



## It Is All About “Doing What’s Right”

By Jim Myers

In her book, *Anatomy of the Spirit*, author Caroline Myss challenges the reader to take the major faiths of the world and stack them up on top of one another. She asks us to look at what the followers of these faiths are taught at their core -- *the things that those faiths really stand for*. By stacking them all up like a layer cake, turning the whole thing on its side and looking through it, you discover that the core essence of all the major faiths in the world is very, very similar. One example? Virtually every major faith or philosophy, in every location around the world, has some version of the *Golden Rule*.<sup>1</sup> Below are a few examples:

- In everything, **do** unto **others** what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets. (Christianity, Jesus, Matthew 7:12)
- What is hateful to you, **do not do** to your **neighbor**. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. (Judaism, Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a)
- None of you [truly] believes until he **desires** for his **brother** what he desires for himself. (Islam, An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith 13)
- Avoid **doing** what you would blame **others** for doing. (Greeks)
- **Do not** offend **others** as you would not want to be offended. (Buddhism, Udanavarga 5:18)
- **Do not do** to **others** what you do not want them to do to you. (Confucianism, Confucius, Analects 15:23)
- I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am **a friend** to all. (Sikhism, Guru Granth Sahib, pg. 1299)

- Regard your **neighbor**'s gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. (Taoism, T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213–218)
- One should **treat all** creatures in the world as one would like to be treated. (Jainism, Mahavira, Sutrakritanga)
- **Do not do** unto **others** whatever is injurious to yourself. (Zoroastrianism, Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29)

*The thing that's important in all of the quotes above  
is "**how people treat other people.**"*

Christianity is listed in the quotes above, and I heard it taught in our church many times. But when it came to the most important thing my denomination taught – *salvation from spending eternity in Hell* – the following beliefs were much more important than *The Golden Rule*:

1. *Belief in the virgin birth.*
2. *Belief in Jesus as the atonement for human sin.*
3. *Belief in the resurrection of Jesus.*
4. *Belief in the imminent return of Jesus.*
5. *Belief in the inerrancy of the Old and New Testaments.*

Salvation had nothing to do with what we did or did not do to others. It had everything to do with "*beliefs based on institutional doctrines.*" I was raised in a Christian denomination that had been strongly influenced by the **Niagara Bible Conference**, even though none of us knew it. This was what I was taught to believe.

*God will save Christians from going to Hell.  
Christians will spend eternity in Heaven with God.*

Therefore, the most important thing people needed to know was "*how to become a Christian.*" In 1883 a group of Christian bible scholars met for the first time at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, near Niagara Falls. The 1895 meeting of the Niagara Bible Conference produced the list of beliefs above -- *the famous "**Five Points of Fundamentalism.**"*<sup>2</sup>

This is what Jesus taught about being saved from eternal punishment and entering eternal life. Once I understood this, the teachings of my church really bothered me. These are people that, according to Jesus, will enter eternal life:

- *Those who fed the least members of the society that were hungry.*
- *Those who gave a drink to the least members of the society that were thirsty.*
- *Those who clothed the least members of the society that were naked.*
- *Those who gave shelter to the least members of the society that were strangers.*
- *Those who visited the least members of the society that were sick.*
- *Those who went to see the least members of the society that were in prison.*

What those people did sounded exactly like what Christians call “The Golden Rule” -- *In everything, **do** unto **others** what you would have them do to you. For this sums up the law and the prophets.* Now please answer these questions:

- *Was feeding the hungry “the right thing to do?”*
- *Was giving drink to the thirsty “the right thing to do?”*
- *Was clothing the naked “the right thing to do?”*
- *Was giving shelter to the stranger “the right thing to do?”*
- *Was visiting the sick “the right thing to do?”*
- *Was going to see those in prison “the right thing to do?”*

Those things are also “the right thing” to do according the Golden Rule. However, the Bible has much more to say about why they are “the right thing to do” – beginning in the first book. The people that helped those shared two things in common with them:

*Both are created in the image of God  
and both are descendants of Adam and Eve.*

The book of Genesis begins with three mysteries – the mystery of God, the mystery of the darkness, and the mystery of the deep waters. All three just exist before the creation process begins. However, it is the creation of humans that opens a glimpse into the thought of God, into the meaning beyond mystery.

“And God said, I will make *adam* (humans) in My image (*tselem*), after My likeness (*demuth*) . . . . And God created *adam* (humans) in His image, in the image of God He created *adam* (humans).” (Genesis 1:26)

According to the Jewish culture behind the Hebrew words in the verse above, this is the fundamental statement about the nature and meaning of humans (*adam*). In many religions, man is regarded as an image of a god. Yet the meaning of such regard depends on the meaning of the god whom man resembles. If the god is regarded as a human magnified, if the gods are conceived of in the image of a human, then such regard tells little about the nature and destiny of humans. Where God is one among many gods, where the word “*divine*” is used as mere inflated expression, where the difference between God and humans is but a difference in degree -- *then an expression such as “the divine image of man” is equal in meaning to the idea of “the supreme in man.”*<sup>3</sup>

It is only in the light of what the biblical human thinks of God, namely a Being who created heaven and earth by doing acts that measured TOV – *acts that protect lives, preserve lives, make lives more functional, and increase the quality of life!* The God of absolute justice and compassion, the master of nature and history who transcends nature and history, the idea of man having been created in the image of God refers to the supreme mystery of man, of his nature and existence.

*God is divine, and man is human.*

This contrast underlies all biblical thinking. God is never human, and man is never divine – “*for I am God and not man*” (Hos. 11:9). Thus, “*the likeness of God*” means “*the likeness of Him who is unlike man.*” The “*likeness of God*” means “*the likeness of Him, compared with whom all else is nothing.*”<sup>4</sup>

Obscure as the meaning of these terms are, they undoubtedly denote something unearthly, something that belongs to the sphere of God. Likeness (*demuth*) and image (*tselem*) are of a higher sort of being than the things created in the six days. This, it seems, is what the verse intends to convey:

*Man partakes of an unearthly divine sort of being that values life.*<sup>5</sup>

It is important to contrast the Genesis revelation above with Babylonian and Egyptian views, where the preoccupation with death was the central issue of religious thinking. The Hebrew Scriptures hardly deal with death as a problem. Its concern is not, as in the Gilgamesh Epic, how to escape death, but rather how to sanctify life. And the divine image and likeness does not serve man to attain immortality, but to attain sanctity.

*Humans are not human because of what they have in common with the earth,  
but because of what they have in common with God.*

The Greek thinkers sought to understand humans as part of the universe, but *the prophets in the Bible sought to understand humans as “partners of God.”*<sup>6</sup>

Readers of English translations, however, are unable to see one of the most important revelations in the first story in *Genesis*. The revelation is found in “God’s blessing to humans” – *a blessing that empowered humans to function as they were created to function* (Genesis 1:28b).

*“ . . . and have dominion (**radah**) over the fish of the sea  
and the winged creatures of the sky  
and over every living thing that moves on the Earth.”*

The Hebrew word **radah** is translated **dominion**, **tread on**, and **rule** in English translations. A very important note in *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Volume 3* (p. 1190) reveals something very important about the core meaning of **radah** – “*the basic meaning of the verb is not to rule; the word actually denotes **the traveling around of the shepherd with his flock**. Humans have a unique function relative to the rest of God’s creation, and all the rest of creation functions in relationship to humans.”*

*Humans serve the rest of creation as **God’s Vice Regents** and **Co-Shepherds**.*

Now we will be able to understand the severity of the punishment in the teachings of Jesus. Below are the people who will be sent into eternal punishment.

- *They did not feed the least members of the society that were hungry.*
- *They did not give drink to the least members of the society that were thirsty.*
- *They did not clothe the least members of the society that were naked.*

- *They did not give shelter to the least members of the society that were strangers.*
- *They did not visit the least members of the society that were sick.*
- *They did not go see the least members of the society that were in prison.*
- *They failed to serve the rest of creation as God’s Vice Regents as Co-Shepherds.*

But make sure that you keep in mind that Jesus is using a parable to teach his followers – *he is not giving a divine law*. He is teaching them how to conduct themselves in the light of the ancient wisdom that has been passed down through generations of Jewish scribes, sages, prophets, etc. – *to get the best out of life*.

- *Discover sources of strength which assure final victory over calamity and evil.*
- *Become a blessing to oneself and society.* <sup>7</sup>

Above I also pointed out that another revelation linked to the teachings of Jesus is that “*all humans are descendants of Adam and Eve*.” Two trees played important roles in the story of the *Garden in Eden* – **The Tree of Life** and **The Tree of the Knowledge of TOV (good) and RAH (evil)**. The entire story focuses on Adam, Eve, and the second tree. The only thing the Hebrew text reveals about the first tree is this (Genesis 3:22):

*“ . . . lest Adam reaches with his hand and takes also  
takes **fruit of The Tree of Life**, eats it, and **lives forever** . . . .”*

Similar stories about **trees or plants of life** are found in ancient writings of the Babylonians and others. Readers of those stories all knew what happens to people that eat from those trees and plants – **they live forever!** In the Bible story, no one mentions that little fact to Adam or Eve. *But Jewish readers knew something about the **Tree of Life** we did not know.*

*“My child, forget not my teachings;  
but let your heart keep and guard, my teachings;  
for length of days, and years of life,  
and shalom (peace, safety, and wholeness), will they add to you.*

*Do not let kindness and truth forsake you.  
Bind them around your neck,*

*and write them upon the tablet of your heart;  
so you will find grace and good favor in the sight of God and humans . . . .*

*Happy is the person that finds **Wisdom**,  
and the person that obtains understanding . . .*

***She** (Wisdom) is more precious than rubies;  
and all things you can desire are not to be compared unto her . . . .*

***She** (Wisdom) is a **Tree of Life** to those who lay hold of her,  
and happy is every one that holds **her** fast. . . .”*

Those are the words of Proverbs 3:1-4, 13, 15 and 18. In the ancient Jewish culture, the opening words – “My child . . .” – are connected to a shared memory of the readers:

*The day their fathers looked into their eyes  
and began teaching them those words.*

Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch gave us the following insights.

To see in your fellow humans something else than merely your rival for the acquisition of the good things of the earth, not to look upon his good as an encroachment on yours, to let your neighbor have a spot of earth on which God has set him or her – as He set you on yours – and even to let him prosper on it – all this amounts merely to not hating the person, not yet loving him or her. To love your neighbor means to see in your neighbor the one condition of your own existence, of your own welfare, of your own fulfilling your mission as man and Israelite, and so, the desire for your own being and living, to include the desire for your neighbor’s also.<sup>8</sup>

Rabbi Akiva provides insights into the well-known verse Leviticus 19:18 – “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*”

It is astonishing that this verse is so often quoted out of context . . . The verse means act lovingly toward others by not wishing them harm. If you take revenge or bear a grudge against your neighbor, you are not acting in a loving manner toward your neighbor. . . . Biblical scholars have pointed out that the Hebrew word kamokha from Leviticus, usually translated into English “as yourself,” does not qualify “love” but “your neighbor.” The meaning is not “love your neighbor as your yourself,” but rather “love your neighbor because he or she is “as yourself” –



**a human being like you, with the same needs, the same hopes, the right to be treated fairly.”**<sup>9</sup>

When we do what's right to others, we repair lives, relationships, and the world! **BHC**

## **November Memorials**

*In Loving Memory*

**PAMELA  
STRYKER**

December 11, 1941  
November 21, 2000

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**LARRY V.  
HARRISON**

October 19, 1944  
November 2, 2016

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**JOHNNIE  
VERA BOND**

February 21, 1893  
November 30, 1985

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

### ***When We Remember Them***

*May their memories inspire us to seek in our lives  
those qualities of mind and heart  
which we recall with special gratitude.*

*May their memories help us bring closer to fulfillment  
their highest ideals and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to each other  
and to those things which cannot die –  
faithfulness, love, and life giving values.*

*We are blessed by our memories of them!*

<sup>1</sup> *What's Right Not Who's Right* By Robert S. Tipton © 2018; Alden-Swain Press, Denver CO; pp. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> <http://jamespaulgaard.wordpress.com/2009/02/09/biblical-inerrancy-history-analysis/>

<sup>3</sup> Abraham J. Heschel; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism* By Hans Kung and Rabbi Walter Homolka © 2009; Skylight Paths Publishing; Woodstock, Vermont; pp.43-44.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham J. Heschel; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism*; p.44.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham J. Heschel; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism*; p.44.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham J. Heschel; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism*; p.44.

<sup>7</sup> The Socino Books of the Bible: Proverbs by Dr. A. Cohen, revised by Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg © 1985; Soncino Press, New York, NY; pp. xii, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism*; p.77.

<sup>9</sup> Louis Jacobs; *How to Do Good and Avoid Evil: A Global Ethic from the Sources of Judaism*; p.77.