over this knowledge to us. Observe, listen, and then act, they would tell us. That was the manner of living.

With you, it is just the opposite. You learn by talking. You reward the children that talk the most at school. In your parties, you all try to talk at the same time. In your work, you are always having meetings in which everybody interrupts everybody and all talk five, ten or a hundred times. And you call that 'solving a problem'. When you are in a room and there is silence, you get nervous. You must fill the space with sounds. So you talk compulsorily, even before you know what you are going to say. White people love to discuss. They don't even allow the other person to finish a sentence. They always interrupt. For us Indians, this looks like bad manners or even stupidity. If you start talking, I'm not going to interrupt you. I will listen. Maybe I'll stop listening if I don't like what you are saying, but I won't interrupt you.

When you finish speaking, I'll make up my mind about what you said, but I will not tell you I don't agree unless it is important. Otherwise, I'll just keep quiet and I'll go away. You have told me all I need to know. There is no more to be said. But this is not enough for the majority of white people.

People should regard their words as seeds. They should sow them, and then allow them to grow in silence. Our elders taught us that the earth is always talking to us, but we should keep silent in order to hear her.'

There are many voices besides ours. Many voices..."

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*(D) The following prescriptions are for right-thinking:*

*(i)*

### ***The Train of Life***

'At birth, we board the train and meet our parents, and we believe they will always travel by our side.

As time goes by, other people will board the train; and they will be significant i.e. our siblings, friends, children, and even the love of your life.

However, at some station our parents will step down from the train, leaving us on this journey alone.

Others will step down over time and leave a permanent vacuum.

Some, however, will go so unnoticed that we don't realize they vacated their seats.

This train ride will be full of joy, sorrow, fantasy, expectations, hellos, goodbyes, and farewells.

Success consists of having a good relationship with all passengers requiring that we give the best of ourselves.

The mystery to everyone is: We do not know at which station we ourselves will step down.

So, we must live in the best way, love, forgive, and offer the best of who we are.

It is important to do this because when the time comes for us to step down and leave our seat empty, we should leave behind beautiful memories for those who will continue to travel on the train of life.

I wish you all a joyful journey.'

The blurb on the website <https://thequestproject.com/the-train-of-life/> continues:

### Pause and Reflect

Likely you are as moved by this as I am. I stopped to consider just how true and frankly "spot on" this is; whomever the author is he/she is incredibly wise!

- How has your journey evolved? Are you on the right "train;" on the right "track?"
- Are the right people traveling with you on this journey? Do they know how much they have impacted your life?
- Has someone stepped off that needs your forgiveness and an invite to retake their seat on your train?

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(ii) Richard Jefferies, *quoted by* Denis Watkins Pitchford

'...There alone in the depts of the woods where the wild-dove drinks, there alone can thought be found.'

(iii) **IF** by Rudyard Kipling

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

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(iv) **DESIDERATA** translated by Max Ehrmann

Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons.

Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others, even to the dull and the ignorant; they too have their story.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons; they are vexatious to the spirit. If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans. Keep interested in your own career, however humble; it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of time.

Exercise caution in your business affairs, for the world is full of trickery. But let this not blind you to what virtue there is; many persons strive for high ideals, and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection. Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment, it is as perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years, gracefully surrendering the things of youth.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden misfortune. But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings. Many fears are born of fatigue and loneliness.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here.

And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be. And whatever your labors and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

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There are thoughtful texts including *Desiderata* that are to be found at:

<https://www.desiderata.com/desiderata.html>

There are books about 'Wit and wisdom'. Visit for instance:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=wit+and+wisdom&rlz=1C1VDKB\\_enGB1015GB1015&oq=wit+and+wis&gs\\_lcr](https://www.google.com/search?q=wit+and+wisdom&rlz=1C1VDKB_enGB1015GB1015&oq=wit+and+wis&gs_lcr)

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