

*Seek Wisdom,  
Practice Kindness*

by

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Second Edition

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My motto is this:

Seek wisdom,  
practice kindness.

Wisdom is the knowledge of  
how to best live one's life.

Kindness is love in action.

It is caring about the well-being of others,  
and acting accordingly.

Do I always act wisely?

No.

Am I always kind?

No.

Do I keep trying to seek wisdom and  
practice kindness, in spite of my many  
failures?

Yes.

Over decades and centuries, a given word can take on many shades of meaning.

However, the more shades of meaning that a word has, the less useful it is for conveying a specific idea; so if my definitions seem simplistic, and not inclusive of all of the current shades of meaning, it is intentional.

I've tried to limit my definition of any particular word to just one or two ideas.

When I was a child, my character flaws may have been due to genetic predisposition, to my environment, to parental mistakes, or to some other external factor; but now that I am an adult, I accept responsibility for all of my faults. No matter what the origin of a particular flaw might be, it is my choice whether to fix it or not, and if I don't do so it is my fault, and no one else's.

For me, the greatest obstacle to seeking wisdom and practicing kindness is the influence I allow my selfish impulses to have over my behavior.

An impulse is a release of energy from the subconscious, influencing one toward a particular goal.

The prime impulses are desire and fear.

As life evolved from single-celled animals to more complex forms, the environment itself became more complex. Animals having a means of selecting from multiple stimuli had an advantage over animals that did not. Thus evolved consciousness. The conscious is the faculty for making choices.

The subconscious originally sent impulses to the conscious based only on instinct, but as animals evolved, they developed the ability to learn. Thus, some of one's impulses are based on instinct, and others on learned behavior.

While our impulses may not be exactly the same as the impulses of members of other animal species, the function of impulse to direct behavior is a part of our common heritage.

Desire is the impulse of attraction. It influences one to do, obtain, or move toward something.

Fear is the impulse of repulsion. It influences one to avoid or move away from something, and in extreme circumstances can even impel one to attack.

Nervousness is the conflict between desire and fear.

Desire and fear arise in  
many different contexts.

Envy is the desire to have something that someone else possesses.

Lust is the desire to have sex.

Gluttony is the desire to eat or drink excessively.

Sloth is the desire to do nothing when there is something (other than resting) that one should be doing.

Acquisitiveness is the desire to get things, without necessarily placing importance on keeping them.

Greed is the desire to get and keep more of a particular thing than one needs, or could possibly use.

Materialism is the desire to get and keep lots of things, but not necessarily a lot of one specific thing.

Ambition is the desire for status.

Status is the relative ranking one has in the opinions of other people, or in one's own mind.

The instinctive default seems to be that the highest ranking man is the one perceived to be the strongest, or most powerful; and the highest ranking woman is the one perceived to be the most beautiful. This is easily understood from a biological perspective, for it is to the advantage of a man to reproduce with the best looking woman, with the underlying assumption being that the best looking woman will be the healthiest, and thus have the healthiest offspring. From the female point of view, the strongest man will presumably sire the healthiest and strongest children for her, and can better protect her as well.

For those of us who can't hope to compete in strength or beauty, status is measured in other ways, such as celebrity, money, possessions, knowledge, ability, fashion, etc.

The reason that I have often dreamed of becoming famous for doing one thing or another, is that becoming a celebrity would automatically increase my status.

I have often imagined myself speaking with a celebrity, because associating with a person of higher status would raise my own status.

When I tell someone something that I think she doesn't know, but in which I think she will be interested, it is often because I feel that by revealing that bit of knowledge I will increase my status in her eyes.

The reason that I like to show off some of my possessions, is usually that I feel that it will raise my status in the opinion of the person to whom I'm showing them, or in the opinion of someone else with whom that person will speak.

I never say to myself, "Hey, I think I'll do such and such in front of so and so to increase my status!"; but when I try to understand my behavior in retrospect, it only makes sense when I take the desire for status into account.

Flattery is telling someone that she is higher  
in status than she really seems to be.

Pride is the placing of  
importance on one's status.

Self-esteem is the sense of one's own inherent worth, regardless of one's place in the opinions of others, and regardless of the superior or inferior attributes of others.

Because everyone has worth, everyone should have a strong sense of self-esteem.

Sometimes I allow the opinions of others to influence how I feel about myself, and this can lead me to think that I'm better or worse in some way than I really am.

Humility is the lack of importance  
placed on one's own status.

Humility is a precious gem. It is freedom from the slavery to the desire for status.

One of the greatest feelings that I have ever experienced was when I imagined myself in a frame of mind in which I had no concern for status. I felt self-esteem, but not only did I not place importance on how others felt about me, I did not place myself above or below others in any way. It was a liberating state of mind that I have only momentarily attained once or twice since, but which I would like, over time, to make a part of my everyday character.

Jealousy is the fear of being equaled or surpassed in status by a competitor.

An expectation is the investment of energy  
in the occurrence or non-occurrence of a  
particular event.

Hope is the expectation that  
a desire will be satisfied.

Anxiety is the expectation that  
a fear will be realized.

An emotion is energy released from the mind due to an event to which the mind attaches importance.

That event might occur in the real world, or only in one's imagination.

The greater the amount of energy released, the stronger the emotion.

Happiness is the emotion  
that results from a sense of gain.

Elation is extreme happiness.

Sadness is the emotion that results from a sense of loss.

Grief is extreme sadness.

Pent-up energy can be so great that it can not be expressed fully at one time.

It will usually be released over time as one dwells on an associated event; however, in the case of repression, it will be released as stress (which is energy directed at the body or mind itself, causing tension); or, in the case of sublimation, it will be released through some other activity, such as exercise.

The truth behind the saying, "Time heals all wounds", is that pent-up energy will eventually be released in one way or another.

Resentment is stored energy associated with the idea that someone or something has wronged one.

Anger is the expression of a resentment.

Regret is stored energy associated with the idea that one should have done something differently.

Guilt is stored energy associated  
with the idea that one has done wrong.

The difference between regret and guilt is that with regret, one did what one thought was right, but it turned out to be the wrong choice; and with guilt, one didn't do what one thought was right.

Forgiveness is the release of energy bound up in a resentment, a regret, or a guilty feeling.

Sometimes forgiveness occurs a little bit at a time, and sometimes it happens all at once.

It is just as important to forgive oneself as it is to forgive others, for when energy is bound up in a resentment, a regret or a guilty feeling, one can not be fully content.

When one asks pardon of another person, it can benefit that other person by helping him or her to release the energy of a resentment.

Should one have feelings of guilt or regret associated with the same event for which one asks another's pardon, it can help to release one's own pent-up feelings as well.

Selfishness is placing one's own needs and feelings ahead of the needs or feelings of others.

Altruism is setting aside one's own needs and feelings, and caring only about the needs and feelings of another person or persons.

A balance between selfishness and altruism is the course I seek to steer for my own well-being. If I don't take care of myself, then I won't be in a strong position to help others; and if I don't help others when I can, then I deny myself the opportunity to grow in kindness, and I miss the chance to make the world around me a better place.

A personal bond is a relationship developed with another person, an animal, or even an object or an idea, which one considers important to oneself.

If a personal bond is broken through no perceived fault of the other, such as the death of a loved one, energy is released as sadness.

If the bond is broken through the perceived fault of the other, such as an apparent betrayal by a friend, resentment results.

Disappointment is the  
emotion of unrealized hope.

The amount of disappointment is in direct  
proportion to the strength of the hope.

Relief is the emotion of unrealized anxiety.

The amount of relief is in direct proportion  
to the strength of the anxiety.

Pleasure is a positive feeling from some stimulus, physical or mental.

Ecstasy is a high state of pleasure.

Pain is a negative feeling from some stimulus, physical or mental.

Misery is a high state of pain.

The utmost extremes of pleasure and pain are usually associated with the body; so it is common for impulses to experience physical pleasure (or to avoid physical pain), to be more dominant than impulses where the anticipated pleasure (or pain), is not associated with a part of the body.

One's attention is the focus of one's conscious. Sometimes one's attention can be focused on more than one thing, but there is usually an item on which one's attention is primarily focused.

Pain and pleasure are the measures used in decision making. When one's attention is focused on something, the subconscious sends to the conscious one or more impulses. These impulses are based on whether the object of attention is likely to offer pleasure and/or pain. Then the conscious must choose between the impulse(s) or some other option (said alternative being arrived at by reason and/or faith). If the pleasure is expected to be greater, and the pain less, by following an alternative option rather than an impulse, one will usually follow that alternative choice; otherwise, one will usually follow the course suggested by the strongest impulse.

The more often one chooses not to follow impulse, the greater pleasure one receives from choosing the "reasonable" path, and the easier it becomes to resist the impulsive dictation of the subconscious.

Desire and fear play an important part in my life. They are the great motivators.

If it were not for my desire to live, or my fear to die, why would I bother to move from the path of an oncoming vehicle?

As long as I don't let myself be entirely ruled by them, desire and fear can be beneficial.

The counterweights to  
impulse are reason and faith.

Reason is the product of thought.

Faith is the belief that something is true,  
without being able to prove it.

When there is a conflict between reason and faith, the easiest thing to do is to compromise reason; but I think that it is better to give greater weight to reason, because with something that cannot be proved, although it may be convenient or satisfying to believe, it may also be untrue.

In my experience, if I have faith that everything will work out well, it usually does; but in all honesty, I can't say if everything seeming to work out well is because of my faith that things will work out, or supernatural guidance, or coincidence, or just that I choose to look at the positive side of things.

It is not enough simply  
to have reason and faith.

One must exercise them to make them  
stronger, and follow their dictates when  
appropriate so that choosing them over  
impulse becomes easier.

Peace of mind is attained when one's impulses, one's reason and one's faith are all in accord (when the mind is not at "war" within itself).

Contentment is attained when one's mind is ruled by reason and/or faith; and when neither impulse, nor unreleased mental energy associated with some memory or idea, are intruding on one's state of mind.

When one receives an impulse, one is taken away from one's current degree of contentment in direct proportion to the strength of the impulse, and one only returns to the previous state of contentment when the impulse is satisfied or passes.

Although one may be at peace, in the sense that there is no conflict between reason, faith and impulse, one may not be content, depending on the strength of the current impulses.

Unreleased mental energy associated with a particular memory or idea can cause a similar loss of contentment.

One can achieve maximum contentment by avoiding expectations; and by releasing the pent-up energy within oneself, either through forgiveness, or by re-channeling the energy through some positive activity.

I personally do not live at the highest level of contentment that I can imagine, but I believe it is ultimately possible, and I try to move in that direction step by step.

Sometimes I don't know the importance I've placed on something until I see either my reaction to losing it, or my fear of losing it.

One day it dawned on me that whether I was  
happy or not didn't depend on factors  
outside of me, it depended on me choosing  
to be happy.

There are positive and negative things all around me, and on which of the two that I focus will determine to a large extent my state of mind.

I saw someone coming down the street. He appeared to want to speak to me. I desired to not speak with him. I was unhappy. I felt it was his fault for intruding on my life.

I saw the same person coming down the street. He appeared to want to speak to me. I didn't desire to speak or to not speak. I accepted whatever would happen. I was not annoyed. I felt content.

It was raining outside. I desired for it not to rain. The rainy day was ugly. I was unhappy.

It was raining outside. I didn't desire for it to rain or to not rain. I accepted whatever would happen. The rainy day was beautiful. I felt content.

I saw something that was beautiful. I wanted it, but I couldn't have it. I kept thinking about it. I felt incomplete.

I saw something that was beautiful. I couldn't have it, but I didn't desire to have it or to not have it. It was lovely to see it. I felt content.

Love, in its most general sense, is a strong,  
positive feeling about someone or  
something.

Love, in the highest sense that I comprehend it, requires a deep understanding of, and a sense of identification with, the object of love.

I can only love, in the higher sense of which I'm speaking, to the degree that I can understand the loved one. I can love my children to a higher degree than they can love me, because I can understand them more than they can understand me, and I can feel a greater sense of identification with them than they can with me. For the same reason, I could never love a god to the degree that a god could love me.

I suspect that love, at a higher level than I am currently able to comprehend it, is the greatest power in the universe.

If I seek to embrace the world and the life that I can reasonably expect to lead here, I must find a balance between my understanding of the unity of all things, and the idea that I am something separate from the world around me. I must accept that I am an individual, but that I am also connected to the other individuals around me, and even to the world itself.

Goodness lies in taking pleasure in seeking the well-being of those around one, without being domineering in the process.

Goodness is positive, in that it leads to one's world becoming a better place to live.

Evilness lies in taking pleasure  
in the pain of others.

Evilness is negative, in that it leads to one's  
world becoming a worse place to live.

If a man destroys his enemy, he may be safer; but if he turns his enemy into his friend, he adds to his strength.

If wisdom is the knowledge of how to live one's life to one's best advantage, what is to my best advantage?

In my opinion, contentment is the ultimate goal; for whether I have money or not, or a good sex life or not, or whether I feast at a banquet or pick food from a trash can, if I find contentment then nothing is missing; and should I find it, any luxuries I might enjoy would be merely icing on the cake.

Without contentment, the luxuries of life could bring comfort, but that comfort would only be superficial.

Is there a god?

I don't know.

Are there beings superior to humans?

When I consider the vast number of galaxies and stars that are out there, and the planets that must also be out there, it seems impossible that there are not some beings superior to us somewhere.

Are there superior beings watching over us?

I can't say for sure, but sometimes some very improbable things happen that make it seem like there are.

If there were a being capable of managing the affairs of just this planet, that being would be far inferior in ability to a being capable of managing this galaxy; and a being capable of managing just this galaxy would be far inferior to a supreme being over the entire universe. If I were to have reason to believe that a superior being was guiding my life, how would I know if it were a god of just this planet, who would be unimaginably superior to me, or if it were a higher non-supreme being, or the supreme being?

I wouldn't know the difference.

If there is a god over the entire universe, and in whose mind the universe exists, then God is in effect the greatest servant. He provides us with everything.

The reason that "many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first", may be that he who is the greatest servant is on the highest spiritual level, and he who receives the most service is on the lowest spiritual level, much as an adult, who is more capable, takes care of a baby, who is less capable.

It may also be that the reason "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God", is that rich people don't tend to dedicate themselves to the service of others, but prefer to be served, in effect keeping themselves the spiritual equivalent of babies.

At this point in time, my focus is not on understanding whether beings superior to me exist or not (although I would love to know). My focus is on understanding myself, and mastering myself to the degree that I can. Should the day arrive that I am satisfied with my level of self-knowledge and self-control, then perhaps I will turn my attention to the search for higher beings; but until then, I think that whatever the chain of command of the universe is, right now my best interests lie in looking inward, and at the world I see around me.

Some would say that we are all sinners, but I would say that we are all slaves to impulse, at one time or another, and to varying degrees.

Through seeking wisdom and practicing kindness, I hope to reduce the power of impulse in my life.

In general, I prefer to listen rather than to speak.

When I listen, I may learn something interesting. When I speak, I rarely learn; and when I do learn, it is usually only that I sometimes say some foolish things, and think some foolish thoughts.

Each moment of every day is a new opportunity to make a wise choice.

I don't have all of the answers.

If you are fortunate, then your passage through life will be one of continued discovery, and you will find answers beyond every horizon, along with a whole new set of questions.



