

# The Golden Rule

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Have you ever heard of the “Golden Rule”? How about the “Principle or Law of Reciprocity”? This is a precept arising from Antiquity through Philosophy, Religion, Culture and Traditions of different peoples and regions. And what is it about? Here is the summary: “Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you” (*Quod tibi fieri nolueris alteri ne faceris*, according to the Latin language). It is not simple to pronounce it; but is it difficult to fulfill it?

According to British writer Karen Armstrong (1945–), there was a period of 600 years in the History of Humanity, between 800–200 b.c.e., called the “Axial Age”, which caused a simultaneous awakening of ideas from China (Confucius), the Eastern Mediterranean (Jewish prophets: Elijah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, among others), India (Siddhartha Gautama, or the better known Buddha) and Iran (Zoroaster). At this time, ideas left the realms of kings, palaces, priests and temples and came to the knowledge of the people.

During the “Axial Age”, Humanity becomes more critical, reflective and aware of its limitations. Naturally, conflicts of opinion appeared. Armstrong draws the following parallel: “the discussions on spirituality took place with the same enthusiasm with which football is discussed today”. An awareness of the human limitations breaks out. Philosophers start to have notoriety and the view of the world is transformed.

In this period, rules of compassion were created, representing a transcendent testimony of the *spiritual search*. People began to feel that something superior surrounded the planet and was also within themselves. In certain regions, people accepted that gods, women, men, animals, plants and stones were subject to a *cosmic order*, which would be responsible for the *meaning of life*.

Because Christianity is prevalent in the western world where we live, it is more common to correlate this rule with the approach of a *divine precept*. On the Christian New Testament, in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, the rule is reported in the Gospels. In Matthew 7:12, for example, the quote is attributed to Jesus of Nazareth (4 b.c.e.–29 c.e.): “So, in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets”.

However, according to Italian writer Renzo Tosi (1951–), the precept represents an ethical norm which is much older than the version found in Christian teachings. The “Golden Rule” is observed in the Hebrew Bible, in Latin literature and in medieval sentences. In virtually all contemporary languages, there is an equivalent to this old maxim. In Brazil, we say: “Do not do to others what you would not want them to do to you”.

Examining the “Golden Rule” from a historical perspective and the expansion of this idea in some contemporary disciplines, one can go back in the history of Humanity starting from the prevailing idea in Conventional Science (Archeology, History, Anthropology, Paleontology, among others) that the *Homo sapiens* or “Wise Man”, as we call our species, appeared about 250 thousand years ago. However, around 3.5 million years ago, the “ape-men from the South” had allegedly stopped *walking on all fours* and *stood on their two feet*. The scientific evidence are the bones of a young woman,

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named Lucy by researchers, who was about 1 meter tall and weighed around 27 kg. These bones were found in Ethiopia in 1975.

There is, however, a huge gap between this stage of history until about 5,000 years ago when, with the invention of writing, the history of mankind became better known. Two thousand years ago, the roots and foundations of the main predominant religions were consolidated: Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Buddhism, in addition to Philosophy ideas in Greece and China. Christianity was then consolidated 1,700 years ago and Islam 1,300 years ago, expanding the “Golden Rule” to the entire planet.

In the view of Brazilian lawyer, jurist and writer Fábio Konder Comparato (1936–), it was from the ideas of the “Axial Age” that two “Golden Rules” were ethically conceived at the origin of Human Rights:

1. Don't do to others what we don't want them to do to us.
2. Do good to everyone, even your enemies.

In the corporate world of contemporary companies, the “Golden Rule” appears indirectly in actions to influence society. In politics, certain ideologies use this concept as a *cause* or *project*. Let's look at the protection of the environment, for instance. In the area of Philanthropy, billionaires like Bill Gates (1955–), together with his wife Melinda Gates (1964–) and with the contribution of large sums of money by Warren Buffet (1930–) work to minimize precarious living conditions in developing countries through research in the fields of public health and sustainable energy, representing, somehow, the positive part of the “Golden Rule”: “doing good to everyone or doing to others what one would like to receive”.

Observing the different statements, here are, in alphabetical order, 24 examples of the “Golden Rule”, found and/or attributed to several individuals, cultures, traditions or religions:

01. **African Proverb:** “If somebody stings a bird with a sharp stick, should be first try it on himself and realize how badly it hurts”.
02. **Baha’i:** “Blessed is he who prefers his brother before himself”.
03. **Buddhism** (Siddhartha Gautama 563–483 b.c.e.): “Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful”.
04. **Christianity** (Jesus of Nazareth, 4 b.c.e.–29 c.e.): “So, in everything, do to others as you would have them do to you. For this is the essence of the Law and the prophets”.
05. **Confucianism** (Confucius, 555–451 c.e.): “What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others”.
06. **Egyptian Proverb:** “Open the way for the one who did to others what he wanted for oneself”.
07. **Gandhi** (Mahatma Gandhi, 1869–1948): “To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face, one must be able to love the meanest of all creation as oneself”.
08. **Greek Proverb:** “Don't do to others what you wouldn't want to receive from them”.
09. **Hinduism:** “This is the sum of duty. Do not unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you”.
10. **Islam:** “No one is truly a believer if he does not want for his brother what he wants for himself”.
11. **Jainism:** “A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated”; “All living creatures must help each other”.
12. **Judaism:** “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow-man”.
13. **Napoleon Hill** (1883–1970): “I will never do to another person that which I would not be willing for that person to do to me if our positions were reversed”.
14. **Native Americans:** “Respect for every form of life is the foundation”.

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15. **Persian Proverb:** “Whatever is disagreeable to yourself do not do unto others”.
16. **Plato** (428–347 b.c.e.): “I can do to others what I’d like them to do to me”.
17. **Roman Proverb:** “The law that is written in human hearts is to love members of society as one would love oneself”.
18. **Seneca** (4 b.c.e.–65 c.e.): “Treat your inferiors as you would be treated by your betters”.
19. **Shintoism:** “Be charitable to all beings, love is the representation of God”.
20. **Sikhism:** “I am a stranger to no one, and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all”.
21. **Talmud:** “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation”.
22. **Voltaire** (1694-1778): “Put yourself in the other person's shoes”.
23. **Zi Si** (483–402 b.c.e.): “What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others”.
24. **Zoroastrianism:** “Do not do to others what is harmful for yourself”.

Dear reader, dear visitor of the *website* of the *Invisible College of Recexology*, do these considerations make sense to you? Can you evaluate the application of the “Golden Rule” towards family, friends, co-workers and other interactions in human relationships? Do you consider it a reasonable assessment for yourself? Can you recycle your way of thinking and acting in order to achieve the best for everyone?

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✚ **Roberta Gava-Seynave's translation from the original article “A Regra de Ouro”.**

