

Commentaries on the Golden Rule

Researchers have discovered hundreds of expressions of the Golden Rule – from ancient and modern sources as well as from religious and non-religious sources. Research efforts have also uncovered numerous commentaries on the Golden Rule from well-known individuals in a number of fields.

A number of these commentaries are presented below. Featured here are scientists, philosophers, politicians, writers, business people, religious leaders, companies, organizations and others.

Mark Twain

“Do something every day that you don't want to do; this is the golden rule for acquiring the habit of doing your duty without pain.”

Mark Twain (1835-1910), American humorist, writer and lecturer.

Edwin Markham

“We have committed the golden rule to memory; now let us commit it to life.”

Edwin Markham (1852-1940), American poet whose writings fused art and social commentary.

Stephen R. Covey

“When ethics – the Golden Rule – is at the center, all compartments of life are harmonized and integrated. The Golden Rule is right. It also happens to work.”

Dr. Stephen R. Covey, American author, consultant, professional speaker; author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, which has sold 15 million copies worldwide.

Mahatma Gandhi

“He who seeks truth alone follows the Golden Rule.”

Quoted from **Mahatma Gandhi's** *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth*.

“As we wish the followers of other religions to appreciate us, so ought we to seek with all our hearts to appreciate them. Surely this is the Golden Rule.”

Quoted from *Mahatma Gandhi and C.F. Andrews* by Dr. K.L. Seshagiri Rao

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), the spiritual and political leader of the non-violent movement which liberated India from British rule.

Charles Darwin

“The moral sense perhaps affords the best and highest distinction between man and the lower animals; but I need say nothing on this head, as I have so lately endeavoured to shew that the social instincts—the prime principle of man's moral constitution—with the aid of active intellectual powers and the effects of habit, naturally lead to the golden rule, ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise;’ and this lies at the foundation of morality.”

Charles Darwin (1809-1882), British naturalist, best known for his *On the Origin of Species*, which details his theory of evolution. Quoted from Darwin's *The Descent of Man*.

Christopher Boehm

“What kind of animal would think up a ‘golden rule’ and urge its fellows to practice it? Both biologically and philosophically, this is an ultimate question which goes all the way back to Darwin.”

Christopher Boehm, professor of anthropology and biological sciences at the University of Southern California (USA). Quoted from Boehm's essay, *How the Golden Rule Can Lead to Reproductive Success: A New Selection Basis for Alexander's "Indirect Reciprocity."*

Brant Abrahamson's commentary on Charles Dickens' use of the term "Golden Rule"

“In 1859, Charles Dickens used the ‘Golden Rule’ term in a story called *The Battle of Life* that follows *A Christmas Carol* in his *Christmas Books: Tales and Sketches*. Dickens uses the term in a satirical way. After a cleaning woman tells an upper class man that she tries to ‘Do as you-would-be-done-by,’ he almost ridicules her by saying that she will find the opposite idea ‘to be the golden rule of half her clients.’”

Charles Dickens (1812-1870), foremost British novelist of the Victorian era, vigorous social campaigner. Considered to be one of history's greatest novelists.

Brant Abrahamson, American educator, publisher and Golden Rule specialist.

Harry Gensler's commentary on John F. Kennedy's application of the Golden Rule

“Let's consider an example of how the rule is used. President Kennedy in 1963 appealed to the golden rule in an anti-segregation speech at the time of the first black enrollment at the University of Alabama. He asked whites to consider what it would be like to be treated as second class citizens because of skin color. Whites were to imagine themselves being black – and being told that they couldn't vote, or go to the best public schools, or eat at most public restaurants, or sit in the front of the bus. Would whites be content to be treated that way? He was sure that they wouldn't – and yet this is how they treated others. He said the ‘heart of the question is ... whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated.’”

John F. Kennedy (1917-63), 35th president of the United States.

Harry Gensler, American philosopher, ethicist and Golden Rule scholar. Quoted from his website: <http://www.jcu.edu/philosophy/gensler/goldrule.htm>

Wolfgang Mieder's commentary on **Frederick Douglass'** appreciation of the Golden Rule

“Morality and religion were one and the same thing for Frederick Douglass, and it should come as no surprise that the so-called ‘Golden Rule’... ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ would become the perfect embodiment of human equality for him. It [the Golden Rule] appears again and again for over fifty years in his speeches and writings, and it must be considered as Douglass's supreme rhetorical and philosophical leitmotif.”

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), considered to be the most visible and influential African-American of the 19th century. A former slave, he became an abolitionist, editor, author, statesman and reformer.

Wolfgang Mieder, American professor of German and Folklore. Quoted from Mieder's *No Struggle, No Progress: Frederick Douglass and His Proverbial Rhetoric for Civil Rights*.

Jeffrey Wattles

“The golden rule is, from the first, intuitively accessible, easy to understand; its simplicity communicates confidence that the agent can find the right way. The rule tends to function as a simplified summary of the advocate's moral tradition, and it most commonly expresses a commitment to treating others with consideration and fairness, predicated on the recognition that others are like oneself... ‘Do to others as you want others to do to you’ is part of our planet's common language, shared by persons with differing but overlapping conceptions of morality. Only a principle so flexible can serve as a moral ladder for all humankind.”

Jeffrey Wattles, American professor of philosophy, Golden Rule scholar. Quoted from Wattles' volume, *The Golden Rule*

President Barack Obama

“We know too that whatever our differences, there is one law that binds all great religions together. Jesus told us to ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’ The Torah commands, ‘That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.’ In Islam, there is a hadith that reads ‘None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.’ And the same is true for Buddhists and Hindus; for followers of Confucius and for humanists. It is, of course, the Golden Rule – the call to love one another; to understand one another; to treat with dignity and respect those with whom we share a brief moment on this Earth.

It is an ancient rule; a simple rule; but also one of the most challenging. For it asks each of us to take some measure of responsibility for the well-being of people we may not know or worship with or agree with on every issue. Sometimes, it asks us to reconcile with bitter enemies or resolve ancient hatreds. And that requires a living, breathing, active faith. It requires us not only to believe, but to do – to give something of ourselves for the benefit of others and the betterment of our world.”

Barack Obama, 44th president of the United States. Quoted from President Obama’s address to the **National Prayer Breakfast**, 2009, Washington, D.C.

Pope Benedict XVI

“Do to others as you would have them do to you, and avoid doing what you would not want them to do to you. This ‘golden rule’ is given in the Bible, but it is valid for all people, including non-believers. It is the law written on the human heart; on this we can all agree, so that when we come to address other matters we can do so in a positive and constructive manner for the entire human community.”

Quoted from **Pope Benedict’s video message to American Roman Catholics** prior to his visit to the USA in 2008.

“The Muslim tradition is also quite clear in encouraging practical commitment in serving the most needy, and readily recalls the ‘Golden Rule’ in its own version: your faith will not be perfect, unless you do unto others that which you wish for yourselves.”

Quoted from **Pope Benedict’s address to the participants in a conference of Muslims and Christians**, Rome, 2008.

Karen Armstrong

“The essence of religion is crystal clear in all the traditions, and it’s simple. I was with the Dalai Lama earlier in September, and he said, ‘my religion is kindness.’ And all the

religions teach the same. All we have to do is go back to the Golden Rule. We don't need to wait for another prophet or another sage or a Buddha. The answer is there, in our traditions. We just have to delve underneath the rubble. Some of it is bad rubble that has accumulated.”

Quoted from an interview with **Karen Armstrong** on the **Tavis Smiley** program, American PBS TV network, 2006

“In compassion, we have to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there and that's the way we come into contact with the Ultimate Reality....we are torn apart in one way as never before; and yet we are also pulled together in our global village as never before.....our only hope of handing on a viable world to the future generations is to learn to practise the Golden Rule....treating other nations, even those far away and remote, as if they were as important as ourselves.”

Quoted from an interview with **Karen Armstrong** on **the Charlie Rose Show**, American PBS TV network, 2006.

“We need to interpret the Golden Rule globally, creating a climate of opinion where it becomes absolutely unacceptable to treat other peoples, other races, other nations, other faiths as we would not wish to be treated ourselves. If we do not achieve this, we are unlikely to have a viable world to hand on to the next generation. We need urgently to make the compassionate voice of religion and of all morality sing out loud and clear in our dangerously polarized world in order to challenge the voices of hatred, exclusion, chauvinism and extremism.”

Karen Armstrong, British writer and scholar of world religions. Author of a number of best-selling books on the history of religion and the role of religion in the modern world.

Deepak Chopra

“...the Golden Rule ...is a statement about Karma, not just about how to act morally toward other people. Certainly Jesus intended to make the latter point: Treating others as you want to be treated is part of his larger teaching to love others as you love yourself. But Jesus implied something deeper, that when you follow the Golden Rule, you are acting as God does. What makes it hard to treat others the way we want to be treated is that others may be the cause of misery, pain and injustice. But Jesus points out that each of us is evil in his or her own way, in that we all commit wrongdoing, and yet God provides abundantly and with love... If you look even deeper, however, this passage is about grace. Karma gives back exactly what you deserve, but God doesn't. He gives without regard to good and evil, and that is a mark of grace. If you contemplate the Golden Rule, it turns out to be an injunction to live by grace rather than by what you think other people deserve.”

Deepak Chopra, Indian-born, American medical doctor and best-selling author in the fields of spirituality and health. Quoted from Chopra's book, *The Third Jesus*.

Paul Weiss

“Mankind with considerable ease seems to know how to use the Golden Rule, with its supposition that we can understand what it is to be in the position of another.”

Quoted from Weiss’ book, *Philosophy in Process*, Volume 6.

“[The Golden Rule] is part of the inheritance of the West as well as of the East; yet it is affirmed and discovered anew in every generation and by almost every individual.”

Quoted from Weiss’ book, *The Golden Rule*.

Paul Weiss (1901-2002), American writer, professor, philosopher who specialized in metaphysics; also known for his efforts to reverse age discrimination in American universities.

Marcus George Singer

“[The Golden Rule is] the most effective instrument of moral education that I know of.”

Marcus George Singer, influential American moral philosopher.

Richard Mervyn Hare

“One of the most important of these rules [of moral reasoning] is a formal requirement reflected in the Golden Rule: the requirement that what we say we ought to do to others we have to be able to say ought to be done to ourselves were we in precisely their situation with their interests.”

Richard Mervyn Hare (1919-2002), British moral philosopher; one of the most influential moral philosophers of the second half of the 20th century.

Karl Popper

“The golden rule is a good standard which is further improved by doing unto others, wherever possible, as *they* want to be done by.”

Karl Popper (1902-1994), Austrian-born British philosopher and professor at the London School of Economics. Considered to be one of the most influential philosophers of science in the 20th century. Quoted from Popper’s book, *The Open Society and its Enemies*.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz

“The veritable sense of the [golden] rule is that by putting oneself in the place of the other one gains the true point of view for judging equitably.”

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), important German philosopher and mathematician who influenced subsequent generations of philosophers and mathematicians. Quoted from Leibniz’s *New Essays on Human Understanding*.

JW Windland

“Living the Golden Rule becomes intensely personal when you realize that you treat your neighbour as yourself because your neighbour **is** yourself. Or to put it another way: ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you because you **are** them and they **are** you.’ After all, how can you love your neighbour as yourself if you don’t know that your neighbour **is** yourself.”

JW Windland, Canadian mythologist, multifaith educator and founder of Encounter World Religions Center, <http://www.worldreligions.ca>

Terry Weller’s commentary on Black Elk’s wisdom

“In my career, I have seen many different expressions of the golden rule; but for me, the most powerful and comprehensive of these comes from the mouth of Black Elk. It goes like this: ‘All things are our relatives. What we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really one.’ In these 18 words, Black Elk not only captures the essence of the golden rule, he also lays bare its assumptions, including its mystical assumptions.”

Black Elk (1863-1950), renowned Native American (Lakota) visionary and shamanic healer.

Rev. Terry Weller, Canadian interfaith leader, writer and publisher/editor of Interfaith Unity News, <http://www.interfaithunity.ca/index.htm>

Towards a Global Ethic, 1993 Parliament of World Religions

“This ancient principle [the Golden Rule] is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years...[and] should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions...”

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings...we must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception.”

Quoted from *Towards a Global Ethic – An Initial Declaration*. This declaration was developed at the 1993 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, USA. The Parliament of World Religions is the largest interfaith conference in the world. Held every five years, it attracts between six and ten thousand participants of numerous religions from around the world.

J.C. Penney

“As civilization grew and horizons widened, the definition of ‘brotherhood’ took on more exact meaning, and people came gradually to understand the golden rule as a basic principle applicable to all relationships. In former periods business was identified as *secular*, and service as *sacred*. In proportion as we have discerned that between secular and sacred no arbitrary line exists, public awareness has grown that the golden rule was meant for business as well as for other human relationships.”

J.C. Penney (1875-1971), founder of the J.C. Penney department store chain (USA). He was one of a number of influential American business entrepreneurs in the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century who integrated the Golden Rule into their business practices. Penney’s stores were originally called “golden rule stores.” Quoted from Penney’s book, *Fifty Years with the Golden Rule*.

Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones

“We must all understand the gospel of DO. I know well enough how to practice the Golden Rule; the difficulty comes in my unwillingness to do it entirely, my half-way doing it.”

Samuel Jones (1846-1904), American politician and businessman who was renowned for applying the Golden Rule in his political and business affairs.

Four Seasons Hotel and Resort Chain

“At Four Seasons, corporate values are much more than a program or a policy – they define who we are and inform the decisions we make. The company’s guiding principle is the Golden Rule – to treat others as you wish to be treated – and as such, Four Seasons strives to have a long-lasting, positive influence on the communities where we operate and on the people we employ and serve around the world. We believe that this goal is integral to our success as a company. This commitment is expressed consistently in our actions through three main areas of focus. By acting in a manner consistent with our corporate values, Four Seasons will continue to seek opportunities to enrich and contribute positively to the global community.”

Quoted from the **Corporate Values** section of the **Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts** website.

Orison Swett Marden

“The golden rule for every business man is this: ‘Put yourself in your customer’s place.’”

Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924), medical doctor and American writer associated with the New Thought movement. A businessman, best known for his writings on financial success, he believed that financial success comes as a result of the cultivation of the individual’s growth process.

John C. Maxwell

“To be accounted trustworthy, a person must be predictable. When you manage your life and all the little decisions by one guideline – the Golden Rule – you create an ethical predictability in your life. People will have confidence in you, knowing that you consistently do the right thing.”

John C. Maxwell, American best-selling author, speaker and internationally recognized leadership expert. Quoted from Maxwell's *There's No Such Thing As "Business" Ethics*.

Dale Carnegie

"Philosophers have been speculating on the rules of human relationships for thousands of years, and out of all that speculation, there has evolved only one important precept. It is not new. It is as old as history. Zoroaster taught it to his followers in Persia twenty-five hundred years ago. Confucius preached it in China twenty-four centuries ago. Lao-tse, the founder of Taoism, taught it to his disciples in the Valley of the Han. Buddha preached it on the bank of the Holy Ganges five hundred years before Christ. The sacred books of Hinduism taught it a thousand years before that. Jesus taught it among the stony hills of Judea nineteen centuries ago.

Jesus summed it up in one thought – probably the most important rule in the world: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.' You want the approval of those with whom you come in contact. You want recognition of your true worth. You want a feeling that you are important in your little world. You don't want to listen to cheap, insincere flattery, but you do crave sincere appreciation... All of us want that. So let's obey the golden rule, and give unto others what we would have others give unto us. How? When? Where? The answer is: All the time, everywhere."

Dale Carnegie (1888-1955), American writer, lecturer, and developer of courses in self-improvement, salespersonship, corporate training, public speaking and interpersonal skills. Author of *How to Win friends and Influence People* (1936), which became a massive bestseller and remains popular today. Quoted from *How to Win friends and Influence People*.

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