

A Journey to the Castle

Exhausted after a long day at work, I wearily set my phone alarm for the following morning and promptly fell asleep. All of a sudden, I could feel my spirit leaving my body. Within seconds, I was transported into a realm I could only describe as 'heavenly'. Everything from my sense of smell and touch, my ability to see as well as the colours of the trees and objects were more vivid, intense and beautiful in this realm. The ground was made of a remarkable golden cobblestone that glowed brilliantly, as if it was alive. Every object seemed to radiate the essence of life and love in its purest form. It was like everything inanimate was breathing. I was in complete awe. Unable to control the sheer joy welling up inside of me, I became a child again and explored this new world in a state of wonder and curiosity.

Whilst exploring this divine realm, I noticed a castle in the distance. Intrigued, I darted across the glowing cobblestones to get a better look. The castle was like nothing I had seen before. Reminiscent of a Seventeenth Century French Baroque palace, the castle exterior was enriched with a vast array of ornaments and decorations all dazzling in hues of gold, silver and marble. Four glowing white columns at the entrance of the castle gave the appearance of complete symmetry and harmony. I marvelled at the castle's size. Above the doors leading to the entrance was inscribed: 'THE HOUSE OF VIRTUE, in large block letters. "Wow!" I said to myself.

Suddenly, I heard a voice, firm yet gentle, calling from inside the castle: "Come in, my child."

This voice was unmistakably female and expressed immense authority and power. Lost for words, I gulped and sheepishly walked towards the entrance.

The castle doors opened as I reached the entrance. I saw an enormous being that looked like a goddess standing around nine foot tall and wearing a bright white garment. Her skin was glowing, in a colour that seemed to encompass all races known to man. She looked down at me and I noticed she wore a golden crown on which was written 'WISDOM'. "I am Wisdom" she said.

“I have existed since the beginning of time, welcome to my home: The House of Virtue.”

Her tone was reassuring yet firm. I recognised her voice as the one which had called me to the castle. I gasped, taken aback by her presence. “I have an important message for you to deliver to the world,” she said. “But first, follow me.”

I followed her into the castle, unsure what to expect. I noticed a huge portrait gallery in the landing full of portraits of figures such as Frederick Douglas, Benjamin Franklin, Leonardo Da Vinci, Martin Luther King and Peter Drucker and others.

With a warm smile, Wisdom said “This gallery is dedicated to the people who sought me whilst they were on the Earth.”

Her warm face now took on a serious demeanour. “I want to add people from your generation to this gallery, however, there is a plague preventing the leaders of your age from experiencing the depths of my virtue. If they do not change their ways, they will fail to achieve the greatness their potential so deeply desires and their portraits will not dwell in my house. That is why I brought you here.”

I was disturbed by her frankness and conviction. “What do you mean?”

“You, my child, are living in unprecedented times. In this current age, attention is a precious commodity more valuable than gold or silver, and it is becoming dangerously scarce. Thanks to the internet and social media, mankind can communicate instantaneously with anyone across the world. However, these technological advancements also mean that mankind is more distracted than ever before. The ability to pay attention is becoming increasingly scarce amongst humans in the Information Age. This worries me deeply.”

I thought about this for a moment, forgetting my surroundings. “But why is the ability to pay attention so important to you, Wisdom?”

“Because attention creates the conditions for personal excellence and mastery. Achieving great things in this world demands a level of focus that cannot be compromised by incessant distraction. Distraction affects one’s ability to critically think. Critical thinking is an important skill that all leaders must possess. Great leaders need to dedicate time and attention to think through complex problems. Only this way can they provide excellent judgement and potential solutions. My spirit cannot dwell in the works of the unfocused; those who refuse to pay attention to the task at hand; those who refuse to rid themselves of distraction. Fewer and fewer leaders are enjoying the precious fruits of mastery and skill development; fruits which ultimately contain my spirit, that is, The Spirit of Wisdom.”

Her words left me dumbfounded.

“Dear child, this is why I brought you here. I need you to deliver this important message to the leaders of the Earth. All great works require my spirit. What great work can be accomplished without me?”

I was speechless.

Suddenly, I saw a vision: a grass field and a group of three friends, chatting. There was a finish line at the far side of this field and the friends appeared eager and excited to reach the end. They were talking about why and how they were going to cross this line. It was clear that each friend had a deadline for crossing the line and a different reason for wanting to get there. Crossing the line was incredibly important to them all.

As they began their endeavour, I could see what looked like little ladybirds on each person’s legs. As the friends got closer and closer to crossing the line, the ladybirds suddenly transformed into adorable dogs – they looked like Yorkshire Terriers but I couldn’t be sure. The dogs began tugging at their legs, wanting to play. This stopped the group of friends in their tracks as they wanted to play with the dogs; the dogs were so cute. The friends couldn’t help themselves, within minutes they were pre-occupied with dogs, and no longer worried about crossing the line. The friends told each other that they would eventually stop, but their actions suggested that they didn’t intend to stop anytime soon. Eventually, one friend checked her watch. “Oh no! I have such little time left to cross the line!” she screamed.

The others panicked at this, they too had hardly any time left. The group of friends tried to sprint to the finish line but the dogs kept tugging at their trousers with an even tighter bite. By the time the friends had prised the dogs from their legs, each person had missed their deadline for crossing the line.

The dogs transformed back into ladybirds at this moment. After a brief period of sadness and gloom, the friends didn't seem too upset about not achieving their initial goal. They each justified their need to play with the dogs, and began making excuses for not crossing the line in time.

“What does this mean?” I asked, perplexed.

Wisdom replied. “Dear child, this is the meaning of the vision. You see, the group of friends represents the knowledge worker in the Information Age, and the field represents life. The friends are knowledge workers who have a certain lifegoal that is valuable to them. It might be obtaining a job promotion, or starting a profitable side-hustle or reaching a financial goal. The finish line represents the achievement of that goal, and the knowledge worker has a time within which they want to achieve it. The ladybirds represent small occasional distractions that do not cause much harm to productivity, such as replying to urgent emails or talking to friends and family on social media. The knowledge worker could easily advance in the pursuit of their goal in spite of these things. However, these small distractions grow into mighty obstacles if unchecked. This is what the dogs represent. The dogs are constant distractions that vie for your attention, like constant social media updates and contact email inbox updates. They are appealing and attractive at first but these distractions must be controlled to achieve difficult goals. The group of friends failed to control these distractions and paid the price. In order to be a successful knowledge worker you must manage yourself so that the distractions of this age do not manage you.”

I was shocked. Wisdom's words had struck something in my memory. “Manage yourself”, I said to myself, “Why does that sound so familiar?”

I thought for a moment.

“Those are Peter Drucker’s words!” I proclaimed. I recalled an article that Drucker made on this very topic. Wisdom smiled. “You are right, dear child. Ah Peter, it was truly a pleasure to manifest myself in his work. That reminds me, there’s something else I need to show you.”

I was shown another vision. A man on the street in a city that reminded me of Paris. This man had immense pain in his feet. Clearly the shoes he was wearing did not fit him properly. The agony showed on his face as he walked and I desperately wanted to help him. Didn’t he realise he could take off his shoes and replace them with ones that fit? Oddly, the man seemed envious of those people who were comfortably walking in shoes that fit them correctly. Why on earth is this man continuing in this ordeal? Worse still, he would pause and look longingly into shoe shop windows, like a child looking at a toy they can’t afford. I realised that this man was not alone. There were others like him, finding comradery in their shared misery. They had so accepted their pain as a part of life, that they made up nonsensical excuses when some shoemakers began pleading with them to come in and try on proper fitting shoes. The new shoes surely wouldn’t fit them properly, they said, and besides, the immense pain they were enduring was entirely normal. The more the shoemakers insisted, the more excuses the people in pain made, until they started to get angry at the shoemaker’s insistence on improving their condition. Eventually, the shoemakers gave up.

“How sad,” I said to Wisdom, puzzled by the disbelief and doubt the people in pain had shown towards the shoemakers.

Wisdom replied, “It truly is, isn’t it?”

“But what does it mean?”

“My child, this is what it means. The man in pain is the knowledge worker in the Information Age. The shoe represents a career path. He is in immense pain because he has chosen a career path that does not align with his innate strengths and abilities. He’s in a career where he doesn’t feel engaged or motivated. He’s simply working to pay the bills, but he is mediocre in his efforts and his output. He couldn’t care less about his job and gleefully grabs every opportunity to take his mind off of the job

he hates. This disengaged attitude to work manifests in other areas of his life. He is less happy and less present at home with his children or his partner. He longs for a career that would utilise his gifts, but he doesn't believe this is possible – it is pure fantasy to him. The shoemakers in this vision are walking comfortably because they have found a job that aligns with their core strengths and values. They enjoy work and they enjoy life. They are present with others and are truly engaged in their work. They've experienced mastery in their respective fields and are appreciated by their colleagues. When they see others who aren't living their lives in alignment with their gifts, they want to help. However, those who have careers they hate have a hard time believing it is possible to have a career they might love. They either think it is impossible, or are too scared and unprepared to do what they need to do to achieve success. They think those in careers they love have found them through sheer luck. The unhappy walkers want others to plan their careers for them and cannot bear the responsibility of carving out their own career – that's why they won't try on a different pair of shoes. People like this naturally attract others in the same predicament, and they risk missing out on career fulfilment. This Information Age requires workers to know their own strengths, their values and their aspirations. Those in pain failed to do this and consequently failed to act on their convictions. My dear child, this story shows the sad result of failing to manage oneself. It is truly a sad sight to see.”

I stood there speechless. Peter Drucker's words in his *Managing Oneself* article had come alive to me. His words were now illuminated. “So that's why Drucker puts such an emphasis on managing oneself,” I said.

“This Information Age gives humans unprecedented autonomy; leaders must know how to manage this and knowledge workers should think of themselves as CEOs,” Wisdom replied.

I hardly had time to process this when Wisdom began again.

“Dear child, this is the message I want you to tell the leaders of the world. This Information Age requires all leaders of the world to learn to manage yourselves. To do this you must listen to your inner voice and discern what you are good at and what you value. Leaders need to develop a deep sense of self-awareness, which can only be achieved by paying attention to your inner feelings, your value systems, your talents and your abilities. All the great men and women of wisdom have done

this, from George Lucas to Mary Jackson; Leonardo Da Vinci to Harriet Tubman. When the world told them they were wrong, they listened to their inner voice and proved the world wrong.”

She continued:

“Attention is the cornerstone of ‘Emotional Intelligence’. One can divide emotional intelligence into three parts: paying attention to oneself; paying attention to others; and, paying attention to the broader issues taking place in the world. All three parts are different kinds of attention. Every leader must have these forms of attention in abundance. I use “leader” to describe everyone in the Information Age, not just those in traditional positions of leadership. Anyone who influences others, in even the smallest way, is a leader in the eyes of Wisdom. My message applies to all. The requisite attention for achieving personal mastery and emotional intelligence is under attack from the internet and social media. Of course, these tools are not to blame. Rather, social media is a tool that, when controlled properly, can be used to place ideas before a global audience at a speed never witnessed in history. It is not easy to pay attention but, with time, attention can be mastered. It is a skill that must be learned, like arithmetic and calculus. I love the world and all that inhabit it, may mankind achieve its potential it was destined to achieve. Now go, tell the world of my message, leaders across the world must know the power of attention.”

Before I could reply, I opened my eyes and realised that I was back in my bed. It was a night I will never forget.