

What is wisdom (*hakhma*)?

Some responses from the Tanakh and Rabbinic literature

Text 1: Genesis 41:33

Accordingly let Pharaoh find a man of discernment and *hakhma*, and set him over the land of Egypt.

לג ועָתָה יֵרָא פַרְעֹה, אִישׁ
נָבוֹן וְחָכָם; וַיִּשְׂיֹתְהוּ, עַל-
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

*Text 2: Exodus 31: 1-6 (compare also 35:30-35)

trio of adjectives also appear in I Kings 7:14 and Proverbs 3:19-20

- א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
1 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:
- ב רָאֵה, קָרָאתִי בְשֵׁם, בְּצַלְאֵל
בֶּן-אוּרִי בֶן-חֹר, לְמִטֵּה יְהוּדָה.
2 'See, I have singled out by name
Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur,
of the tribe of Judah.
- ג וְאַמְלֵא אֹתוֹ, רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים,
בְּחָכְמָה וּבְתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת, וּבְכָל-
מְלָאכָה.
3 I have endowed him with a
divine spirit, of *hakhma*, ability, and
knowledge, in every kind of craft:
- ד לְחָשֵׁב, מִחֲשָׁבֹת; לַעֲשׂוֹת
בְּזָהָב וּבְכֶסֶף, וּבְנַחְשָׁת.
4 to make designs for work in gold,
and silver, and copper,
- ה וּבְחַרְשֵׁת אֶבֶן לְמַלְאֵת,
וּבְחַרְשֵׁת עֵץ; לַעֲשׂוֹת, בְּכָל-
מְלָאכָה.
5 to cut stones for setting, and to
carve wood-- to work in every kind of
craft.
- ו וְאַנִּי הִנֵּה נֹתְתִי אֹתוֹ, אֶת
אֶהֱלִיאָב בֶּן-אֲחִיסָמֵךְ לְמִטֵּה-דָן,
וּבְלֵב כָּל-חָכָם-לֵב, נֹתְתִי חֲכָמָה;
וַעֲשׂוּ, אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִךָ.
6 Moreover, I have assigned to him
Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, of the
tribe of Dan; and I have also granted
hakhma to all who are *hakham lev*,
that they may make everything that I
have commanded you.'

Text 2b: Rashi on Text 2.

Hakhma—what a person learns from others

T'vunah—a wider understanding gained through intelligent application of what he has learned (cf. to JPS translation—ability)

Da'at—the “holy spirit” (cf. to JPS translation—knowledge)

Text 3: I Kings 2:9

ח והנה עמך שמעי בן-גרא
בן-הימיני, מבחורים, והוא
קללני קללה נמרצת, ביום
לקתי מחנים; והוא-ירד
לקראתי, הירדן, ואשבע לו
ביהוה לאמר, אם-אמיתך
בחרב.

8 “You must also deal with Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim. He insulted me outrageously when I was on my way to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, ‘I will not put you to the sword.’

ט ועתה, אל-תנקהו, כי איש
חכם, אתה; וידעת את אשר
תעשה-לו, והורדת את-
שיבתו בדם שאול.

9 So do not let him go unpunished, for you are *ish hakham*; and you will know how to deal with him, and send his gray hair down to Sheol with blood.’

Text 4: Proverbs 10:8

חכם-לב, יקח
מצות; ואויל שפתים,
ילבט.

8 He whose heart is *hakham* accepts commandments; but he whose speech is foolish comes to grief.

Text 5: Haggadah—The Wise Child (from a Baraita)

חכם מה הוא אומר?

The child who is *hakham* –what does he say? What are the terms and the statutes and the laws with which the Lord our God has charged you? (Deut 6:20) And so you should tell him as in the laws of Passover, “one may not partake of the afikoman after the Passover meal.”

