

True Wisdom

Nachlas Tzvi cites a story as a basis for this idea. There was a caliph who had two sons, from two different wives: One son was the crown prince, his queen's child. The other son was born to him from one of his other wives. One day the caliph noticed that the queen was crying. When he asked her why she was crying, she responded, "I am bothered by the fact that you favor the maidservant's son over mine." The caliph said, "You are right; forgive me. Send for your son, and I will ask him to do something for me."

When her son appeared, the caliph said to him, "Go to the store and bring me some threads." The boy bowed to the caliph, immediately leaving to do his bidding. When the shopkeeper asked him regarding the texture of the threads, he did not know. He had forgotten to ask the caliph. Upon returning, the caliph instructed him regarding the threads' texture. The boy returned to the store only to be asked what colors the caliph wanted. Once again, the boy was dumbfounded and embarrassed for not asking the color before he left. The caliph instructed him to purchase white threads. He returned to the store only to be questioned regarding the amount of the threads the caliph required. Humiliated, the boy returned to the caliph at which point the caliph told him he no longer needed the threads.

Afterwards, the caliph instructed his aide to call the "other" wife's son. When the boy arrived, the caliph asked him to purchase threads for him. The boy immediately responded, "Father, what type of threads do you want: wool or linen, thick or thin, what color and how many? Perhaps if you tell me for what purpose these threads will be used, I can purchase the ones most appropriate."

The caliph now turned to the queen and said, "Do you now understand why I favor this son?" Knowing what to ask and how to question is a sign of wisdom. Patience and deliberation are virtues that not only complement wisdom, but they are also essential qualities which are the hallmark of a wise man.