

Introduction to Commentaries on the Rules  
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September 12, 2021

If one studies the rules one can find that they represent certain themes. Of course we know that they are organized in 4 groups. There are the Iron Rules, the Copper Rules, the Silver Rules, and the Golden Rules. But if you study the Iron Rules and the Copper, and Silver and Golden Rules, you will find that there are Iron and Copper rules that have commonalities and Golden Rules and Copper Rules that have commonalities. And in my own reflections what I found is that there are seven different ways in which the rules speak to us. And these are the rules regarding self-respect, rules regarding fair-mindedness, rules regarding fairness, rules regarding good speech, rules regarding duty, others regarding courtesy, and still others regarding generosity. So maybe we could take some time and consider each of these groups of rules. Because they tell us something about the process as a whole, the process of reintegrating ourselves and being in service to the whole of life.

So we begin with the first category, which is the Rules of Self-Respect. And in this category I would count these rules, I will read them. Remember they all begin with the words, “My conscientious self.”

My conscientious self,

Do nothing which will make your conscience feel guilty.  
Be firm in faith through life’s tests and trials.  
Meet your shortcomings with a sword of self-respect.  
Let not your spirit be humbled in adversity.  
Uphold your honor at any cost.  
Hold your ideal high in all circumstances.

So you see these are all rules that have to do with how you view yourself. And that’s really the foundation of the rules. It begins with your own relationship to yourself. The rules are about relationships. But it begins with your relationship with yourself. In the Quran Sharif we read *quli alrroohu min amri rabbee*, “Say, the soul is an *Ammara* of God.” We saw that word, *ammara*, already yesterday in another form, *nafs al-ammara*. Now that is all too often the *nafs al-ammara bissu*, the soul that commands evil. That’s the Id in its imperious, egotistic self-absorption. But *ammara*, that is to say commanding, that quality has its origins in God. In us it is misplaced, tangled up, misdirected, and it has to be disentangled, it

has to be purified, but at the Source, the original *Ammara*, comes from the One to Whom we belong, *quli alrroohu min amri rabbee*. Say the soul is of a command of God. The Divine Being wishes this. Your soul has been ordained by God. That's an extremely powerful realization. Your soul is not something random. The notion that we are the result of something random is a very modern idea and a very disenchanting one. Your soul has been ordained by its Source — ordained in love, ordained for the purpose for which the whole world exists, witnessing. You were loved into being. *Yuhibbuhum wa yuhibboonahoo*, God loved them and they loved God. So you were loved before you even had any notion of love. You were created in love. Your soul was emanated from the Divine Light. Murshid says, as a kind of exegesis, "The soul is an activity of God" like the wave of an ocean. These rules recognize this, and have their foundation in this realization, the dignity of the soul.

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Hold your ideal high in all circumstances.

Respect yourself! Don't speak against yourself; don't undermine yourself. Respect your soul. It's God given. It's sacred. Everything flows from that. You won't be able to respect others until you feel deeply within the dignity of your own soul. If you feel that, you will be able to acknowledge the dignity of other souls, and grant them their rights. But you've got to begin with a sense of the preciousness of your own light, the light bestowed upon you from the Light of Lights.

So do nothing which will make your conscience feel guilty. Why? Because the conscience in you is the light of your soul. Respect it. Now, we'll see sometimes the conscience manifests in the form of a conditioned judgmentalism, that is to say, inherited views, the internalization of external voices of rebuke. That is something different. But to respect the conscience that is intrinsic to your own soul, that is fundamental to a sense of dignity and self-respect.

"Be firm in faith through life's tests and trials." When something challenging happens, it's easy to complain or to begrudge one's fate, to bewail one's fate, to wish it could be otherwise. Then one is feeling dependent on outer circumstances, and lamenting the circumstances. But, if you come back to your soul, the

circumstances are just swirling around you. It isn't that you are in life, so much as that life is in you. Murshid said, "Did I pass through life? No it is life that passed by me." That is the perspective of the soul. That way one is not overwhelmed. The soul is going to light up? whatever it faces and this too shall pass, so be firm in faith through life's tests and trials. Be always mindful of that inner face within you that's constantly face to face with the face of the One to Whom you belong. When you have faith there, then everything else is manageable.

"Meet your shortcomings with a sword of self-respect." We do make mistakes and we probably will continue to make mistakes, but what's important on the path of chivalry is not to keep making the same mistake. Learn from a mistake and go on. Learn the lesson. Yes, we are growing, transforming. We will continue to make new discoveries, and open in new ways, and realize that our ways of being were not yet as comprehensive as they yet could be, so there will always be lessons to learn. But can we learn those lessons and keep going onward? And what enables us to go onward is the sword of self-respect. It's absolutely debilitating in this path to succumb to a sense of failure, hopelessness and demoralization. Get up again. That's the way of knighthood, Get up and keep going. There is no time, really, to wallow. You've been given in your soul everything you need to fulfill your mission, and you are going to do it. So don't keep looking back. Yes look back once to learn the lesson, but then go forward, and be confident. Just because you've had more struggles than someone else, that's no commentary on you. And if you've made the same mistakes, well, there is learning in all of that, but your soul is *min amri rabbee*, Divinely ordained. So, respect that. We are respecting God by respecting ourselves. God made this soul. Honor it.

"Uphold your honor at any cost." Again, this is about self-respect. There are many reasons to practice altruism, to be generous in one's conduct. But perhaps fundamentally it's just doing justice to one's own soul. You're honoring your own soul's dignity by acting in accordance with high ideals. Then hold your ideal high in all circumstances. So there are times when you are going to be misunderstood, and mischaracterized, and people are going to make you out to be someone who you are not, and villainize you and mock you and so forth. You can't control that. But hold your ideal high. Don't succumb, and don't feel that you have to reciprocate when someone approaches you in a manner that is ignoble. Keep your own ideal high. Whatever they say, whatever they do shouldn't alter your own dignity.

So these are some of the rules that pertain to self-respect. And maybe we can just take a moment before going on and close our eyes. Just sense within yourself your

soul. And by the soul, I don't mean the psyche. Sometimes the word "psyche" is translated as "soul". But I mean the *Ruh*, the innermost spirit, the light given to you by God, the Divine Light in you. Just sense it at the core of your being, and affirm it as the basis of your whole life.

(pause in silence)

Let's turn now then to the next category of rules. The first again was self-respect and the second is Fair-Mindedness. So this has to do with your attitude. We're working from inside out. We're not even talking yet about actions. We started out with self-respect, and what comes out of that self-respect is an attitude, which is a benevolent attitude, a fair, just, considerate attitude, even before we take any kind of action at all, a just orientation to the world, a frame of mind, which is fair-minded. Murshid said, "It is not the action which is a sin. It is the attitude of mind which makes it so." So attitude is primary. Before we do anything, or while doing anything, the real essence of it is our intention. Now, in the course of a day we might have any number of intentions, but there is an overall framework of intention, which is one's general attitude to life. Specific intentions that arise in the course of the day derive from this, one's worldview, one's frame of mind. So this is something that the rules address. Here are rules that describe fair-mindedness:

My conscientious self,

Do not look down upon the one who looks up to you.

Judge not another by your own law.

Bear no malice against your worst enemy.

Be prejudiced against no one.

Place people rightly in your estimation.

Have regard for the feelings of every soul.

Observe constancy in love.

So these are all rules that have to do with benevolent mentality. "Do not look down upon the one who looks up to you." That is to say, do not indulge in arrogance and condescension. Let your attitude toward everyone that you meet, wherever that person may be in the journey of life, let it be a respectful glance. Listen to what everyone has to say, children, people of very different walks of life, people who are taken to be unwell, whatever may be the situation in which someone finds themselves, meet them in their dignity, and take them seriously. They might regard themselves as inferior to you, but you need not regard yourself as superior. Then really life becomes our teacher in so many ways. We learn from everyone.

“Judge not another by your own law.” This has to do with de-centering your subjectivity. All too often our subjectivity is the frame by which we assess everything around us. Of course that is understandable because we are situated within our subjectivity. But if we can’t see it as our subjectivity, we assume it to be objectivity, and that’s where all kinds of problems begin. So the first thing is to own our subjectivity as something subjective, and realize your position within it, and recognize that others have their own subjectivity within which they are positioned, and that their choices follow from that position. So, instead of assuming that everyone sees things in the same way that you do, recognize that they see things in a very different way.

“Bear no malice against your worst enemy.” So again, this is a frame of mind which is fair-minded. Just because someone is in disaccord with you, you need not fall into malice, malice being ill will, which is to say hoping for a bad outcome for that person. If someone is at variance with you, you could still very much hope for their happiness and fulfillment. That doesn’t mean you have to abandon whatever you are defending when you need not wish ill for that other person. So a fair-minded, a generous frame of mind is one in which we can even wish well for those who are averse to us.

“Be prejudiced against no one.” Don’t make assumptions about other people, and while you recognize, while your experience is some basis for forming judgements, it isn’t a complete basis, and there is much that we don’t know. So this teaches open-mindedness, which is really essential to fair-mindedness. Just always be curious, interested, ready to learn more, not assuming, not being fixed in one’s assumptions. Fair-mindedness is a posture of intellectual flexibility, intellectual humility, always ready to be shown more.

“Place people rightly in your estimation.” That’s a reminder that we are always putting people in categories, consciously or unconsciously, mostly unconsciously. And this rule is telling us, if you are going to do that, be careful. Really think, and don’t assume, even after reaching a conclusion that that’s going to be a final conclusion. Because we run a great risk when we think we’ve got someone in a box.

“Have regard for the feelings of every soul.” So not only considering their point of view, but also considering their feelings, the state of their heart.

“Observe constancy in love,” which is to say, fairness of mind is infused with the heart quality, with lovingkindness, and don’t let that retract just because you’re surprised or confused by circumstances. Keep it going, keep that loving kindness in the mix, all of the time. Observe constancy in love.

So those are some of the qualities of fair-mindedness. Then there is Fairness, which is to say fair-mindedness in practice. Now we are getting into practice.

Fairness would be:

“Do not take advantage of a person’s ignorance.” Don’t benefit from knowledge that you withhold from others for your own gain.

“Do not claim that which belongs to another.” Don’t appropriate. If you are given something, that’s one thing. If you’ve earned it, and you’ve been paid, then you may regard that as your earning. But otherwise, just look out in this world of so many inequalities and see how so much is appropriated and unjustly reallocated. Imagine if everyone was able to enjoy the due of their own hard work, and the gifts that we give to each other freely. What a thriving world we would have together. So we all need to do our part in abstaining from latching onto that which isn’t justly our own.

“Seek not profit by putting someone in straits.” Again, in a world of soaring profits and terrible poverty, you have to think about what kind of livelihood is possible such that everyone benefits.

My conscientious self,

Harm no one for your own benefit.

Influence no one to do wrong.

Do not challenge anyone who is not your equal.

These are all rules to do with fair play, something we were meant to learn as toddlers, but, in a way, we are still learning those lessons. Just play fair.

We turned within and noticed our own soul, but now turn within and notice our own mind, how the mind flows out of the soul, how one’s actions are consciously and unconsciously directed by the mind, and how the mind is malleable, how you can work with it, reshape it. You can choose to be fair-minded, so that fairness comes from one’s mind naturally. See your mind as a work in progress. All too

often it is just back there somewhere invisible, but you can see it now, as the system, the matrix, that's moving the body, directing your speech. So, before acting out, what would it mean to reorganize, and illuminate this inner faculty, the depth of which is the heart? And, of course, the depth of the heart is the soul. Okay, then we can open our eyes again. We are going to be a little swift, because the clock is ticking.

The next category is Speech. There are a number of rules that have to do with how we express ourselves in words, whether typing on the keyboard or speaking verbally. The Buddha said that right speech, *samma vaca*, is speech that is spoken at the right time, is spoken in truth, is spoken affectionately, is spoken beneficially, and is spoken with a mind of good will. So, timely, honest, friendly, useful, benevolent. And this well describes the principles inherent in the rules on speech.

Make no false claims. Truthfulness.

Speak not against others in their absence. Being straightforward and sincere, and avoiding gossip and calumny.

Do not boast of your good deeds. Humility in speech.

Do not reproach others, making them firm in their faults. That's one that can be challenging because there are times when someone's behavior is destructive, and you need to challenge it, you need to create a boundary for the protection of others and yourself. How can you do so and still uphold the rule? These are the kinds of challenges that we find with these rules. Their contemplation makes us reflect on how we can balance our ideals. How do you balance honesty and straightforwardness on the one side and kindness on the other side? Kindness, tolerance, forgiveness, how do you balance those? There's a way. It takes a lot of care.

So, do not reproach others. Well, the word reproach itself is the clue, because, to speak sincerely with someone about a concern that you have is different from just hurling a rebuke at someone. The difference is that, in one case you are recognizing the soul in that person, and in the other you are just venting your spleen. And, finally, Break not your word of honor whatever may befall. So, keeping to your promises and your commitments and, of course, that reminds us to be careful in what we say and not too loosely make all kinds of promises that we will never be able to fulfill. But be very thoughtful, and even reserved, so that one's speech is in accord with one's action, and one's action is in accord with one's speech.

Then we come to the rules which concern Duty. Now there are three remaining categories. These are Duty, Courtesy and Generosity. And, if you reflect, you might remember Murshid's teachings in "Moral Culture," that wonderful volume, which is really a handbook of chivalry. There he speaks about reciprocity, benevolence, and renunciation, three stages of moral culture. You can't jump to the end.

You have to begin with reciprocity. That means to begin with simple fairness before you even strive for any kind of self-giving or generosity. Just strive in the first place to be fair, to be just. Start there. Only then, when your life is reciprocal, when you are giving as much as you are receiving in all of your relationships, then you can start to go beyond that. So duty has to do with reciprocity. Duty is just upholding what is your natural obligation.

But then you can go beyond duty, and going beyond duty is what we call Courtesy. It's not only to provide a service that you are obligated to provide, but, let's say you have a contract, to do so kindly, to do so courteously, and in a manner that's friendly and polite, and so forth. That's courtesy.

And then, if you were to go even further, the third category is Generosity. So, not only are you fulfilling your obligation, and not only doing it nicely, but going above and beyond the call of duty and freely giving of yourself. But, if you are doing that out of some kind of inner brokenness, if you are doing it out of fear of rejection, or a sense of dependence on someone else, a grasping dependence that makes you feel like you must keep emptying yourself out and abasing yourself, that isn't really true generosity. That's the symptom of a wound that needs a balm, and that balm is the dignity of your soul. You've got to acknowledge it. But when you do rediscover and find grounding in your soul's natural dignity and feel the divine light pouring through your soul, then you can be freely generous in a way that's truly free and generous and joyful. So that's going beyond the fulfillment of one's duty, it's going beyond politeness. It's just the joy of giving of oneself because one is lured by a love that is as ancient as the music of the spheres.

So, under the category of Duty, we have:

My conscientious self,

Do not spare yourself in the work which you must accomplish.

Consider your responsibility sacred.

Prove trustworthy in all your dealings.

Consider duty as sacred as religion.



Keep to your principles in prosperity as well as in adversity.  
Guard the secrets of friends as your most sacred trust.  
Do not neglect those who depend upon you.

But, then going beyond duty, Courtesy:

My conscientious self,

Be polite to all.  
Use tact on all occasions.  
Be no more to anyone than you are expected to be.  
Do not make a show of your generosity.  
Do not ask a favor of those who will not grant it to you.  
Be considerate.

And finally, we come to the category of Generosity:

My conscientious self,

Render your services faithfully to all who require them.  
Extend your help willingly to those in need.  
When you possess something, think of the one who does not possess it.  
Meet the world with smiles in all conditions of life.

So we have seen how the rules are rooted in the life of the soul, and how the soul then manifests itself through the mind. And now we might consider how the body is the instrument of the mind. The Magi were mindful of the importance of the body, as an instrument on the path of the service of light. They say in the Denkart, "The satisfaction of the angels is the joy of the body of good people. It is necessary to keep one's body in joy and hold one's hand back from doing harm." So the joy in the body is that which holds the hand back from doing harm. When the body tightens up, becomes rigid, when the chest becomes contracted, breath is diminished, the heart's own life is restricted, a burden piles up on your shoulders, heavier and heavier, the mind is confused because the brain's action is dulled, the electric circulation along the spine is impeded. Well then one feels beleaguered and more and more the instinct is to lash out. But the more the body is embedded within the great flow of life, receiving breath, giving out breath, porous, transparent to endless interior layers that open out toward vastness, the more one can be aligned so that the soul acts through mind, mind acts through body.