



The Golden Rule

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Good Morning One and All! Welcome. I'd like to begin with an acknowledgement of the Honor it is to stand before you in this Sacred Space. I am very grateful for this opportunity.

Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you.

The Golden Rule, as it is often called is a simple approximation of a complex idea that has woven itself into the moral edicts of most religions. Love your neighbor as yourself; treat others in the way you wish to be treated. What you do to the least of these you do unto me. Jesus' message was certainly one of treating others equitably, and with Love. Buddhism also has its incarnation, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (Udana-Varga 5,1) "All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One." The Medicine Man Black Elk has said, and further, "Respect for all Life is the foundation" from The Great Law of Peace, comes the wisdom of the Native Americans. These concepts are not foreign to the Unitarian Universalist. There are a multitude of ways to phrase this ideal, and each major religion and many Philosophers have contemplated these Golden Rules. These rules, or guiding words, help us to empathize with other people. If we truly take the time to place ourselves in another person's position, it makes it easier to treat them well. If we examine our own Principles and Purposes, we see this idea front and center in most, if not all of them.

Take our first principle,

The inherent worth and dignity of every person; [40]

-We all want our personal worth honored. We all deserve to have our dignity. We are all unique, and what makes us different, makes us special. That ought to be celebrated! It's hard to disagree there. Easy, right? Until someone cuts us off in traffic, treats us badly, or acts in a way that we feel is counter to what is right. The harder it is to treat another person in accordance with the Golden Rule, the greater the lesson.

Justice, equity and compassion in human relations; [41]

-We as a community as well as in our own individual interactions strive for this. We see injustice in the world, and seek to correct it. We feel deeply and truly for those suffering oppression, we work for equality for everyone. However, there are systems in place that are not in line with our mission, and even run counter to what we know to be right. The school to prison pipeline and the fight against proper healthcare for each of us spring immediately to my mind. What comes to yours?

Acceptance of one another and encouragement of spiritual growth in our congregations; [42]

-Here is where we shine, my Friends. The principle of accepting and encouraging one another on their spiritual journeys is one of our most sacred and most challenging missions. This fits so beautifully with the Golden rule. We should ask ourselves, 'how do we want to be treated?' The recognition of each individual, their knowledge, life experiences, beliefs and the encouragement of those values is the epitome of doing unto others. We all want our own inherent value recognized. We want our whole self to be loved and celebrated. Perhaps this incarnation and interpretation of the Golden rule is what drew you to Unitarian Universalism. We are open hearted, and eager to learn from other people. Every Journey is Unique and Divine. Acceptance here is not so much a two-way street, as it is a multi-lane Highway. While we may be able to easily support those who agree with us, what about those who don't? Here's where you apply "liberally" the Golden Rules. This idea can be boiled down to what I see as the application of empathy.

Apply Empathy. Look at those who disagree with you, or seek to use religion or scripture to make you feel less than, remember this,

-We see things a different way. We see the worth of ourselves, and the worth in others, and we choose to celebrate the differences, the uniqueness of each one of us. We treat others the way we want to be treated. We get the Golden Rules. We will lead by example.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; [45]

-This principle goes hand in hand with the first. If we respect the inherent worth and dignity of the individual, it stands to reason that cultural groups will receive the same reverence and respect. I encourage you to apply this idea to situations you come across in your day to day, as well as the hypothetical. When we listen deeply, we break down the barriers that make us afraid. Lack of understanding can lead to fear. When we approach a situation from a place of fear, we are not open. We are not putting ourselves in the place of the “other”. We can combat this by listening deeply, and communicating from a thoughtful place. Apply empathy to those in circumstances far beyond your personal scope.

This is the place where we grow.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.[46]

-We are all part of the intricate web of existence. We are all connected, as Black Elk said, ‘All is One’. I agree! We are all one human family; and it’s time we all acted like it. Let us see each other as we are. Human beings, all the same, all equal. Each of us is longing for belonging, for a place, a community to call our own. We make that Beloved community, mindfully, purposefully, here. When we use the Golden Rules to guide our interactions we are setting ourselves up for positive changes. This is easier said than done.

I have been reading up on this subject in preparation for today. I anticipated a relatively easy subject matter that most would be familiar with would make for a good sermon. It was fascinating to see that The Golden Rule predated Christianity. As long as there have been groups of people, as long as there has been folks in search of spirituality, there has been some variant of this concept of taking a step back, and truly trying to put yourself in another’s place. This concept of applying empathy is more important now than ever before. The ability to put the Golden Rules into practice I believe has become more difficult in today’s climate of division and derision. It’s easy to fall into the trap of ‘Doing to others as they have done to me.’ In the writing of this piece I have taken a look at myself and the interactions I participate in. I can see in hindsight that I have fallen into that trap, and I barely noticed. I realized I was counting wrongs, adding them up, keeping score. I was angry, because I was wronged, and I would take any chance I had to Dish a little out. Even up the score. I was feeling the pressure, and I was lashing out. It got to the point to where I didn’t know who I was angrier with, the World, or myself. I’ll be frank with you, it wasn’t pretty. I found myself in a terrible circle of frustration, anxiety and self-pity.

One of the problems with this, (there are a few) is that when we get sucked into this mindset, we forget about how we treat others, we become consumed with our own toxic feelings, and we forget how to treat ourselves. Often, we treat ourselves in a way that we would never treat

our friends, or even a stranger. As important as it is to treat others the way you want to be treated, that ability begins with how you treat yourself.

When we see a friend or family member go through a trying time that we have also experienced, it is not difficult to imagine how they may be feeling. We try to be there, and give them support. For example, I would never tell an exhausted, overwhelmed special needs parent that they are an abject failure, their kid is a mess, and it's entirely their fault because they are just a big dummy. However, the number of times I have hurled similar garbage that at myself is too numerous to count. Being mindful of our inner dialogue is a key first step in using the Golden Rules as your guide. Reframing how we talk to ourselves will help us to reframe our interactions with others in a more positive way. When you notice that you are getting down on yourself, stop, and imagine one of your dearest friends. Now, imagine they are the one in whatever the situation is. Think about what you would do for them that would be most helpful. Would you give advice, offer help, or simply listen?

We can use this mindfulness exercise when dealing with difficult people as well. The next time you find yourself up against someone giving you a hard time, stop. Take a breath, and imagine you are in their place. Try to understand where they are coming from, and if you can't remind yourself, everyone has tough stuff to deal with. Sometimes it brings out the best in us, sometimes not. When we approach difficult interactions with empathy, we are growing the good in the world. Am I saying this approach will work every time on everyone? Nope. It won't. But I can promise, you'll feel a little better about your own interactions, and you may even learn something about someone else along the way.

Sometimes it's easier to apply the Golden Rule to our interactions with others, but it is just as important, perhaps more so, to begin within. Only then can we fully appreciate the wisdom held in each incarnation of the Golden Rule.

There is wisdom to be found in many places, as long as we have an open heart and mind.

The Universality of the Golden Rule in the World Religions

Christianity All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophets. Matthew 7:12

Confucianism Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you, either in the family or in the state. Analects 12:2

Buddhism Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. Udana-Varga 5,1

Hinduism This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you. Mahabharata 5,1517

Islam No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. Sunnah (saying from the Prophet M. pbuh)

Judaism What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. Talmud, Shabbat 31d

Taoism Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. Tai Shang Kan Yin P'ien

Zoroastrianism That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself. Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5* (a monotheistic pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia founded by Zoroaster in the 6th century BC)

_ *Taken from <http://www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html>

Native American Spirituality:

"Respect for all life is the foundation." The Great Law of Peace.

"All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One." Black Elk

"Do not wrong or hate your neighbor. For it is not he who you wrong, but yourself." Pima proverb.

Roman Pagan Religion: Religio Romana is a modern-day Neo-pagan religion based on the religion of ancient Rome:

"The law imprinted on the hearts of all men is to love the members of society as themselves."

Wicca: A modern Neo-pagan religion derived largely from Celtic sources. Their Wiccan Rede states:

"And it harm no one, do what thou wilt" (i.e. do what ever you will, as long as it harms nobody, including yourself). This is called the Wiccan Rede

*Taken from ReligiousTolerance.org