

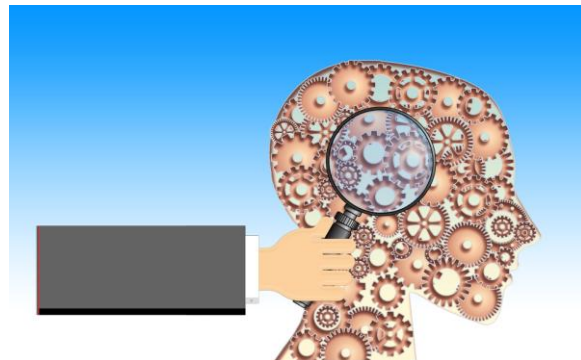
## IGNORANCE OR INSIGHT?

The importance of insight, knowing the truth about reality and oneself, is universal, present in every culture, worldview, and religion. Leyland Ryken, Emeritus professor of English at Wheaton College, describes “archetypal plot motifs” that occur in all literature, myth, and legend. One of these is “the movement from ignorance to epiphany” (insight). For example, the following is a Hindu parable about an adult tiger who encounters an orphaned tiger cub eating grass among the sheep:

One day the Bengal man-eater comes stalking through the woods. He has just eaten a gazelle for breakfast, but he is always hungry. His spring is impeccable. The goats all flee — except for the wanna-be goat. The tiger inspects the cub in astonishment. “What are you doing here?” “Maaaaah,” bleats the wanna-be goat. “We don’t bleat,” growls the man-eater. Confused, the cub nibbles grass. “And we do not eat grass!” roars the man-eater. “We are not vegetarians!” The tiger seizes the cub by the scruff of the neck and carries him to a reflecting pool, to show him his true face. When the wanna-be goat sees his true face, he squeals in terror.

Enraged and disgusted, the man-eater grabs the cub and drags him back to his lair, where he is hoarding the remains of the gazelle he had for breakfast. He pries open the cub’s jaw and forces down some of the raw meat. As the blood trickles down the wanna-be goat’s gullet, he opens his jaws. And he roars. Whereupon the tiger says, “Now that you know who you are, we can begin to discuss how you ought to behave.”

The motif of transformation, from ignorance to insight, is a recurring theme in popular film as well. The first “Matrix” movie concerns the initiation of Neo, who discovers that the human race is totally manipulated by computers. What he thought was real was only an illusion, created to enslave mankind. The “Truman Show” is about coming to know that reality, as it presents itself, is a total façade, designed to entertain others and sell products. “The Island” depicts human clones, brainwashed to embrace an illusion, but whose only purpose is the provision of body parts for others.



Why does “the movement from ignorance to epiphany” appear in every culture, worldview, and religion? Why is insight about reality so important? Why should we know the truth about God, the world, and ourselves? Because...

God created the world as a school. Every aspect of creation, the natural world, ourselves, and our relations are revelatory. All facts speak to us. Everything, every encounter, and everyone is an invitation to think and learn.

God, the great teacher, created human beings as his pupils -- in his image. We are *homo discerner*, the being who learns. Humans were designed for intellectual curiosity and insight. We were created to serve God and mankind with our minds. Dru Johnson in his book, Biblical Knowing, says:

"The Christian scriptures could be theologically described as beginning and ending with an epistemological outlook." He added: "The first episode of humanity's activity centers on the knowledge of good and evil. The final stage of humanity is pictured by Jeremiah as a universally prophetic and knowing society (Jer 31:34)."

Knowing, understanding, wisdom, and insight, in other words, are crucial features of the world as God created it.

Jan Amos Komenský, Czech Protestant reformer (1592 – 1670), taught that the acquisition of knowledge and all of life's experiences are a spiritual exercise. "As the whole world is a school for the human race...so every individual's lifetime is a school from the cradle to the grave." He believed that the goal of life is the acquisition of wisdom, which is comprised of learning, morality, and faith. He wrote that "to know oneself (and with oneself all things), to rule oneself, and to direct oneself to God" is the purpose of learning in service to God.

Again, the movement from ignorance to insight is a central feature of the Bible. Consider these two passages, for example:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" (Mark 12:28-30)

Please note that the *most important* commandment includes learning and loving God with the mind.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom 12:2)

Our goal as followers of Jesus Christ is to know God and to make him known. This involves a process of diligent study, moving from ignorance and illusion to epiphany and insight. Or, to paraphrase the last sentence of the Hindu parable, our transformation means: "Now that you know who you are, we can begin to discuss how you ought to *think*!" As Christians, we must stop consuming "grass" and eat the "meat" of God's word. We should enroll in God's school.

Once again, transformation is the result of insight. This happens due to a radical change in what and how we think, brought about by repentance from being "conformed to this world" intellectually and being "transformed" in our minds by the Spirit of God.

