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*Wise guys:* The Biblical wise men who brought gifts to baby Jesus were famed astrologers.

**Can wisdom be taught? A little over two thousand years ago, a little star-watching skill was enough to be known as a “wise man”. These days, it is a bit more complicated.**

## What’s happening?

“We three kings from orient are”, runs the famous Christmas carol. But in the **Gospel** of Matthew, the men who visited the baby Jesus are described as “Magi”, which is often translated as “wise men”.

The word “magi” originally came from the **Persian** word “magus”, or a **priest** who was highly trained in **astrology**.

Today, however, studying astrology is unlikely to get us quite as far. So how can we learn to be wise in our own times?

## Find out more

Here are five ideas you can use to become wiser in the modern world.

**Goodhart’s law:** This rule states that setting targets can make people focus on meeting the target instead of actually making things better.

**Segal’s law:** This states that: “a man with a watch knows what time it is. A man with two watches is never sure”. We tend to think that the more information we have, the better. But sometimes it is better not to spend too much time worrying about whether or not the information we have is right.

**Generation effect:** When we want to learn about a topic, we often start with reading about it. But according to the generation effect, information stays with us more easily if it comes from within our own minds.

**Licensing effect:** In simple terms, this states that if we think we are good we will let ourselves do bad. For example, we might let ourselves keep £10 that someone has dropped if we have given that much to charity.

**Ambiguity aversion:** In general, we prefer a known bad outcome to an unknown one. But taking risks is important in life.

## Can wisdom be taught?

### Some say

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Yes! Being wise means knowing how to change how you act depending on the situation you are in. Anyone can learn that.

### Others think

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No! Being wise relies on lots of skills that you are either born with or born without — such as good memory and intelligence.

## Some people say

*“The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.”*

**William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616),  
English playwright**

*What do you think?*

## Six steps to discovery

### 1. Connect

**How do you feel about this story?** - Who is the wisest person you know?

### 2. Wonder

**What questions do you have?** - For example: Should the world be run only by the wise?

### 3. Investigate

**What are the facts?** - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

### 4. Construct

**What is your point of view?** - You are put in charge of a UN programme to increase the wisdom of everyone on Earth by 10%. How do you go about your brief?

### 5. Express

**What do others believe?** - Get in a small group. Each of you should choose the wisest person you can think of and explain your choice to the others. Try to agree on whose choice is indeed the wisest.

### 6. Reflect

**What might happen next?** - The year is 2033 and the world has been overrun by fools. Write a diary entry describing everyday life in a world without the slightest hint of wisdom.

## Glossary

**Gospel** - In the Bible, a teaching of Christ.

**Persian** - A language, also known as Farsi, spoken in Iran.

**Priest** - A religious leader in the Christian church.

**Astrology** - The study of the movements of the sun, moon and planets and the belief that they affect people's personalities and lives.