

Preparing the Vessel

An instruction manual for personal growth and Enlightenment

Author: Burton Alexander

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Chapter 1 – In the Beginning...

In the beginning All was God, without end. There was no distinction, no separation, no division. There was no objective view point, no mirror for God to know Oneself. So God created one.

God opened a void in oneself, shattering oneself into innumerable fractal shards and casting those shards into the void while whispering the Great Question:

Who am I?

For 13.7 billion years those shards have been changing and evolving, leading to our current state of existence. During this time the Great Question has echoed throughout the universe. Our species, both as individuals and as a group has attempted to answer this question from time immemorial. It is the question that is always at the periphery of consciousness. It is the question that motivates, that drives, that mobilizes. Each person aches to know the answer, and each person must answer the question for themselves.

This guide exists to provide people with the tools necessary to answer the Great Question for themselves with the future goal of enlightenment. It exists to enable others to know themselves. Preparing the vessel refers to personal change as specified below. This guide breaks down and outlines the steps and goals necessary to properly prepare a vessel.

While religious belief is not necessary this guide aims to be compatible with all love-based ideologies. To that end any description of God in this guide can be considered to be metaphorical in nature. Literal interpretations are not required to perform the work described in the following pages.

As I was raised Christian this guide will have a strong Christian flavour. I will be drawing upon the strengths of Christianity to set the initial framework for construction.

Chapter 2 – Introduction

The purpose of existence is to answer the Great Question, to know yourself. By following the path laid out in this guide one will become mentally toughened and able to handle all that life has to offer, both the good and the bad. By using this guide you will create and use the tools necessary for self knowledge.

The first and most important of these tools is The Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Be excellent to each other. Love your neighbour as yourself. From the point of view of separation striving for such behaviour seems to be chasing optional extras, behaviours that are nice to have but are not necessary. From the point of view of All being God such 'extras' no longer appears to be optional. When you don't do unto others, when you don't love your neighbour as yourself it is as if you are treating yourself to your own negative actions. You deserve better treatment than this.

Christians will recognize their God's words in answer to the question “What is the highest law?”. Jesus' answer was clear, but it is not rare to find those claiming to be Christians who obviously disregard their God's own words on the most important Law in their existence. Such people wear the title of Christian falsely, in truth following a god of their own creation whose name happens to be 'Jesus'. Christians are supposed to strive for the highest of behaviours. Few do. This is entirely a consequence of teaching that all that is required is belief and contriteness. The great hamstring of Christianity is the phrase 'sorry Jesus'. All shortcomings forgiven, no effort required. Jesus has to forgive because he said so, all I need to do is believe and ask forgiveness and I get to heaven and avoid hell! It doesn't matter if I do those extra optional things...

But it does matter. It is those extra optional things that prepare one for life. Christians short change themselves when they do not follow their God's highest law and in some cases individuals would have been better off had they never heard the words of Jesus. Those words leave them weakened and ineffectual, preventing them from embracing the person they strive to be. In contrast this guide illustrates how to become a person that uses the Golden Rule as a source of strength for behaviours and actions.

'Doing' is important, but not as important as 'being'. It is not enough just to do the right things. One must be the right things, a person who has changed themselves to be an individual who does the right things as their default behaviour. Individuals starting out on this or an equivalent path will find themselves in circumstances which require hard control of their responses in reaction to negative emotional states. In doing so one is overriding their own instinctual reactions. There may be a physical reaction, a feeling of choking on it may occur. While the hard control eliminates negative responses the negative emotion remains. There is no change yet within the individual and the negative state of mind can easily be provoked again through similar circumstances. The goal is to understand why the negative emotional state was provoked and to make internal changes to prevent it from even occurring when facing similar situations. The negative emotional state can then no longer be triggered in this manner and the potential for negative responses is minimized. The additional effort and focus makes life more difficult in the short term however as one masters the skills of self transformation such personal change makes life easier.

Chapter 3 – Goals

Honesty

Honesty is a required goal. This is not being honest with others; it is being honest with yourself. You must tell yourself the truth about your strengths and weaknesses and use that knowledge to focus on said weaknesses. You must be honest about your mistakes and your responsibilities for your actions. You must tell yourself the truth. Such honesty is difficult to attain, made more difficult by psychological disorders such as narcissism. If honest objectivity cannot be attained then nothing else in this guide will be of any value.

Never lie to yourself and become aware of when you do.

Self Knowledge

Self knowledge is an understanding of who you are. It requires the aforementioned honesty setting in place the foundations and providing the starting point for personal transformation. As the transformation progresses self knowledge becomes more complete. Not only do you come to terms with the person you are you are fully aware of the changes you have made in yourself. Such knowledge does not come cheaply. It takes many years of focussed work with an attention to detail. If the time to focus on self knowledge cannot be taken then nothing else in this guide will be of any value.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to see through the eyes of others. To walk a mile in another's moccasins. To understand another's point of view. In learning to be honest with yourself you develop the ability to be honest with yourself about others. Understanding other people helps you to treat them as you would be treated. If empathy cannot be developed then nothing else in this guide will be of any value.

Self Control

Self control is a required goal. At first such control is difficult as you fight your instinctive reactions and responses. As the work progresses such control becomes endemic; it is a part of you. As instincts are rewired control becomes effortless. Without self control nothing else in this guide will be of any value.

Self Creation

Self creation is the crafting of the person you have chosen to become using The Golden Rule as the standard of behaviour. The changes made within yourself force you to come to terms with the person you are while providing the implementation of the vessel required for enlightenment. If meaningful personal change is not performed then nothing else in this guide will be of any value.

Self Mastery

With time devoted to these goals you attain a mastery of the skills required for all. You become a person who does good and right things by default instead of fighting instincts and triggers. With such mastery comes a peace and self confidence making life joyful. No longer does life happen to you. You become the master of yourself. Such mastery is required for a fully prepared vessel. It is expected that mastery will take on the order of ten years to attain.

Perfection

Perfection is a goal, not a destination. You will never perfectly implement the instructions in this guide. You will always fall short, do things you regret, miss the mark. You must be prepared to accept this while using any shortcomings as instructional events, to do better next time. Aiming for perfection while accepting and using failures to improve is the destination.

A Better Life

Self mastery takes time and effort, it is expensive. Without any benefits such work would not be worth the effort. But the benefits are there, available immediately. Your close relationships improve as you choose to treat others as you would like to be treated. You develop empathy and empathy assists in self creation. In being honest with yourself you develop the ability to detect falsehoods within yourself. As mastery is attained this ability helps to detect all kinds of falsehoods; a tool honed against your greatest adversary, yourself. At the other end of mastery exists a peace and quiet confidence that can only come with such mastery. Life's calamities no longer hold sway over you. You have become mentally toughened in advance of all that life can throw at you. These benefits alone are well worth the time and effort required to properly prepare the vessel.

Chapter 4 – Starting Out

In beginning this work of self transformation one starts out a neophyte. You don't know. You don't understand. Especially if you think you do. Such work must be cultivated and takes many years. Focus on being honest with yourself, especially when it is difficult to do so. Depending on your age you may very well have a good head start on this work, but begin by questioning everything you think you know. In doing so you will cultivate humility, an important quality when learning to be honest with yourself.

Silence is Golden. There is no need to speak of the work you are doing. It is nobody's business. The dialog for personal change must first be internal. Praying about it helps to organize your thoughts and feelings. When the time comes to speak about it you will know it and be prepared for it.

Keep a journal of your progress. Keep it private. Record your thoughts and feelings, the situations faced, triggered emotions, anything relevant to the implementation of The Golden Rule in your life. A journal will help you quantize your progress and highlight weaknesses and omissions. It will also help you measure your progress over time.

Chapter 5 – The Concept of Sin

The definition of sin is 'an immoral act considered to be a transgression against divine law'. Religions specify a myriad of laws which must be followed ranging from dietary and clothing laws to specifications about behaviour. From a Christian point of view anything that causes you to contradict the Highest Law – love your neighbour as yourself – is sinful by reason and logic. This guide shares this same definition of sin. Anything that causes you to contravene the Golden Rule is sinful and must be addressed. This is the root of personal change in this guide.

Violations of this law include things like stealing, lying for personal gain at the expense of others and cheating others. Specifying each transgression can become confusing such as a blanket ban on lying. There are few people who would claim wrong against the people hiding Anne Frank and her family during the war when the SS came knocking. A convenient definition of sin is being selfish at another's expense. This covers nearly all of the actions that are detrimental to the preparation of the vessel. The aim as specified in this guide is to be generous towards others, to a fault.

Chapter 6 – Love

When people think of love they commonly think of the feelings and emotions that come with our hormones tricking our brains to reproduce, including the love a parent has for a child. Sexual and parental love are powerful but are not the love required for preparing the vessel. These types of love are instinctual, necessary for the continuation of the species and do not require a conscious decision. The definition of love required for this work is synonymous with the definition found in 1 Corinthians chapter 13:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Such love is a choice, a conscious decision made by the individual. This is a choice you must make in order to prepare the vessel. From the point of view of the Golden Rule the reason you must love becomes abundantly clear; it is how you would like to be treated. Patience and kindness, not envious of you or boastful to you, no tearing you down or hidden agendas, slow to get angry with you and no record of your wrongs. No delight in selfishness at your expense, celebrating with your truth. Protection, trust, hope, perseverance. Who in their right mind would not want to be treated in this manner? And in treating others as you would like to be treated you increase the likelihood of others choosing to treat you in the same manner.

From the point of view of All is God the reason you must love becomes even clearer; you are treating yourself when you treat others. You give yourself the treatment you give to others before they have a chance to give it back.

In many cases people fall short of love because they do not believe they deserve love. It is necessary to understand why such feelings of inadequacy exist and take steps to rectify one's perspective. It may be something as straight forward as poor parental treatment, abandonment or being on the end of severe teasing and bullying behaviour. Perhaps so many unloving choices have been made that one cannot envision being worthy of love. Regardless, time must be taken to understand the root causes and neutralize them. In the meantime striving for Golden Rule behaviours will seem difficult but will assist in dredging up the root causes. Remember, you are deserving of love and in giving it to others you are giving it to yourself.

Chapter 7 – Negative Emotions

There are in truth no negative emotions, only toxic quantities and/or qualities of emotions. All emotions have their place. It is quite natural to be happy or sad or angry or jealous or melancholy at the proper time. The problem arises when the emotion is so strong that it threatens to negatively impact your responses against your best judgement or when the time and place of the emotion makes the emotion toxic.

The following instructions are not applicable to those suffering mental illness or clinical depression. In such cases professional help should be sought out.

Happiness

It is hard to imagine happiness being toxic. It is an emotion that is coveted by all. Everyone wants to be happy. But at the wrong time happiness can be quite toxic and that time is selfish happiness at another's expense. Laughing at the misfortunes of others. Rejoicing when others fail. Celebrating the mistreatment of others. Happiness in these and like contexts is vessel destroying.

The medicine for treatment of toxic happiness is love.

Sadness

Sadness can be considered the opposite of happiness. It is an emotion that all wish to avoid, but none can. The end of a relationship, the death of a loved one, loss is unavoidable. As sadness is an emotion all wish to avoid strong sadness can be quite toxic. It is important to learn to let go while still giving yourself permission to grieve.

Sadness can be experienced as a state of being, fuelled by regret and dissatisfaction in one's place in life. It is important to be able to be honest and objective with oneself in identifying the root causes of such sadness, taking appropriate action and changing one's perspective as appropriate.

The corollary to happiness is that it is even possible to be selfishly sad at another's expense; a response to some expected misfortune that does not befall an enemy or adversary for example.

The medicine for treatment of toxic sadness is love. You will see a pattern developing here...

Anger

Anger has its place. Anger at the injustice in the world, anger at the mistreatment of others, even anger at our own mistreatment, it is natural and right to be angry at such things. With anger it is the quantity which determines toxicity. It is important when starting out to stifle angry responses in totality regardless of whether the anger is justified or not. This is not to suggest that one become a push over. If the anger is justified then the response must still be measured and controlled. If it is not then any justification for the anger is lost. With mastery of self control your responses will be measured and controlled by default. And it is certainly possible to be selfishly angry at another's expense.

The medicine for treatment of toxic anger is, you guessed it, love.

Jealousy

The value of jealousy exists primarily in the selfish propagation of genes. It serves its purpose, but there are better ways. All but the lowest quantity of jealousy is toxic for the preparation of the vessel. It is important as with anger (or rather, along with anger) to stifle jealous responses in totality regardless of whether the jealousy is justified or not. Again, with mastery of self control your responses will be measured and controlled by default. Being selfishly jealous at another's expense is an easy state in which to exist.

And as with all toxic emotions, the medicine for treatment of toxic jealousy is love.

Chapter 8 – Triggers

Triggers are events or actions which cause toxic levels of emotions to be experienced. From getting cut off in traffic to catching your partner cheating on you, triggers are diverse and personal. They can be learned behaviours or instinctive reactions. Once the trigger is pulled the toxic emotions have the potential to provoke you to contravene the Golden Rule. As such, in all cases triggers are to be eliminated.

In this perfection is the goal, not the destination. It is very difficult to eliminate all triggers. While it may be mildly difficult to forgive the guy who cut you off in traffic it may be nearly impossible to stop the anger and jealousy evoked by catching a cheating partner. Nonetheless the responses arising from triggers must be measured and controlled.

In addition to minimizing or eliminating the toxic levels of emotions there is another good reason it is important to eliminate triggers. Triggers are weakness. They provide others with the ability to make you experience toxic levels of emotions, and through those emotions control your responses. Eliminating triggers prevents other people from controlling you in this manner.

Chapter 9 – Obstacles

Obstacles are anything stopping you from implementing the Golden Rule within your life. Toxic emotions and triggers fall within this category but are deserving of their own main sections. It is up to the individual to find and minimize all obstacles standing in their way of their Golden Rule implementation.

Time and Effort

It takes time. It takes years. It takes effort. It is expensive. There are paybacks for doing this work as previously described however nothing is gained for free. You get out of it what you put into it, the impetus for striving for perfection. Without the time and effort little is gained. You must be prepared for brutal self-honesty and be ruthless in obstacle minimization.

Other People

This is the reason for the Silence is Golden admonition. Other people are probably not on your wavelength. People certainly exist who would not hesitate to make your life hell for choosing a spiritual path. Among other reasons it is for self protection that neophytes are admonished to keep their mouths shut about the work they are doing.

Depending on circumstances it may be necessary to cut some people loose from your life, however this is as a last resort after it has become apparent that those people cannot help but to be obstacles in your path. And learn to distinguish between an obstacle and a challenge. Learn to see obstacles as challenges.

Personal Tragedy

A personal tragedy can make you question all of your life choices including your decision to prepare your vessel. Such questioning would certainly be the case if experiencing out of control toxic emotions as a consequence of the tragedy. While it may not seem like it such a tragedy provides a perfect platform on which to get to know yourself better. It tests your mettle, whether or not you are committed to this work to answer the Great Question for yourself. As such welcome such tragedies when they occur, accepting the opportunity to change yourself for the better.

Chapter 10 – Who are You?

With the term 'preparing the vessel' the vessel is often represented as a cup, however a useful metaphor is as a crucible (there is malleability and plasticity which one wouldn't find in a ceramic, but the metaphor holds). If one's crucible is well made the molten metal is poured in and everything works as expected. If however the crucible has weaknesses, cracks, water inclusions, when the molten metal is poured in the crucible can fail catastrophically, molten metal going everywhere.

The molten metal represents enlightenment. There are stories I have come across about people who have tried to shortcut the process of enlightenment using substances or techniques. Those who hadn't properly prepared the vessel sometimes went mad, sometimes they died. All in the quest to answer the Great Question for themselves.

You are God. You are All. That is the answer.

But you don't have to believe it. The only belief required is the belief in the value of the Golden Rule.

Enlightenment can come later.