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## **The Golden Rule and its Consequences: A Practical and Effective Solution for World Peace**

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### **Abstract**

Peace is something desirable and requested by all nations in the world. What makes it necessary to address this issue is the critical, undesirable state of the current world that, despite statements by international organizations with the theme of peace, reveals growing conflict and war and irreversible damages caused by them. This article seeks to provide a practical and effective solution for achieving peace in the global community. To this end, it introduces the golden rule (treating others as you wish others to treat you) as a rule common to all nations. This rule which has a special place in moral philosophy and has been the common denominator of all religions and schools of thought from ancient times until the present provides peace throughout the world through its mechanism. With the use of analytical methods, this study examines and explains it. The results show that the most effective and powerful way to achieve world peace is the adherence to the golden rule.

**Keywords:** World peace, War, The golden rule, Empathy, Religions.

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## **Introduction**

Peace is something desirable and requested by all nations in the world. It has become important in the present era more than ever. Disputes between nations, faiths and religions have led to conflicts and wars with irreparable damages. The United Nations, hence, have imposed some principles for the establishment of peace and a culture of peace. However, we are again witnessing the increasing spread of individual, social and global conflicts. This echoes the reasons for the occurrence of conflicts and wars more serious than the past and makes it more urgent to find answers to these questions and solutions to this crisis.

In this regard, there are various studies on the subject of sustainable peace; one of the most important of these studies is the theory of Kant. UNICEF's statements on the issue of peace are also remarkable. The current study has a different approach to the problem of how to bring peace to the world. The solution proposed in this study is to find a common denominator among all nations and religions based on which a common point of view can be achieved on peace. The common point is regarded to be the golden rule (treating others as you wish others to treat you). The golden rule is a common principle among all religions and schools of thought that order and advise its obedience. Hence, it is important first to define peace and evaluate its importance and then the golden rule, and its place in religions. Finally, the consequences of this rule for world peace are explained.

## **Peace**

Peace is a broad concept and did not just mean outright violence or armed conflict (negative peace), but it denotes the political, economic, and social justice. Violence is a term used to describe inequities such as poverty, discrimination, and unequal access to opportunities, which are the roots of most conflicts (Fountain, 1999: 3). Positive peace is based on the common framework of universal values such as respect for the human dignity and rights, justice, the ideals of democracy, non-violence, tolerance, patience, and dynamic, positive participation process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are resolved by mutual understanding and cooperation. Such a positive concept of peace should be established at all individual, interpersonal, intergroup and international levels (UNESCO, 2000: vii-viii).

Therefore, as a comprehensive definition, it can be said that peace is a mental, social, political, moral, and spiritual status manifested at individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and international levels of human life and the final product of human transmission from self-

orientees, selfishness, and aggressive and dual tendencies (self and other) to a global and widespread status of awareness of the fundamental oneness of mankind and relationship with all humanity, and indeed with all life (Danesh, 2006: 64). This means achieving unity in spite of all differences and diversities among human beings and, undoubtedly, it will result in justice, equality and freedom (ibid: 67- 68).

As a result of UNESCO's initiatives, United Nations named the year 2000 as the International Year of the Culture of Peace and the first decade of the twenty-first century, i.e. 2001 and 2010, as International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the world's children (ibid: vii). In its constitution, UNESCO declares (ibid: viii): "Since wars begin in the minds of men, the defense of peace must be constructed in their minds". To spread the culture of peace, the world must work to change people's thought and behavior toward a peaceful culture. This culture is a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behavior and lifestyle that is based on the following principles (ibid: viii):

1. Respect for life, termination of violence and promotion of peaceful actions through education, dialogue and cooperation.
2. Respect for the promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms;
3. Respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of nations and refrain from interfering in matters which are essentially within the domestic sovereignty of each nation and agreed by the United Nations and international law.
4. Commitment to the chapters of peaceful settlement of conflicts.
5. Attempt to find environmental and developmental needs of present and future generations.
6. Respect for the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for men and women.
7. Respect for the promotion and development of the truth.
8. Respect for the promotion of all individuals' rights for freedom of expression, opinion and information.
9. Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, and dialogue at all levels of society.

Education is one of the main methods for spreading the culture of peace at all levels (personal and social) (Ibid: ix). UNICEF defines peace education as: "nurturing and reinforcing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that change behavior and enable children, youth, and adults to prevent the conflict, both apparent and structural, resolve conflicts peacefully, and

create conditions that bring peace at the individual, interpersonal, intergroup, or international levels” (Fountain, 1999: 1).

### **The golden rule**

The golden rule is a rule common to almost all religions. This rule can be defined as “treating others as you wish others to treat you” (Hare 1965: 34; Wattles, 1996: 3). Due to its countless value, this rule was called golden in the sixteenth century, an adjective that indicates its superiority over other rules (Singer, 2013: 56). The term rule, also, shows that it is a standard, model and measure for ethics (Wattles, 1996: 78). This rule recommends a formal, formula-oriented ethics in which there is no certain article, but is an indicator of interpersonal behavior. Then, before saying exactly what to do and what to beware, the golden rule introduces a criterion and a model for behavior, because everyone naturally knows how they should and should not be treated or what behavior causes pain or loss and with such a simple knowledge, they follow the golden rule and adjust their behaviors appropriately.

The golden rule considers the spirit of ethics and helps us understand the points embodied in ethical rules. Instead of imposing answers on us, this rule focuses on our argument, fights with our selfishness and makes use of ideals such as fairness and concern for others in a tangible and concrete way. Therefore, the golden rule is a short, one-sentence rule that could well be a summary of ethical contents (Gensler, 2013: 208). To apply the rule, you must first become aware of the impact of our behavior on other people's lives and then, clearly and accurately imagine ourselves in the position of other people and subjected to the same behavior. If associated with wisdom and imagination, the golden rule will become a powerful and effective tool in moral thinking (ibid: 194).

Different religions and cultures of the world have abundantly confirmed the golden rule. Jesus, Confucius and Rabbi Hillel regarded the rule as a summary of their teachings in general. Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism and the cult Dao as well as secular thinkers in different cultures have confirmed this rule, and many of them consider the rule as the core of ethical thinking. Hence, the golden rule has become an almost global principle, i.e. a rule common to all people in all times and places.

## **The golden rule in different religions**

### ***Buddhism***

Three sets of Buddha's teachings, Dhammapada, Udana, Sutta-Nipata have referred to the golden rule. In Udana, the rule is introduced as the negative formulation of the golden rule and is known as Silver rule. The rule states that: “there is nothing dearer to man than himself; therefore, as it is the same thing that is dear to you and to others, hurt not others with what that pains you” (Udanavarga, 5:18). Dhammapada also says that the happiness of each individual isn't certainly achievable through the oppression of others: “He who seeks his own happiness by oppressing others, who also desire to have happiness, will not find happiness in his next existence” (Dhammapada, 1985: 131). In Sutta-Nipata, the golden rule is manifested in the relationship between human beings: “As I am, so are these. As are these, so am I. Drawing the parallel to yourself, neither kill nor get others to kill” (Sutta-Nipata, 1947: 705).

### ***Confucianism***

The golden rule has been considered in Confucianism and its teachings. One of his teachings that concerns with the general criterion that includes all aspects of life states that: “Zigong asked: “Is there a *single word* that can serve as a guide to conduct throughout one's life?” Confucius said: “Perhaps the word ‘shu’, ‘reciprocity’: ‘Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you” (Analects: 15.24). In paragraph 4.15 of Analects, Confucius declares: “Shan, my Way is penetrated by a single thread” and according to his previous training, the thread is the golden rule that is the spirit of whole teachings of Confucius (Confucius, 2003: 183).

### ***Hinduism***

In Hinduism, we can observe both negative and positive formulation of the golden rule. Mahabharata that recorded a significant portion of the teachings of Hinduism knows the adherence to the golden rule as the path to eternal bliss: “One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self”. It also states that “That man who regards all creatures as his own self, and behaves towards them as towards his own self succeeds in attaining to happiness” (Mahabharata: Anusasana Parva, Section CXIII: 240).

### *Zoroastrianism*

In Zoroastrianism, the footprint of the golden rule can be found in the Gathas, the oldest poems and teachings of Zoroaster. According to one part of the Gathas, happiness that everyone wishes to achieve is possible in the light of making other people happy. Mazda, God's absolute commander decreed that: "The fortunate person is one who makes others happy". The doctrine is connected to the golden rule in that the happiness is achievable when the person, first, thinks of others and secondly, does everything to make other people happy (Gharamaleki, 2014: 86).

### *Judaism*

In the Holy Scripture and Exodus in Judaism, it is written that, "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22: 21). "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt" (Exodus 23: 9). In these verses, the scripture resorted to the golden rule to express prohibition of violence against strangers. That is, according to these verses, the golden rule is in a position to justify the prohibition of cruelty to others, even strangers (Karimi Laski and Faramarz Gharamaleki, 2015: 80). There is another verse in the Torah that is known as "the command of love": "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Tanakh, 230; Leviticus 19: 18). The golden rule and the command of love are complementary. The command of the Holy Scripture urges kindness to others and the golden rule provides a practical way to carry out this command (Gensler 1998: 113 & 2013: 39).

### *Christianity*

In Christianity, the golden rule is addressed in the Gospel of Matthew and in the command of love "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7: 12). Elsewhere, it commands: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 39). The first paragraph recommends the positive form of the golden rule and what is remarkable here is its emphasis on its being a law and being attributed to all prophets. The second paragraph refers to the command of love that was stated in the Old Testament. The golden rule is integrally required for running the command.

## *Islam*

Several verses of the Holy Quran refer to the golden rule. The first verses in which the golden rule is stated more explicitly are those of Surah Al- Mutaffifin: “Woe to the diminishers, who, when people measure for them, take full measure but when they measure or weigh for others, they reduce!” (Mutaffifin: 1-3). The provisions of this verse indicates that those who disregard this golden rule, and take full measure for themselves and reduces it for others are condemned. This condemnation, actually, is an emphasis on compliance with the golden rule. The other verse is the verse 267 in Surah Al-Baqarah that forbids spending bad properties for the poor. The content of the verse implies that the reason for this prohibition is non-compliance with the golden rule (Karimi Laski and Faramarz. Gharamaleki, 2015: 91), “Believers, spend of the good you have earned and of that which We have brought out of the earth for you. And do not intend the bad of it for your spending; while you would never take it yourselves, except you closed an eye on it. Know that Allah is Rich, the Praised” (Al-Baqarah: 267).

### **The golden rule and its consequences for world peace**

The golden rule that is the common denominator among religions respects the spirit of morality. As previously mentioned, the rule “treat others as you wish others to behave with you”, if combined with knowledge and imagination, becomes a powerful and effective tool that will make peace possible. The purpose of knowledge is to be aware of the impact of one’s behavior on the lives of others, and the purpose of imagination is to carefully and clearly imagine oneself in the position of others and subject oneself to the same behavior. However, the consequence of the golden rule for peace is that every human being with due regards for the law, along with knowledge and imagination, accepts and promotes a culture of peace. In fact, the supporters of peace are people who consider their own need for peace and reconciliation and according to the golden rule, put themselves in the position of others and regard it as the need of other people and thus provide peace and reconciliation for others. Therefore, the golden rule aims to establish global peace and unity and harmony among all human beings.

## Conclusion

The main causes of clashes, conflicts and wars among humans are selfishness, in other words, lack of concern for others and lack of moral principle of fairness. The golden rule that is the common denominator of all religion and respects the spirit of morality shifts human attention from oneself to the others. This rule is introduced as: “and so treat others as you wish others to treat you”. The replacement of oneself with the other, when combined with knowledge and imagination, becomes a powerful and effective tool that will make peace possible. The purpose of knowledge is to be aware of the impact of one’s behavior on the lives of others, and the purpose of imagination is to carefully and clearly imagine oneself in the position of others and subject oneself to the same behavior and therefore adjust one’s behavior appropriately. However, the consequence of the golden rule for peace is that every human being with regard for the law, along with knowledge and imagination, accepts and promotes a culture of peace. In fact, the supporters of peace are people who consider their own need for peace and reconciliation and according to the golden rule, put themselves in the position of others and regard it as the need of other people and thus provide peace and reconciliation for others. With its specific mechanism, in fact, the golden rule builds a very powerful support for peace and certainly makes peace possible.

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