

A Rule for Life

April 29, 2020

What is the code you live by? Do you have one? Is there a voice in the back of your head whispering “No! Don’t do THAT!” or “Hey that was really nice, you get brownie points.” Where did that voice come from? Who or what does it sound like?

One of the most universal truths about religion and belief is that every tradition has something to say about what is good and what is bad, what people should do and what people shouldn’t do. I spent many hours in a class on Religion and Politics debating with my classmates on if religion exists because there is a

God/gods/deity/devine something that knows what's best for humanity, or to ensure that the guy with the biggest stick/rock/gun has to answer to something bigger than himself, or that humans invented a “higher power” because it's beneficial in general and we forgot to tell people we made it up. (I'm sure you all can guess which camp I'm in.)



There are some things that seem right at the time. But even though the right things may seem wrong sometimes, sometimes the wrong things may be right at the wrong time, or vice versa.

Whatever understanding of Religion and the Divine you ascribe to matters, a lot. Not in the you're going to be saved or go to hell kind of mattering, but in the sense of where you see the root of justice, the rationale behind how you should treat other people, what you do with your own power and privilege, and how you understand the consequences of right and wrong. I find it is much easier to respect someone I disagree with if I can understand their moral compass. I don't have to agree with their ethical code, but if I can understand its origin and logic I find it much easier to work with.

Jews follow [Kosher laws](#), Muslims have rules about what [halal](#) and [what is haram](#). Monastic traditions from around the world publish codes and “rules” describing how people should live and behave. (One of the most famous ones is “[The Rule of St. Benedict](#)” totally worth a skim.) Yet, moral and ethical codes do not always need to be associated with a particular religious tradition, that can instead be seen as a universal truth or principle that benefits all of humanity (which I read as being a religious idea but hey... I see religion everywhere). For example doctors live by the code “of do no harm” and the [Hippocratic Oath](#), originally an oath sworn to “Apollo, the Physician and Aesculapius and Hygeia and Panacea and all

the gods and goddesses," but has now rewritten to just a promise with no deity or faith attached. We find other rules that started in the religious realm that have bled out for example "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"(Luke 6:31) is perfectly acceptable when found on a public school poster reading "Treat others the way you want to be treated." There are some rules that just work for people across the board, and frequently show up across various traditions. My high school pastor used to tell us "No one really can disagree with the teachings OF Jesus, but seems like everyone can disagree with the teachings ABOUT Jesus."

So for a moment, let us lay teachings ABOUT Jesus aside, and look at the moral and ethical truths he taught us, (If you're more familiar with the teachings of Muhammad, Budda, Shinto, Tao, or really anything feel free to latch on to the prophet/teacher/sage/guru you're most comfortable with and know best) and consider part of the Rev. Dr. Peter Gomes book "The Scandalous Gospel of Jesus" where he presents this argument:

The question should not be 'what would Jesus do?' but rather, more dangerously, what would Jesus have ME do?' The onus is not on Jesus but on us, for Jesus did not come to ask semi divine human beings to do impossible things. He came to ask human beings to live up to their full humanity; he wants us to live in the full implication of our human gifts, and that is far more demanding.

We are all just humans, we are not perfect, we do not know everything, and we frequently need someone or something to prod us in the right direction. A rule, or way of living that helps us determine what we should do and how we should live. So let us ask ourselves "What should I do? What am I called to do? How am I called to live my life?" Muskingum believes that we are all called and to make an IMPACT, on our communities and the world, and we see equipping our students to do that the mission of our institution. But just as each of you are unique, so too is your impact and call to serve the world.

So this is your final spiritual practice prompt of the semester, it is not short, and I hope it will provoke thoughts both through the summer and, especially for our seniors, beyond. Consider what the rule for your life is? It doesn't need to be long or complicated, but it can also be as long as you want, it can be inspired or adapted from a tradition or rule that exists or it can be your own creation. The only rules for creating your rule, is that your rule



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shouldn't hurt others and you can't force anyone else to live by your rule, these are personal.

- If this feels complicated and confusing and hard, good! It's not easy, and it's always changing and evolving, just like you and your relationship with the Divine and the World. But write something down today, revisit it later this week, or next week, or next month. Write it, tweak it, throw it out and start over, wrestle with it until it feels like it fits you.
- If this is a really easy prompt for you, fantastic! You've probably already thought about this before so now you're ready for step 2! Write down your rule, and share it with someone (feel free to email me with it!) and ask them to help you explore how you might live into it in an even deeper and more meaningful way.
- Now go and live it! Make your IMPACT, help make the world a better place one tiny step and act of kindness at a time.