

A Virtuous Journey

Living with the Twelve Virtues as a Cycle of the Year



A joint collaboration between

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Over the course of the year we are going to work with a list of virtues originally given by HP Blavatsky, but also endorsed by Rudolf Steiner. There are twelve virtues in total, with each one corresponding to a sign of the zodiac¹:

March 21 for Aries: **Devotion**, *becomes power of sacrifice*

April 21, for Taurus: **Equilibrium**, *becomes progress*

May 21, for Gemini: **Perseverance**, *becomes faithfulness*

June 21, for Cancer: **Unselfishness** *becomes catharsis*

July 21, for Leo: **Compassion**, *becomes freedom*

August 21, for Virgo: **Courtesy**, *becomes steadiness of feeling*

September 21, for Libra: **Contentment**, *becomes self-composure*

October 21. for Scorpio: **Patience**, *becomes understanding*

November 21, for Sagittarius, **Control of speech and thinking**, *becomes a feeling for the truth*

December 21, for Capricorn, **Courage**, *becomes the power of redemption*

January 21, for Aquarius, **Discretion**, *becomes the power of meditation*

February 21, for Pisces, **Magnanimity**, *becomes love*

Despite the list provided above, these virtues in large part remain a mystery. Whilst Steiner provided the above list, he gave no other direct reference to the twelve monthly virtues, only veiled pictures for us to build upon. Others have provided some insights for us to explore, but this work is still very much unfinished, with many new possibilities still to emerge.

It is a large undertaking, working with these virtues. Even just considering the role of virtue in our modern life is a labour of love. The concept of a virtue, is often associated with religion, philosophy or ethics, but in its simplest form in our present day it means, a *good moral quality in a person, or the general quality of being morally good.*² And whilst this provides an initial entry point for us to begin our exploration of the twelve virtues, it does not provide a complete picture of the depth required to fully immerse ourselves in this work. If we look back through history to the classical Greek word *aretē*, we find that this related to human qualities that were both physical and spiritual. Socrates used this term to describe human qualities associated with inner morality, based on striving for the good, suggesting that it may be learned, whilst Plato saw *aretē* as something conditioned by the soul.³

Already we have the four Platonic or cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance from Ancient Greece, or the seven Heavenly virtues, which combine these four, alongside the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. We can also look to many other cultures, religions and traditions and their own virtues. In Buddhism, it is spoken of Four Brahma-viharas, also known as the Four Immeasurables, being loving kindness (or benevolence), compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity. And in Taoist traditions they speak of the Three Treasures as compassion, moderation and humility. Today we also see the discipline of modern virtue ethics, alongside the many other

lists of virtues that exist, and whilst there are both obvious and also more subtle similarities across these many lists, the *twelve monthly virtues* we shall explore are unique in their connection with the zodiac.

We can begin to see an emerging and continual thread of the links between virtues, human qualities and morality, and as we do, it becomes clearer that the twelve monthly virtues are strongly connected with qualities of the soul. As we begin this inner soul exploration of the virtues, it can begin as a thought or a feeling, yet the work involves more than this. It requires all the qualities of the soul, our thinking, feeling and also our will. We undertake this journey with our whole being, and it is important as we do this work that we find and maintain harmony and balance within our soul qualities of thinking, feeling and willing. This balance allows us to explore the virtues and not lose ourselves in lofty spiritual notions with no practical application, or alternatively to not just have a purely abstract or intellectual view of the virtue, whereby the spiritual essence gets lost.

This exploration is in a way a journey into the unknown. The virtues are both archetypal and individual, yet both aspects are initially hidden. We may begin with an idea or picture in our head, or a feeling or sense of the virtue, yet we also intuitively know that this is only the beginning. We are working with something that always remains unfinished, with perhaps only fleeting glimpses or feelings of what the virtue can become in us. The virtues are something that exist in each of us individually, but only emerge more fully with effort, striving, reflection and inner work. But even then they still remain unfinished, with always more to explore.

Whilst the virtues are listed separately and each is a whole unto itself, they are also part of a larger whole. Each of the individual virtues contain within it all the qualities of the other virtues combined, much like the zodiac. Working with the zodiac we find there are shadow sides, initial qualities, extremes, balancing gestures, and transformed qualities, and it is no different when considering the virtues themselves. As we live with the virtues throughout the year we shall work towards bringing all twelve to life within our being, just as all twelve zodiac signs are within the whole human being, whether it is within our bodily organs, personality traits and attitudes of soul.

Part of this exploration involves not just the virtue, but also working to transform the virtue. Steiner also gave us the picture of what can emerge as the virtue becomes something else. Again this guides us towards the ever changing, always emerging, constantly becoming, nature of the twelve monthly virtues. This journey involves many different aspects and one of those which we shall explore more deeply is the role of silence. Silence allows us to begin to work with the heart in a new way. In silence we can begin to connect with the heart as a sense organ, one that can guide us with love and wisdom. Not in a sentimental way, but in a way in which our thinking, feeling and willing are in harmony. In combining clear and healthy thinking, with a deep and concentrated feeling we can invite a meeting with this heart's guidance to allow the pictures to emerge as we work with the twelve monthly virtues within the rhythm of the zodiac.

References

1. Steiner, Rudolf, *Guidance in Esoteric Training*. Forest Row, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2007.
2. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/virtue>
3. Verbrugge, Verlyn, *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 2000