

Step 1

Spiritual living starts in simply following some 'ideal' or 'rule' about how we should live, such as the Golden Rule. We look at the Golden Rule and see the sense that it is a good way to live – and then we try to obey it. In this way we get onto the first step in living spiritually according to the Golden Rule. This 'first step' is quite basic and 'down to earth' and has something of self-interest in it – after all we are “doing for others what we would wish them to do for us”. But we can move on away from this rather self-interested approach.

Step 2

As we try harder and harder to follow this 'first step' and obey the 'rule' in all aspects of our lives we begin to appreciate the good this leads to for others. We are then ready to move on upwards to the 'second step' – we begin to follow the 'rule' not because we feel we have to obey it or because we see the value for ourselves but because we see the truth that it is a wise way to live. Following it has become easier because it is now part of the way we think about life and how it should be lived. We have replaced basic obedience with a developing wisdom.

Step 3

But there is a 'third step' in our spiritual growth – the step where love takes over. We no longer want to follow the 'rule' through simple obedience, nor because we see it is a wise way to live but because our love for others drives us to live that way.

All spiritual living needs to involve these three steps of growth from obedience through wisdom to love.

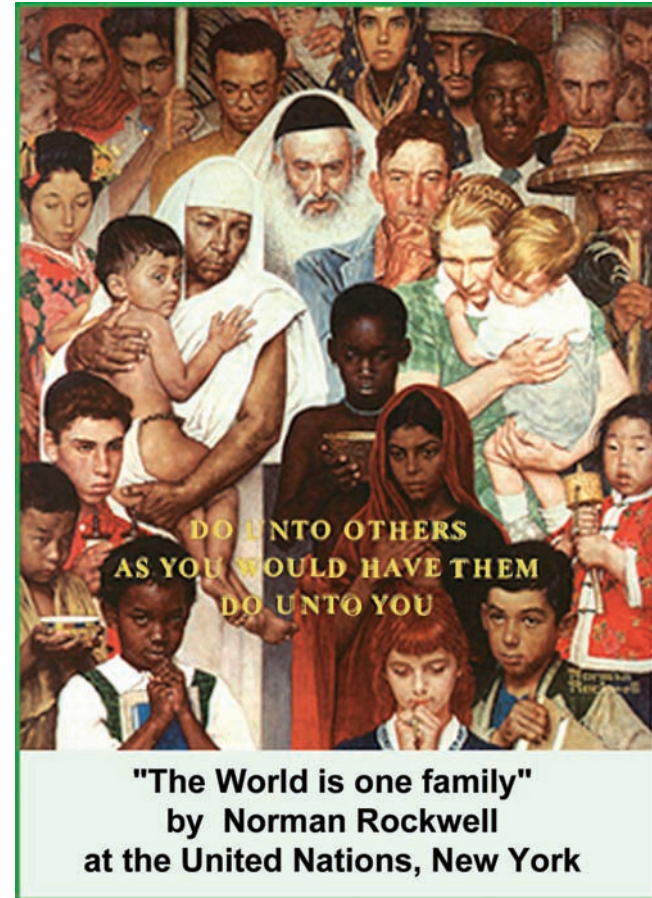
Emanuel Swedenborg commented on the difference between obedience and love when we are doing good for others:

Doing good from obedience is one thing, and doing good to the neighbour from an affection of love towards him is another. The difference is like that between the heat and light by night from the moon and stars, and the heat and light by day from the sun.

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The Golden Rule



The Golden Rule

One of the fundamental moral principles found in nearly all religions is the concept of “*do unto others as you would have them do unto you*” – this is the ‘Golden Rule’. Examples of this approach to life can be found in many sacred scriptures:

Christianity

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also 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 15:23

Buddhism

Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
Udana-Varga 5:18

Hinduism

This is the sum of duty; do not do to 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

Judaism

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

Zoroastrianism

That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself. Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5

Accepting the Golden Rule as a principle for living adds a completely new dimension to the meaning of life. It emphasises that we should not act in our own interests regardless of others but rather see ourselves as part of a wider community in which we want to build a reciprocal relationship with others based on goodwill. And the fact that this ‘rule’ appears throughout world religious texts encourages us to see that it should be applied regardless of race, religion or culture.

The American poet Edward Markham wrote:

*“We have committed the Golden Rule to memory;
let us now commit it to life.”*

And this is where the difficulty arises. It is very easy to know we should apply this rule in daily living but another thing entirely to actually follow it in everything we do. Take a simple example like driving a car.

Imagine you are driving along an urban road in slow traffic desperate to make progress (an unfortunately common experience). You are about to pass a junction on your left from which several drivers are waiting to join your line of traffic. Do you (a) – ignore them completely and carry straight on regardless or do you (b) – waive to them to drive into line in front of you?

Now if we are honest with ourselves we probably adopt tactic (a) far more often than (b) because we see it as serving our purposes best – after all we want to get to where we are going! But the Golden Rule asks us to put ourselves in the other person’s position – what would we want to happen if we were waiting at the junction. The answer, of course, is clear but how often do we act upon it? But then what about the other people behind us!

As we can see from this example, what we need to do to follow the Golden Rule is often quite simple but actually obeying it can prove quite difficult.

All spiritual living involves three steps.

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