

LOVE AND LAW

Virtues are at their best when they travel in pairs. This is a simple idea which has incredible depth and far-reaching implications for us all. Behind the veil of this principle lie the secrets as to why so many of our best efforts fail. Its primary message is that when we apply a virtue, such as kindness, truth, tenacity, or love, without taking proper account of the variables such as, the individual(s), our delivery, and the context, we can do more harm than good. This is because we are acting with only one virtue in mind.

It's easy to think that a virtue, is always inherently positive. However, we can all think of times when our good intentions/actions have brought about negative outcomes, where we have inadvertently hurt another's feelings with the way we've delivered our message, or how we've influenced events by 'helping', and yet made things worse. In those moments, when we are struggling to understand how our kindness, honesty and support led to feelings of hurt and sadness, if we were to look closely, we would discover our good intentions were insufficient. We didn't properly think our position through or consider how it might be for the other person or party. In other words, we didn't apply discernment.

The discerning mind can see, based on its own experience and through the eyes of others' experiences, that the proverb, 'the road to hell is paved with good intention', is indeed correct, and a valuable maxim that we should all hold dear. This is why truth without kindness is the sharpest of swords. Offering support without consultation and respect can undermine another's ambition and self-belief. Determination without sensitivity and consideration can diminish and destroy everything in its path. Listening without due care for the other person's perspective can leave them feeling not seen or valued. There is an endless stream of well-meaning justifications, that we all use to 'explain' our position, but no matter how well-meaning those justifications are, the fact is that it's a lack of discernment, that's the problem - it's why we often act employing only one virtue at a time.

The more closely we look at this subject, the more obvious it is that we continue to do a great deal of harm by offering justifications for doing what we believe to be the right thing, when we have not sufficiently drilled down into our motivations and questioned the decisions we've made. When we examine our intentions, we can find they are much murkier than we would like to admit. They are often entangled with our prejudices, fears, beliefs and agendas, and so they are not as pure as we may believe/profess. It takes a great deal of honesty to unravel our intentions and address these issues.

Focused attention and discernment are needed if we are to successfully apply the virtue principle. Virtue pairings change according to the situation, the individual, the wider social context, and the timing. Although there are some pairs that are naturally aligned, this is not an absolute position and if you're really listening and paying attention in the moment, the pairings will make themselves known to you.

One of the oldest and most important pairings is that of love and law. These two magnificent giants tower above humankind, calling for our attention and respect, especially when making decisions about how to be in the world. When applied together they create balance, harmony and fairness.

One could be forgiven for thinking that love and law are not natural bedfellows, but theirs is arguably the most important marriage of all. Their contract demands are clear and uncomplicated; put simply, we must always apply love within the necessary boundaries, otherwise that love will spoil whatever it touches. The opposite is true, we must always apply the law with love, otherwise the boundaries we hold so dear, will lead to great harm, abuse and even destruction.

Many of us think of love as the greatest of all virtues and that it can do no wrong, and its impact is indeed incalculable, but if we look closely at our own lives, we will find plenty of examples of where love has been blind, suffocating, limiting and disempowering. In most instances, this will not have been the intention, but the impact and consequences cannot be denied. Love by itself is often not enough, and so we need to pause and consider our position and responses more thoroughly.

Wherever there is a dislocation between love and law, we will find injustice, inequality and a culture steeped in ignorance and fear. Applying the law, in whatever context that might be, without applying the principles of love, nearly always leads to poor decisions and outcomes. Those whose bias is in favour of law, tend to believe that it's being right that matters most, when in fact it's doing right that really counts. Ensuring the necessary boundaries are in place and are being adhered to, requires the wise eyes of discernment and the kind eyes of empathy and love. This leads to acting within the law of good intention and right action.

The fabric of our society is rapidly fraying at the edges because these two ancient tenets are no longer given the primacy and respect, they are due. To remedy this, we must first address the imbalance of love and law in ourselves. We cannot let one have dominion over the other. They are equal partners, each with incredible power and influence. However, there will be times when the law needs to be more prominent, but it must always be entwined with love. Equally there are times when love needs to lead, but law must always be close at hand. Sit regularly and consult with them both. Try and understand how they best fit together in any given situation. Without this listening-in and inner consultation, you're unlikely to catch yourself in the act. Catching yourself in the act means, becoming aware that you are acting without thinking first, acting without kindness and sensitivity, acting without being really present in the moment, or acting without considering the consequences.

Whatever you do, never separate these two magnificent virtues of love and law, because if you do you will unintentionally find yourself on the wrong side of what is right.