

Living the Golden Rule Fully

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When I thanked Vita for organizing this meeting amid all her other responsibilities, she replied, “Increasing responsibilities can indeed be distracting, but are we not to bring this essence into our daily life? If one tries to be centred in 'being-ness' then life becomes an expression of the golden rule, one can then only live it, be it, express it. And it is an ever expanding expression of love and equanimity and inclusiveness [which] all together make up the essence of it.” It’s at a moment like that that a presenter wonders whether he has anything to add.

I also thank Rudolf for leading me to a fuller realization of the golden rule, and Olivier for his scholarship in producing a dissertation that is ten times as long as my book. I have copies of my book here for you, which you are welcome to take if you like and which I will inscribe for you if you would like that, too.

I learned a bit about the organizations you represent, and I honor your dedication to planetary welfare and your willingness to participate in our present topic. And I know that I have much to learn of the golden rule from you. Your gifts and achievements are evident in your NGO activities, your ability and willingness to be leaders and team members.

In addition to the major approaches to ethics, studying the golden rule in its diverse cultural and disciplinary contexts provides a new and fruitful approach. For me, the golden rule has its context in a philosophy of living in truth, beauty, and goodness. This actualizes in the virtues and concepts of scientific living, philosophical living, spiritual living, living amid the beauties of nature, artistic living, and morally active living in a character dominated by love.

Olivier has spoken of the empathy and morality in the golden rule, and there is another dimension that I will speak of—the spiritual. My words do not flow from the heights of the unbroken practice of the spiritual level of the golden rule. I only know tastes and interpretations.

My thesis is that the golden rule has life in it, and that this life is its spiritual power of truth. One of the strengths of the rule is that it is a non-theological principle that neither mentions God nor is bound to the scriptures or doctrines of any one religion. Much of its meaning of the rule can be put into practice without any conscious, spiritual commitment.

Like a living cell, the golden rule has both stability and flexibility. Its stability is to express fundamental human moral intuition. The rule is intuitively accessible, easy to understand. Its simplicity communicates confidence that the agent can find the right way. The rule tends to function as a simplified summary of the advocate's moral tradition, and it most commonly expresses a commitment to treating others with consideration and fairness, predicated on the recognition that others are like oneself. The rule is part of our planet's common language, shared by persons with differing but overlapping conceptions of morality. The flexibility of the rule is seen in the fluid and adaptive power of love that it liberates and in the various levels of meaning found in cultures and disciplines which have really worked with it

(<http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jwattles/goldrule.htm>). Only a principle with such stability and flexibility can serve as a moral ladder for all humankind.

Religiously speaking, the golden rule may be called *the principle of the practice of the family of God*, and it means relating with other persons as brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of God. Its height involves conduct patterned on a divine paradigm, extending to others the same quality of service that one would welcome as the recipient of someone else's divinely parental love.

The rule cannot be captured in a static interpretation for it engages the thoughtful doer in a process of growth. To work with it is to move from egoism to sympathy, to sharpen moral intuition by reason, and to find fulfillment beyond duty-conscious rule-following in spontaneous, loving service. The unity of the rule, amid its diverse expressions, is its function as a symbol of this process of growth. Whoever practices it opens him- or herself to a process of change. Letting go of self to identify with another individual, or with a third-person perspective on a complex situation, or with a divine paradigm, one allows a subtle transformation to proceed.

How do we want to be treated? With regard for the truth—the truth of our situation and ourselves. We want to be treated beautifully, with gracious spontaneity. The golden rule may be adopted as one's rule of living because it implies truth and beauty as well as goodness. Truth, beauty, and goodness are qualities of divinity, and the golden rule is thus ultimately a spiritual teaching.

The way of simplicity at the heart of this rule of living is enriched by the following path of complexity, leading from preliminary achievements to the spiritual level.

1. Acknowledge the potential for distorting material impulses and selfish urges, as you want others to do.
2. Show sympathy for others, as you want others to have sympathy for you.
3. Treat the other person, whom you profoundly respect, with scientific realism regarding the other's long-range welfare, as you want others to treat you.
4. Serve the other person as a brother or sister, a son or daughter of God, as you want others to serve you.
5. Treat others in accord with moral reason, as you want others to treat you.
6. Treat others in a God-like way, as you want others to treat you.
- 7.

Obviously, this is no simple matter. It may take hard work. Nor is its application to complex problems simple, for example, in the work you do for the planet. Where the truth is many-sided and well-informed persons of good will may reasonably differ, much of the rule's contribution is procedural. *The golden rule is a searchlight, not a map. As a spiritual principle, its leverage is enhanced when freed from explicit identification with any specific social, economic, or political agenda.* Practicing the golden rule in hard cases helps by healing self-righteous anger, calming the waters when minds clash, listening to people's stories to learn of the values they cherish, and seeking for a quality of thinking that can do justice to many-sidedness without falling into the paralysis of relativism. The procedural import of the golden rule is no mere formalism, because of the substantive ideals implicit in it.

Part of the mission of the golden rule is to open us to other questions. For example, am I ready to seek the best and right solution by mobilizing positive attitudes and, *after* doing my best to resolve the problem, *then* surrendering my intellectual conclusions and value longings to open myself to fresh spiritual input in meditation or prayer? Where theistic religionists assert themselves, do they pursue dominion over other religions, or are they willing to surrender sovereignty to God alone? Which topics are proper subjects for legislation at the present stage of the evolution of a world government, and which are better reserved for regional solutions or cultural development?

I invite you to share your tastes of golden rule spirituality and any questions or comments that you may have for Olivier and me.