

VIRTUE OR VICE?

Virtues travel in pairs. What does this mean? Quite simply, if a virtue stands alone, it will eventually become a vice. Let's take a few examples to illustrate the point. Truth is considered to be one of the most prized virtues and yet if it is served up with anger or indifference it becomes tainted. The content may still have the 'appearance' of truth, but the nature of the delivery has now turned it into a weapon. The lack of care and sensitivity means the person standing in a place of 'perceived' righteousness has given away any right to that. And their message is now coloured by their anger and indifference and has become something else: revenge, cruelty, intimidation etc. The content, due to the delivery, has in most cases now been lost. Truth can only retain its virtue if it is paired up with virtues such as: empathy, kindness, or love. The pairing is determined by the context and the situation.

Let's examine further. Kindness for many is the most beautiful of the virtues. Even just observing an act of kindness, has been proven to have a measurable positive impact on the observer. And yet if kindness is repeatedly administered without discrimination, it can easily become abusive, manipulative, self-limiting and disempowering. Imagine a situation where someone continues to give regardless of the circumstances. As a result, a culture of expectation and dependency emerges. Those in receipt of that kindness, if they lack awareness or virtue, come to expect more of the same even when it's clearly unreasonable to do so. The giver in this situation continues to act with kindness even when they are compromising their own beliefs and giving away their self-respect. Is this kindness? Can there be virtue in a situation where one loses sight of what is right and where another becomes absorbed in their own selfishness? Neither the giver nor the receiver is acting with virtue. In this example the kindness has become weakness. The giver has either been shackled by fear, ignorance, or a need to be liked, to such an extent that their original intention of kindness is now spoiling them, as well as the other person. Kindness needs the clarity of discrimination to ensure it's being applied correctly to the individual or circumstance. Once again according to the context it needs to be paired with other virtues such as: humour, sensitivity, and warmth to name a few.

Let us take one more example to demonstrate that a virtue that travels alone will become a vice. Very few things can be achieved without determination. Determination can drive people to achieve extraordinary things. We can all think of examples where the impossible has been achieved due to someone's incredible desire to achieve that goal. But here too if determination lacks empathy and awareness and loses respect for boundaries the very force that can create miracles can just as easily lead to demise and destruction. If one applies determination without considering one's environment, then it is easy for that positive force to cause harm to others by not respecting their boundaries or limitations. Is it right to pursue a course that does not take account of its impact on those around you? Determination can become so ruthless it pursues its ambition and is blind to the consequences of its actions. So, it becomes thoughtless and unkind, even to those who are most dear. Also, the one who is 'driven' becomes blind to the fact that their determination has now become something else e.g., pride or stubbornness. In such circumstances, the goal may well be achieved but the virtue has been lost. Is any goal or ambition worth such a compromise? You must decide for yourself. For us a prize gained without virtue is no prize at all (see *The Only Destination is Right Action*).

Through these examples, we've tried to demonstrate that it is a mistake to think truth, kindness, determination, or any other virtue can ever deliver its message when it is unaccompanied. It cannot. Apply humour without thoughtfulness and watch it become a knife, do the 'right' thing but deliver your message through bad behaviour, and watch your message disappear into the ether. No virtue will ever leave its lasting mark if it doesn't come from a considered consciousness. Virtues can literally change the world. History is full of such examples, but history is also full of examples where virtues have become vices due to minds that haven't understood the depth of this principle: virtues always travel in pairs.