

VIRTUE

By

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What influences the virtues of an individual? Is it social convention? Is it religion? Or are a person's morals simply dependent on their past personal experiences? In my opinion all of these factors play a role in influencing one's morals. But ultimately, it is up to us to determine our own virtues. If one allows others to solely determine what is morally correct, then that person will eventually become horribly confused. Only we can decide the code of conduct by which we live. I personally believe that all the virtuous topic choices given are very important to practice in one's life. However, the virtue that I have continuously lived by is love, which intertwines with benevolence.

When one lives their life based on love, happiness and a sense of peace will follow. This may sound like a clichéd theory from an idealistic individual, but I have repeatedly proven this theory in my own past experiences. History also suggests that other individuals have had similar ideologies. In fact, famous writer and poet Oscar Wilde, once stated, "Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead". In other words, without love, life is like a miserable wasteland. Plato, a famous Greek philosopher, also stated, "Love is the joy of the good, the wonder of the wise, the amazement of the Gods." I interpret this to mean that he believed love was a powerful emotion. No soul can fully understand it and it brings joy as well as confusion.

With love in my life, I have obtained a sense of purpose and reason for living. Love is the root beneath every other virtue or moral. We are all far from perfect and though people may try, it is hard for them to preserve their morality. This is especially true in most of my personal experiences. But I believe that since I believe in love, it is easier to stay true to all other virtues. For instance, since I have a healthy love for my fellow man and humanity, I naturally try to display benevolence towards my peers. However, sometimes doing this is not an easy task. In

some situations it is hard to show kindness without feeling like someone is taking advantage of you. For example, I feel this way when I am contemplating if a “homeless” person really deserves my hard earned money. In fact, in one specific situation I completely ignored a homeless woman asking for money.

I was walking to the train station one day and I came across a woman begging for money. I was on my way home from school, which was all the way in Staten Island. I had just arrived in Brooklyn and had only one more train ride before I reached my paradise, home. With all this in mind I almost didn't even acknowledge the woman. It is hard for a low-middleclass person to willingly stop and give money to a homeless person, or anyone for that matter. Actually in this economic age I would love if someone randomly gave me money instead. To make things worse, this took place in the most brutal part of winter. Stopping for any reason was very unlikely.

As I was walking, I heard her faintly say “Please sir could you spare some food, a penny, anything?” By the time I fully processed what she said, I was already beyond her and halfway to the train station. She wasn't that far from the train station, however under these conditions, she seemed miles away. While entering the station, I remembered I needed to reload my Metro Card. I went to the machine and proceeded to feed it my card and the amount of money I wished to put on it. While completing the transaction I still thought about that lady. However, I started to question her authenticity. I thought, “She'll probably use the money to buy drugs or something trivial. She'll probably just take it home right after I give it to her. Plus why should I be the one to give, someone else will stop. I always do good deeds when I can so it's not a big deal.”

After I completed the transaction I found myself walking back towards the exit, which was my entrance a moment ago. As I made my way out the subway, I could see the lady a few feet away. It was as if I was seeing her for the first time. There were so many things about her that I had not

noticed before. She was a thin, fairly elderly woman. She looked frail and had a bundle wrapped in old clothing behind her. I have always believed in giving to those less fortunate if I had the resources. But I sometimes hesitate to show such generosity because I know we live in a cold world. Honesty is another important virtue that is lacked in modern times. Sadly, today people are more prone to others taking advantage of them. I did not want to be the victim of a con artist. However, after seeing that elderly lady begging in this tundra-like weather, my thoughts completely changed. I started to think, "Even if she is lying and doesn't need the money, she must be very desperate if she chose to scam people in this weather." I approached her and proceeded to give her five dollars and a sandwich I had brought from campus. What happened next is a constant reminder of why love is a very important virtue in my life.

She started to cry as she held the money in one trembling hand and the sandwich in the other. She repeatedly said "Thank you, God bless you!" with tears still flowing from her eyes. She then proceeded to say "And you turned back? Oh my God thank you sir! Many blessings to you". Her voice sounded weak but the emotion behind it was extremely strong. That was a life changing moment for me because I felt so happy to see how appreciative she was of what I did. In a perfect world we should do things out of pure kindness without expecting any gratitude. However, it is human nature to want appreciation. The great Greek philosopher, Aristotle, once stated that, "Man is a social animal." I believe this statement to be very true. That woman certainly showed her appreciation and I felt immensely happy as a result. However, I was also sad because I did not view my gift as something great. It was amazing to see her get so excited about five dollars and a soggy sandwich. It shows how difficult it must be for her to obtain the things I would obtain easily. At that moment I realized how many things I had taken for granted. Gratitude was another virtue I learned to take more seriously that day.

That one experience made it easier for me to display kindness and love without feeling like a fool. However, having love as a key virtue in your life involves more than just spreading kindness to feel content. It is also about living by the principle, "Do on to others as you would have them do on to you". This is a religious saying taken from the Matthew 7:12 bible verse. It is also referred to as "The Golden Rule". I believe it is important to live by this rule regardless of one's religion. It means that if you want people to be honest to you, you should practice being honest to others. I appreciate this principle because it allows me to practice most virtues simultaneously. This reminds me of one of my favorite quotes of all by artist, writer and philosopher, Elbert Hubbard. He stated, "The love we give away is the only love we keep". The principle is identical to the principle of the "Golden Rule" and it is also a big part of why I show love to others. I would like others to be kind and show me a certain level of compassion as well.

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