

The Seven Virtues of the Soul

It may not be commonly known, but for quite some time it has been understood that there are many **virtues of the soul**, in fact usually seven of them. Before we delve into those seven wonderful virtues, it may be useful to set the foundations for why these virtues would be important and useful to us. There are variations on the exact names of the seven virtues but it should become clear as to why the specific seven are presented here.

Firstly, here is a list of the 7 virtues of the soul: **Humility, charity, chastity, kindness, temperance, patience** and **diligence**. Wait till you find out how extraordinary these virtues really are as the precise meanings of these terms are more deeply defined on page four. Imagine these qualities being used to describe a person. That would be a very nice person to know.

Why are there Seven of these Virtues?

Why not six or eight virtues? There may not be one concrete answer to this question, but it's likely that these *seven* characteristic have a direct relationship with another *seven* things, namely the **Seven Deadly Sins**. Most everyone knows of the Seven Deadly Sins, right? In fact, I bet they could be listed off with ease,



maybe not even missing one. They are: **Pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath** (anger) and **sloth** (laziness). Imagine these qualities in a person. Mmm, not too hard to do, since we all indulge in them, but some perhaps more than others. What we can say is that conventional societal norms **encourage** all of these behaviors, **constantly** (see left). It is not hard to imagine that those who routinely indulge in these sins are not very nice people to know.

Since these sins are so well known and so faithfully practiced, there must be some remedy for them hidden out there, right, like an antidote for these sins? I propose that the 7 virtues of the soul are the remedy to the 7 deadly sins. I'm surely not the first to propose this, but exploring this idea should be valuable. In the table below are the deadly sins and their antidote virtues!

7 Deadly Sins	7 Virtues of the Soul
Pride	Humility
Greed	Charity
Lust	Chastity
Envy	Kindness
Gluttony	Temperance
Wrath	Patience
Sloth	Diligence

Why could Virtues be Valuable?

We should try to be familiar with some virtues, at least equally as well as the sins. But why?

If we consider that we are living on a meaningless spinning accident lost in space, then why would it matter what the heck we do here? Indeed, if there were no point or purpose to our lives, it should not matter what we act like at all, right? However, most of us understand at one level or another that **what we do really does matter**.

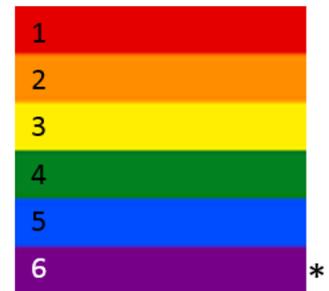
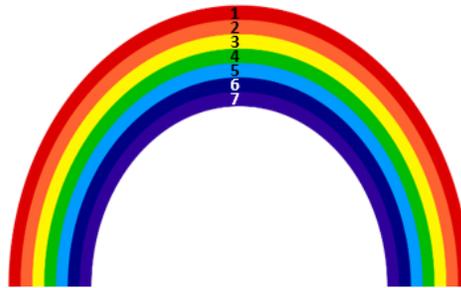
In this way the first underpinning must be that there is something special about us and being here. Some people (maybe more than we realize) understand the meaning of having a soul. Most importantly, that it has extraordinary value and we need to protect it. Invariably linked to this notion is that a soul has **virtues** and a **purpose**. Even if a person does not know, is not sure, or does not believe they have a soul, there are other aspects of these virtues that may be useful, even inspirational. That in and of itself makes it worthwhile to take a closer look at the seven virtues of the soul.



Interestingly, the number **7** is very meaningful and revered in many realms. Seven is considered **lucky**. It means **completion** and **perfection**. It is a prime number (cannot be exactly divided by any whole number other than itself and 1). The number 7 also symbolizes the unity of the four corners of the Earth with the Holy Trinity, that is, $4 + 3 = 7$. Customarily in the US there are 7 digits in a phone number, likely related to the concept

that seven is the limit of the bits of information most people can process and remember at any one time. The 7 chakras of the body, the 7 wonders of the world.

There are **7 colors of visible light** in the electromagnetic spectrum, that is, the real rainbow in nature has 7 colors. They are: Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet as shown in the arched image at right.



Other political rainbows have 6 (as seen at far right) or 8 colors. The number 6 is interesting, it is one shy of 7 and thus is said to signify **imperfection** and **incompleteness**.

*Note: There is no purple in the natural rainbow. Violet is not purple. "Roses are red, violets are **blue**". Nor pink or magenta for that matter, as they exist in the 'line of purples', a non-spectral boundary formed as opposing wavelengths of red and violet, with no distinct wavelength on the visible spectrum. What we see as 'purple' is essentially an illusion, a mixture of blue and red light hitting photoreceptors in the retina to create purple in our minds. This does not diminish the color purple but adds context. For future reference, the color purple most often means *royalty*, *illusion* and *deception*. When you see a news caster wearing a purple tie... 😬 ah oh, overt deception is likely.



What else might we know about the number 7? There are **7 natural notes in music**, named after the first 7 letters of the alphabet: A, B, C, D, E, F and G. These are associated with the major music scale of the solfege system of 7 basic syllables: Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti (Do). In a condition **synesthesia** a person sees specific colors, associated with a number, when hearing specific notes.

What about the **7 days of the week**? The days of the week are named after an infusion of the 7 classical planets and their Roman, Norse and Greek god nomenclatures. What are the **7 classical planets** you ask? They are the: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn.

Below are the days of the week with the relevant god/planet.

1. **Sunday** - Sun's day (**Sun**, helio, solis).
2. **Monday** - Moon's day (**Moon**, luna).
3. **Tuesday** - Tiu's day for the god of war (Roman **Mars**, Norse Tyr, Greek Ares).
4. **Wednesday** - Woden's day (Roman god **Mercury**, Norse Odin, Greek Hermes).
5. **Thursday** - Thor's day (Roman **Jupiter**, Norse Thursdagr, Greek Zeus).
6. **Friday** - Freya's day (Roman **Venus**, Teutonic Freya, Greek Aphrodite).
7. **Saturday** - Saturn's day (Roman **Saturn**, Greek Titan).

Did you know there are actually **7 types of medicine**? It's a topic for another day, but let's just mention here that the lowest form of medicine is called *allopathic* or *symptomatic* medicine. This involves naming a symptom, calling it a disease, suppressing it, and then proclaiming it 'cured'. The highest form of medicine is when you are your own doctor. Don't worry, we can all work our way up! 😊

Appropriately, there are also **7 types of love**! The Greek terms below give basic definitions of them.

1. **Epithumia**: Liking-love.
2. **Xenia**: Hospitality-love.
3. **Eros**: Romantic-love.
4. **Storge**: Family belonging-love.
5. **Philia**: Friendship-love.
6. **Mentor**: Guiding-love.
7. **Agape**: Universal giving-love.

The three types of love that perhaps best summate the span and spectrum of feelings we have for one another are briefly elaborated upon below, as this may help us better understand the virtues to be described on the next page.

Eros means "erotic" or carnal love, as in sexual love. Also called romantic-love, described as a sexual desire for another person. Desiring a sexual encounter *without* any feelings of love for the person is the **lowest** kind of love called *epithumia*, it's like a lost yearning. It can get complicated with humans.

Philia is friendship love. Just like the city of Philadelphia means 'brotherly love'. It is affection, the love of friendship. It's opposite of 'phobia' meaning fear. Just as hydrophilic is 'water loving' and hydrophobic is 'water fearing'. Even the term *philosophy* is the love or affection 'phil' for wisdom 'sophis'. This type of love can center on common interests, values, experiences, etc., and is platonic (non-sexual).

Agape is the **highest** kind of love, unconditional love. It implies wonderment and charity, as the love a parent feels for a child. It is often referred to as **God's divine love** or **universal love**. It is giving, selfless and divine. A key love to any spiritual practice. An ideal to strive for, with a reverence for all.

FINALLY, as promised, the famous seven virtues are provided below, along with the sin that they remedy.

Specific descriptions of the 7 Virtues of the Soul and the Sin they oppose

1. **Humility:** A modest view of one's own importance, being humble. Exhibiting selfless behavior. A spirit of self-examination to undertake difficult tasks graciously. Giving credit where credit is due. Being faithful to promises and revering others. Refraining from despair. Humility is not having a low opinion of oneself, but rather an accurate one, with accomplishments in perspective. The word humility comes from the Latin term *humus* meaning 'grounded, or from earth'.

Opposes: Pride. Indulgent self-worship, idolizing and esteeming oneself above all others and above God. It is an unreasonable and inordinate arrogance and overconfidence regarding one's own perceived achievements. At its core is self-serving self-importance.

2. **Charity:** Generosity, self-sacrifice and a kindness towards all others. A desire to help others and better the world by benevolent giving. Similar to universal love (agape), charity is a giving kindness towards others. A person does not need money or material wealth to be charitable, it is a giving of what you have (time, assistance, knowledge, support), without any expectations in return.

Opposes: Greed. Intense, uncontrolled, insatiable and selfish desire to increase material acquisitions or social gain, such as status or power. Stinginess. A state of always wanting more.

3. **Chastity:** Refraining from unreasonable desires. Abstaining from sexual conduct according to moral wholesomeness; the practice of courtly love and romantic friendship. To be honest with oneself and others. Cleanliness through cultivated good health and hygiene, and maintaining this by refraining from intoxicants. Embracing morals to achieve purity of thought through education and betterment. Ability to overcome temptation with self-discipline, not from lack of temptation but by refraining from distractive influences of hostility, temptation or corruption. Being unhindered by worldly desires.

Opposes: Lust. Intense unrestrained desire (especially sexual) for a person, object or circumstance. It can also be a strong, unregulated craving or hunger for anything, like power or control, with an overwhelming and destructive drive at its core.

4. **Kindness:** Being good towards all, expressing compassion and friendship for its own sake. Ability to express empathy, loyalty and trust without prejudice or resentment. Consistently having a positive outlook and cheerful demeanor, regardless of the circumstances. It involves a desire to inspire kindness in others. Unselfish love and voluntary kindness, again like agape, without bias or spite.

Opposes: Envy. Spite, resentment and unhappiness aroused by seeing the possessions of others, or at perceiving the success or happiness of another. Feelings of discontentment and bitter longing.

5. **Temperance:** Practicing restraint, moderation and justice. Exhibiting self-control, abstinence, and deferred gratification. Having mindfulness and prudence to make good judgements between self-interest versus the rights and needs of others. The 'Temperance movement' was for the abstinence of consuming of alcohol. Fasting is the abstinence of eating food. It requires discipline and self-will. It also involves the prudence to judge what an appropriate action would be at a given time.

Opposes: Gluttony. Overindulgence and overconsumption of an object or activity, often involving the excessive ingestion of food or drink. People can also be gluttons for pain, money, and drama. Showing no restraint or control. A state of always taking more than is needed.

6. **Patience:** The ability to accept delay, annoyance, or suffering with serenity and dignity, and without complaining or becoming angry. A willingness to forgive others and show mercy. Endorsing stability and rejecting revenge in order to accept the faults of others without prejudice. Forbearance and endurance in resolving conflicts and injustice peacefully, as opposed to resorting to anger, hostility, and violence.

Opposes: Wrath. An intense extreme anger, often with an evident display of unbalanced emotional feelings. Expressions of rage and fury that are unfounded or unreasonable, indicating a loss of self-control. Strong vengeful anger with indignation.

7. **Diligence:** Having a persistent and decisive work ethic with a steadfast belief and capacity of not giving up. Showing fortitude and persistence even when the situation is difficult. Exhibiting thoughtfulness and care in actions and work. Upholding one's convictions at all times, especially when no one is watching; having integrity. Completing any work to be done, and doing so properly. Thoughtful monitoring of activities and time to safe-guard against laziness.

Opposes: Sloth. Reluctance to work or make an effort; laziness. Loss of physical or emotional motivation or desire. Idleness, being unwilling to work or put forth any tangible effort.

On a closing note, although the focus here is on the **virtues**, it is worth pointing out that **pride** is arguably the most deadly of the sins. As we know, pride comes before a fall. Like sugar, pride is the gateway drug. All of the other sins can be indulged with wanton self-importance, as long as the person is first full of pride. It literally blinds people, they are truly unable to see in this condition. This is why **humility** is so important.

Since it would appear that humility is currently the most important remedy needed, it has been listed first in this presentation. Humble ourselves, always. It reminds us that we do not know it all. Be grateful and grounded. Find value in what others bring out, even when it may contradict what you *believe* you know. Genuinely praise and exalt the worthy virtues around us. When we practice this state of mind (approaching things with humility), firstly it promotes the natural flow of all the other virtues, they will follow in their place. This then puts us in a state that allows us to **learn new things**. This in turn may give us **better vision** to see our reality more clearly, more accurately. The most precious resource is our focused attention. Therefore, when our vision is clearer, we can pay more attention to what is truly valuable. An important component is to identify these virtues and incorporate them into all aspects of our lives. Maybe we can discover things we never knew before? This is an extremely exciting way to view this wonderful place we are in - by keeping the 7 virtues of the soul in mind, in practice, and at the ready at all times.

The real voyage of discovery consists not of seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.
MARCEL PROUST

Your humble servant,
 Marie McMahan