

Essential Spirituality by Roger Walsh
Practice #3: Live Ethically: Feel Good by Doing Good
Chapters 15, 16, 17, 18

OVERVIEW

[3] Live ethically: Feel good by doing good [jkk: Experience true happiness by doing good]

Keywords: Ethical living, morality, ethics

Living ethically is the concrete fruit that spirituality produces. It does not only benefit others. It actually benefits yourself first and foremost. It will make you experience a genuine and deep peace and happiness.

Sample Exercises: Give up gossip; Communicate to heal; Right a wrong

1. The Value of Virtue (Chapter 15, Page 117)

Summary:

Ethical guidelines are not burdensome rules, but ethical living (for example, being kind and compassionate to everyone) is a gift to the world around you. It will actually benefit you first of all.

Key Points from Chapter 15

1.1 Benefits of Virtue (Page 118)

- Acting unethically exacts both immediate and long-term costs
- When we attack in anger or lie from fear, we drive these emotions deeper into our minds and carve their traces further into our brains.
- What we do, we become
- Ethical behavior—when we try to foster people's well-being, including our own—is far more beneficial to both ourselves and others
- Ethical acts foster qualities such as love and generosity,
- Ethical living is absolutely crucial for advanced spiritual work, and without it, progress is difficult

2. What is an Ethical Life? (Chapter 16, Page 125)

Summary:

What does it mean to live ethically? There are three aspects of our lives we need to attend to if we are to live more consciously and kindly. The first two are our (1) speech and our (2) actions, and the third is the (3) emotional residue left over from past unethical behavior.

Key Points from Chapter 16

2.1 Right Speech and Right Action (**Page 125**)

- Right Speech
 - Warm words heal, while unethical speech can destroy
 - It is a challenge to change the way you speak.
 - Right speech requires sensitivity to other people and to our own motives and emotions.
 - Over time it becomes increasingly effortless and produces a growing sense of peace.
- Right Action (**Page 127**)
 - Right action focuses on doing what is beneficial to everyone, including yourself.
 - Right action is a kind of enlightened self-interest.
 - The emphasis of mature ethical speech and action is not a list of rules and regulations that attempt to lay down the law on what is right and wrong.
- The underlying motive is crucial in spiritual life and ethical action, the central motive is kindness
- Religions place enormous emphasis on not causing harm or suffering to any person, or even any conscious living creature.
- The ultimate goal is what Tibetans call "all-embracing kindness," which excludes no one from our concern.

2.2 Guidelines for Healing the Past (**Page 132**)

- Undo any damage. If you caused pain or harm, undo it if possible
- Aim for solutions in which everyone wins
- Avoid attack. It is terribly tempting to retaliate when someone hurts you
- Communicate
- Learn
- Ethical people recognize their mistakes as simply mistakes. They heal the past and themselves by correcting their errors, forgiving themselves, and learning as much as they can from the process.

3. Exercises in Ethical Living (Chapter 17, Page 137)

Summary:

Ethical transformation is a demanding process, having exercises can help cultivate this practice.

Key Points from Chapter 17

3.1 Exercise 1: reflect on your good deeds (**Page 137**)

- Recall three contributions or things you have done that you feel good about.

- As the memories rise into awareness, allow yourself to savor each one and reflect on them. Notice the feelings they evoke.
- Many people are surprised by the memories that emerge. They expect dramatic events, but often the things that stand out are quite simple and apparently unremarkable

3.2 Exercise 2: Tell the truth for a day **(Page 138)**

- Truth-telling doesn't require we say everything that comes to mind, and it certainly doesn't imply being insensitive to people's feelings.
- Select a time of day to practice speaking as truthfully and as kindly as you can
- Record your findings

3.3 Exercise 3: Give up gossip **(Page 139)**

- Avoiding gossip is another powerful exercise in truth-telling.
- Choose a time period to commit to not saying anything about people unless you have said or would say it to them directly
- Record and reflect on your findings.

3.4 Exercise 4: Do no harm **(Page 140)**

- Choose a time period to try to not to harm anyone
- This is both physical, but also right speech
- Record and reflect on your findings

3.5 Exercise 5: Communicate to heal **(Page 141)**

- Right speech can be healing
- Select an unethical behavior, either yours or someone else's, that still disturbs you. It should be one you would like to resolve and would be willing to communicate
- Then select someone you trust to communicate with. Ideally this will be someone wise enough to listen carefully
- Talk as openly and honestly as you can about your pain
- The listener doesn't have to provide answers or solve the problem
- Continue until you feel some sense of completion
- Reflect on your experience

3.6 Exercise 6: Right a wrong **(Page 141)**

- Unethical behavior tends to produce a black cloud of guilt and discomfort
- Reflect on unethical things you have done that remain unresolved.
- Choose one you would like to resolve and decide how to do it.
- Decide on a time by which to complete the task, because guilt has a tricky habit of helping us procrastinate and forget.

4. The Higher Reaches of Ethical Living **(Chapter 18, Page 143)**

Summary:

As ethical living becomes a deep and natural way of life, it offers increasingly profound gifts. Ethical living offers a further benefit. By loosening the grip of jarring emotions such as guilt and

anger, it leaves the mind less vulnerable to upset and agitation. This helps concentrate and calm the mind.

--