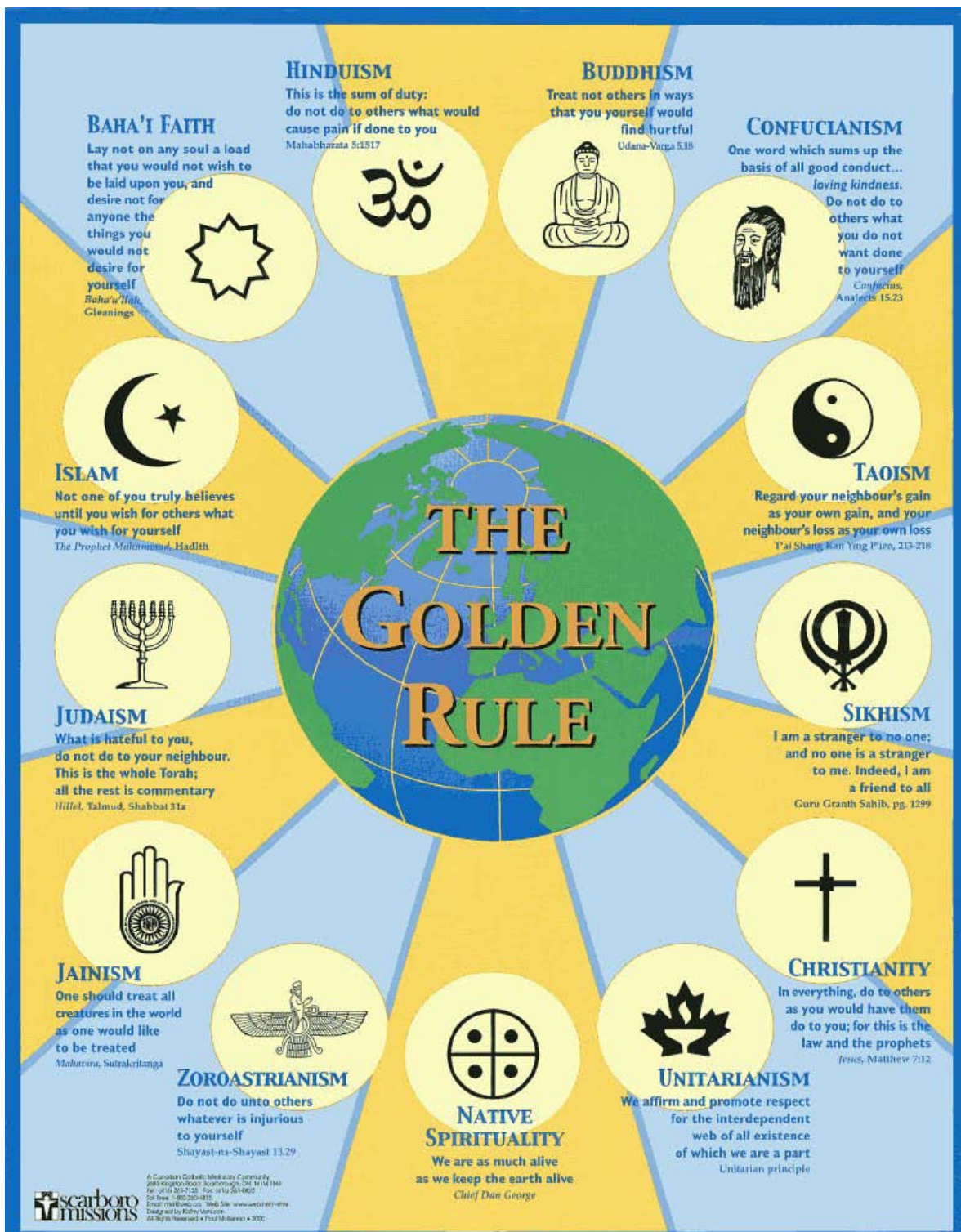


The Seven Points of Mind Training

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Introduction

There are many reasons to follow a spiritual path and there are many paths to choose from. Each tradition has its own answers to the existential questions to which the traditions are answers. However there seems to be one ideal that is cherished in every spiritual tradition and that is the ideal of unselfishness. The Golden Rule is a pretty much universal expression of this which is to be found in every tradition.



In Tibetan "Lo" means mind and "Jong" means training and this is regarded by Tibetans as the single most important teaching in Buddhism.

"Based on developing a deep compassion for ourselves and for other beings, it gives us a simple method of learning to be less self-centred and selfish. The paradox is that our compassion eases the distress of others and also heals our own unhappiness. Lojong is not simply a mental exercise or a new approach, it is a profound education. ." Ringu Tulku Rinpoche (RTR)

It is truly non-sectarian as it involves no complexity or formality. It is for everyday life no matter how busy or stressful and no special abilities are needed. The wisdom of the seven points is truly universal going beyond Buddhism and much of it is to be found under different words in other traditions or even in secular ethics.

"Our attitude to life matters and this training improves our attitude by changing our way of seeing things. When we are in a more positive state of mind, no unfortunate experiences can defeat us. We develop confidence and inner strength in facing the challenges of life. Rather than excluding negative and disturbing things, we do the opposite - we accept them. This turns our problems into possibilities. " RTR

But Lojong also works in another way in so far as it confronts ego clinging - the source of much of our pain. These practices give us important insights into how we cling to a false sense of self freeing us up to develop the kinds of qualities that make us more useful and compassionate to ourselves and others.

We should not take these teachings as doctrine but rather as something to be tried and tested in experience. Indeed whether these instructions work or not depend on whether we have found for ourselves the value in them. Therefore after reflecting on the information given in the points the proof of the pudding is in the putting them into practice in our daily lives.

First it may be important to consider how these teachings work so we have to look at the three mind poisons of greed, hatred, and ignorance, (plus jealousy and pride). Particularly the push and pull of attachment and aversion and how our happiness gets caught up with these.

Our attempts to achieve happiness are generally motivated by self interest and self protection (attachment and aversion) and come from a sense of separation (ego) and the ignorance our interdependence. Usually our desire for happiness goes hand in hand with a fear and dislike of unhappiness. The compulsive search for happiness goes together with aversion to pain and discomfort. Everyone is the same.

"So much of our distress and suffering comes from the unrealistic expectations and negative reactions produced by our own mind. Our desire creates

possessiveness and grasping and we fasten on to certain objects, people or experiences for gratification. When objects satisfy us we become attached to them. The stronger our attachment the tighter our grip and the more anxious we feel about defending our territory and possessions. Whatever we care about is idealised and must be kept safe. If our craving for something is frustrated or disappointed, we respond with aversion. When an object does not satisfy us we angrily reject it. Deciding it was the wrong thing all along we set off again in pursuit of a different object: something else, something better, something new." RTR

Our attachment and aversion produce other emotions such as jealousy and pride. We feel pride when our expectations are met and jealousy or envy if we don't get what we hoped for. Fear arises in response to not being able to keep what we think we need or not being able to get it in the first place. Fear doesn't go together with happiness. The more our aversion the stronger our fear. Even if we try to avoid situations in which aversion arises it continues. It comes from aversion to the past and anxiety based on anticipating the future. It usually felt as a contraction in the body - a tightness, a knot, an ache or pain but it can be very subtle as well being below the threshold of our usual awareness and experienced as a low level anxiety.

"He insulted me, he beat me, he hurt me, and he deprived me," a man who always thinks about such thoughts hatred will never end. "

"He insulted me, he beat me, he hurt me, and he deprived me," a man who does not hold such thoughts in mind hatred will end."

Buddha

Aversion is our own creation and if we try to eliminate the outer things that upset us we will never succeed and it will simply get worse.

The external situation is never the deciding thing in our unhappiness.

Victor Frankl - Holocaust survivor and founder of existential therapy found that the final freedom is in finding meaning even in the most difficult circumstances and that it is this that enabled him and many others to survive.

Physical dimension On the physical dimension (Umwelt) individuals relate to their environment and to the givens of the natural world around them. This includes their attitude to the body they have, to the concrete surroundings they find themselves in, to the climate and the weather, to objects and material possessions, to the bodies of other people, their own bodily needs, to health and illness and to their own mortality. The struggle on this dimension is, in general terms, between the search for domination over the elements and natural law (as in technology, or in sports) and the need to accept the limitations of natural boundaries (as in ecology or old age). While people generally aim for security on this dimension (through health and wealth), much of life brings a gradual disillusionment and realization that such security can only be temporary. Recognizing limitations can bring great release of tension.

Social dimension On the social dimension (Mitwelt) individuals relate to others as they interact with the public world around them. This dimension includes their response to the culture they live in, as well as to the class and race they belong to (and also those they do not belong to). Attitudes here range from love to hate and from cooperation to competition. The dynamic contradictions can be understood in terms of acceptance versus rejection or belonging versus isolation. Some people prefer to withdraw from the world of others as much as possible. Others blindly chase public acceptance by going along with the rules and fashions of the moment. Otherwise they try to rise above these by becoming trendsetters themselves. By acquiring fame or other forms of power, individuals can attain dominance over others temporarily. Sooner or later, however, everyone is confronted with both failure and aloneness.

Psychological dimension On the psychological dimension (Eigenwelt) individuals relate to themselves and in this way create a personal world. This dimension includes views about their own character, their past experience and their future possibilities. Contradictions here are often experienced in terms of personal strengths and weaknesses. People search for a sense of identity, a feeling of being substantial and having a self. But inevitably many events will confront them with evidence to the contrary and plunge them into a state of confusion or disintegration. Activity and passivity are an important polarity here. Self-affirmation and resolution go with the former and surrender and yielding with the latter. Facing the final dissolution of self that comes with personal loss and the facing of death might bring anxiety and confusion to many who have not yet given up their sense of self-importance.

Spiritual dimension On the spiritual dimension (Überwelt) (van Deurzen, 1984) individuals relate to the unknown and thus create a sense of an ideal world, an ideology and a philosophical outlook. It is here that they find meaning by putting all the pieces of the puzzle together for themselves. For some people this is done by adhering to a religion or other prescriptive world view, for others it is about discovering or attributing meaning in a more secular or personal way. The contradictions that have to be faced on this dimension are often related to the tension between purpose and absurdity, hope and despair. People create their values in search of something that matters enough to live or die for, something that may even have ultimate and universal validity. Usually the aim is the conquest of a soul, or something that will substantially surpass mortality (as for instance in having contributed something valuable to humankind). Facing the void and the possibility of nothingness are the indispensable counterparts of this quest for the eternal.

Story of rain boots and umbrellas.

The first point. - Train in the preliminaries. These are known as the "ordinary" foundations to spiritual practice and they are the firm basis on which understanding is developed.

Usually in Tibetan Buddhism we pray to the lineage and the Buddhas and

enlightened beings to help us in our practice but we can visualise that in whatever way we find helpful. So for Christians it could be Jesus or God, for others who perhaps do not have a conventional faith it may just be a ball of light that represents the very best in ourselves or in those we trust and aspire to be like. Really it's up to you - whatever inspires you most. We feel that light comes from them and enters into us through our fontanel - the top of the head and fills us with the light and we have a happy feeling of bliss and satisfaction.

1. The precious human birth - traditionally in Buddhism this is taken to mean that a fully endowed human birth is in fact very rare. What this means is that, apart from just being lucky enough to be born human as opposed to something else we also have "leisure, freedoms and assets". Time, possibility and the means to do many things. At the same time we need to be aware that this form is easily destroyed. Not just by dying but also through unfortunate circumstances like stress, lack of freedoms and assets. So we should really appreciate what we have.

A I recognise and appreciate the health, wealth that I currently enjoy.

B Ditto the happiness and the ease that I currently enjoy.

C Ditto the opportunities and fulfilments that I enjoy.

2. Death and impermanence- the universe and everything in it is impermanent, endlessly creative destructive, endless process.

3. Particularly impermanent are the lives of beings which are like water bubbles. We ourselves are impermanent and everyone and everything we encounter is.

4. Samsaric existence is suffering. An endless stress reaction cycle of attachment-desire, aversion - hatred avoidance which pushes and pulls us out of our clear, calm and sensitive centre of the cyclone.

Homework

Do the visualisation meditation at the beginning then begin to go through all the things that you are grateful for in your life - counting your blessings.

Be aware that everything and everyone is impermanent. Appreciate the people and the things in your life knowing that we do not know when we will die nor when they might die.

Notice when and how we get so caught up in the stresses and strains of our life that we lose our centre, our mindfulness. Notice if you can at the time or as soon as possible afterwards the bodily sensations and feelings connected to that.