

Comments on the golden rule

Lately, the statement "treat others as you would have them treat you" has promoted good communication with many people who are lost in their own contradictions, people who are also continuously increasing the amount of contradiction in those around them. Current people's behavior is becoming ever more erratic and they don't know how to relate to each other; at the same time, they don't know what to expect from you.

At times we have alluded to a "morality". Today, such a word sounds fake. This has often happened with words that are manipulated and utilized with the worst intentions. What is today's "morality" if not an obsolete skeletal structure that nobody believes in? Our morality has nothing to do with the established farce. We are supported by a great principle of behavior called "the Golden Rule". Obviously, for those who are familiar with Humanist thinking, "the Golden Rule" presents no problems. It fits our vision of the human being perfectly. Nevertheless, some remarks may help extend a type of behavior which affirms and justifies the effort needed to eradicate pain and suffering in our society.

When we talk about anti-discrimination, respect for diversity and choosing the conditions of life which we aspire towards for ourselves and for others, this morality resounds!

In the humanist vocabulary, we define the Golden Rule as "A moral principle which is very widespread in many peoples and which reveals the Humanist stance. Some examples: Rabbi Hiller, 'Whatever you don't want for yourself, don't do to others'. Plato, 'May I do onto others as I would have others do onto me'. Confucius, 'Do not do to another what you would not like to be done to you'. A Jain maxim, 'Man must strive to treat all creatures as he would like to be treated'. In Christianity, 'Everything you would like others to do to you, do to them as well'. Among Sikhs, 'Treat others as you would like to be treated'. The existence of the Golden Rule in several ancient peoples was proven by Herodotus.

In Humanism it is said 'treat others as you would have them treat you'." In the Humanist Movement many understand, practice and/or try to practice this principle of behavior. These people have a sensitivity, an appreciation of others which is different from what has been imposed in this period of deconstructurization of human relations. In order to clearly understand this principle, we must begin with a singular comprehension: the comprehension of human life as a whole. In the Movement, we are skeptical of the sincerity of others who claim to share our beliefs since their vision of the human being is often the opposite of ours. If people don't normally treat their neighbors according to this principle, what can be said about those who talk about changing society and the world? What is the real basis of their battle for improving the conditions of life for the human being?

Let's see the difficulties.

"Treat others as you would have them treat you". In this relationship of behavior, there are two parts: what you request from others and what you are willing to give others.

A. The treatment you request from others.

It is a common wish to be treated without violence and to ask for help in improving your own existence. This is true even among the most violent and exploitative people, who demand collaboration from others in upholding an unjust social order. The treatment requested is independent from what you're willing to give.

B. The treatment you are willing to give others.

We are used to treating others in a utilitarian way, as you would treat other objects, plants or animals. We're not talking about the extreme of cruelty because, after all, you don't destroy something you want to use. We tend to take care of others as long as their existence pleases us, or may be useful to us in the present or future. Nevertheless, there are "others" who somewhat disturb us: the so-called "loved ones", whose suffering and joy moves us very much. We recognize something of ourselves in them and we tend to treat them the same way we would like to be treated. There's a big difference between our loved ones and others in whom we don't recognize anything of ourselves.

C. The exceptions.

Regarding the "loved ones", we tend to treat them with help and cooperation. This also happens with strangers. Perhaps we recognize something of ourselves in them, or the situation in which the other person finds

him/herself reminds us of our own situation. Perhaps we can imagine a future situation in which this person might turn out to be of help to us. These cases are all unique and are not the same as with our "loved ones". This does not occur with all strangers.

D. Words alone support nothing.

You would like to receive help, but why should you give it to others? Words like "solidarity" or "justice" are not enough; they are spoken with an underlying falseness, spoken without conviction. They are "tactical" words that are often used to get collaboration from others without giving it to them. This can be taken even further, for example with other tactical words, such as "love", "kindness", etc. Why should we love someone who is not one of our loved ones? The statement "I love someone I don't love" is contradictory. It's redundant to say "I love someone I love". On the other hand, the feelings that would appear to back up these words are constantly changing, and I come to realize that I love more, or I love less, the same loved one. Lastly, the layers of this love are many and complex.

This is evident in phrases such as: "I love X, but I can't stand him when he doesn't do what I want".

E. Applying the Golden Rule from other positions.

If you say "Love your neighbor as yourself, for the love of God", at least two problems arise: 1. - We must assume that you can love God and admit that this "love" is human; therefore, the word is inadequate. Or, that we love God, but with a love that is not human; in which case the word is still inadequate. 2. - You don't love your neighbor, except indirectly, by way of your love for God. Double problem: using a word that doesn't truly represent this relationship with God, we must translate it into human feelings. From other positions, we say things such as "We struggle for class solidarity", "we struggle for human solidarity", "we struggle against injustice to free the human being". , We keep on going even with nothing to back us up. Why should I struggle for solidarity in order to liberate others? If solidarity is a necessity, it's not something I can choose. Therefore, choosing is irrelevant since it doesn't depend on me. If, on the other hand, it is a choice, why should I opt for it?

Others say things even more extraordinary, such as, "loving my neighbor, I fulfill myself", or "loving my neighbor, I sublime the instincts of death". What can be said about this, when the word "fulfilled" is not clear until the aim is clarified, when the words "instinct" and "sublime" are metaphors from mechanistic psychology which, in any case, nowadays is insufficient?

And then there are always the roughest, which preach "You cannot operate outside established Justice, which exists so that we are all mutually protected". In this case, you cannot demand any moral standing higher than this "Justice".

Then there are some who talk about a Natural zoological Morality. There are even others who, defining the human being as a "rational animal", expect this morality to derive from said animal's reasoning.

In all the cases mentioned above, the Golden Rule doesn't fit very well. We cannot agree with them even when they tell us that we are saying the same thing, but with different words. It is clear that we're not saying the same thing.

What must have those people felt who, among the various populations in different times in history, made the golden rule their highest moral principle? This simple formula, from which an entire morality can be derived, springs from modest and sincere human depth. By way of this formula, it is through others that we are unveiled to ourselves. The Golden Rule doesn't impose any type of behavior, it offers an ideal and a model to be followed at the same time that it allows us to progress in understanding our own life. Nor should the Golden Rule become a new tool for the hypocritical lesser morality, useful for measuring the behavior of others. When a "morality" tablet serves to control instead of helping, to oppress in place of liberating, it must be broken. Beyond any morality tablet, beyond the values of "good" and "bad", the human being along with his destiny rises above, ever unfinished and ever growing.

Mendoza, December 17, 1995.