



On Enemies and the Compass

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Abstract: Whether something is benevolent or malevolent depends on what one's goal is. Spiritually, there are really only two directions: toward Goodness—the One Thing—and away from it. How do we tell which is which? Rules cannot account for all situations and changes. Vices are internal enemies, and make one vulnerable to external enemies. Any desire can become a vice if it overwhelms one's desire for Goodness. Reading the spiritual compass occurs by feeling resonance with Goodness. Eventually one can realize that all enemies are really opportunities or angels in disguise.

1. Benevolent and Malevolent

In our world of duality and polarities, some things are clearly benevolent toward particular aims, and others are malevolent toward those aims. It's crucial to realize that ***whether something is benevolent or malevolent depends on what one wants!*** A young child thinks unlimited candy is benevolent because it tastes good, while a parent, valuing the child's future health and development, regards it as malevolent.

Such attitude differences persist throughout life—people often regard whoever gives them candy, alcohol, drugs, license to do what they want, or anything “free” as benevolent, even though the act is often malevolent. The consequences come later—illness, addiction, becoming weak and disempowered, or the bill for what was supposedly “free.” Sometimes the giver's ***intent*** is completely innocuous, and sometimes there is great malevolence underneath sweet-sounding persuasion.

Children hopefully grow up to see the wisdom of the restrictions of good parents and feel grateful. When they become adults, some decide to look further down the road to see this wisdom, and others remain stuck in self-centered pleasure-seeking, desiring immediate gratification at any cost. Wise people who advocate for what is best for everyone in the long term do not often win votes or popularity contests at this time in history.

Human beings are inclined to demonize anyone or anything that stands in the way of getting what they want. They label it as bad or evil; they criticize and condemn it

because it obstructs their desires or their ego. But often it is neither demonic nor evil, just another human being, or something Nature has created.

Enemies do not necessarily look like scary demons! They can appear in beguiling disguises, with tempting offers and promises to fulfill our hearts' desires.



Demons (by definition herein) have hardness of heart; angels (by definition herein) have love and wisdom. Both can be restrictive, both can be freeing. Both can bring pain, both can bring pleasure.



Politicians convinced people in one city to vote for new water pipes, claiming that a wealthy city nearby was going to pay for them. After the new system was installed in both cities, everyone's water bills rose dramatically. One city does not normally pay for another city's improvements, but people were deceived by promises of "free."

Angels and saints can also come in disguise! Hindu lore tells how the gods churned the ocean to acquire the nectar of immortality. When the pot of nectar emerged, the god Viṣṇu appeared as an enchanting maiden to distract the demons so that only the deities, not the demons, would become immortal. The demons were foiled due to their own weakness—which is exactly what happens to us humans in real life.



Another story tells of King Mahabali, who loved God but became arrogant due to his great success. During a ritual, the god Viṣṇu appeared to him as a lowly dwarf and requested as much land as he could cover with three steps. The king agreed, whereupon Viṣṇu grew large and covered the whole world with one step, and the next world with his second step. The king had no more land to give him, but he had given his word. In humiliation, the king offered his own head as the last step, eliminating his pride.



Distinguishing between benevolent and malevolent is a task for the intellect, which evaluates sensory data. We need to observe carefully with all our senses, including our gut feelings, and use discernment, reason, and memory. Wise discrimination comes with lots of experience.

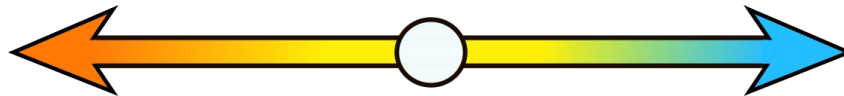


2. Only Two Directions

The spiritual compass has only two directions: toward Goodness-Truth-Source-God-the-One-Thing, and away from it.¹ For one person, the direction toward this One Thing may be Eastward from where they are, for another person it may be Southward, or upward or downward or anything in between. The direction looks different only because people are in different “places,” with different histories. From wherever one is, only this one direction matters.

These two directions define the spiritual compass. “Spiritual” in this context does not indicate “spirits” or simply the unseen; what is invisible may have an absolutely good influence, or an absolutely bad influence. The spiritual compass points toward and away from Goodness.

Each of the two directions can have an infinite number of flavors, varieties, shades and colors, specific paths of action. But there are only two directions, not a continuum of “sort-of” in one direction or the other. It is not possible to simultaneously serve two masters, and it is not possible to simultaneously proceed toward Goodness and away from it.



Sometimes it seems like a course of action will benefit one person or group and harm another. However, when one looks very deeply at the whole picture at all levels, what is **truly** best for one person is always what is **truly** best for everyone else too. We don't perceive all, but we can do our best. We need to remember that, like a child who wants the whole candy store, what is really best is not necessarily what someone wants, agrees with, or what feels good immediately.

These two directions can also be described as toward the true Self (Ego), and toward the “fake self” (ego). The “fake self” is a real thing—it includes the body, emotions, mind, intellect, and our sense of being a separate entity. It is an instrument, a vehicle we are in, not what we really **are**. Our true identity is a soul, connected with our Source. The goal is for one's soul, one's true Self, to use and direct one's instrument.

The “fake self” is called “fake” because it masquerades as our true identity, presenting its needs and desires to our awareness. The fake ego self is impermanent and knows it. In its doomed effort to become permanent, it uses everything possible for its own growth and aggrandizement, for its own benefit, security and longevity. It even uses truth, fairness and happiness for its own ends, skewing, twisting or obscuring them as needed to serve itself.

¹ For a detailed discussion of the word “God” and “the One Thing,” see “God”, <https://wisdom2joy.com/God>.

Presently, most people identify more strongly with their “fake” selves than with their real Selves. Elevating the fake self to an undeserved position causes people to act out of fear, selfishness, greed, separation, and untruth. Thus, confusion and deception abound, and our world has lost its way.

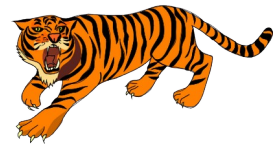
Restoring our individual and collective sanity depends on restoring the fake ego self to its proper, subservient place, and restoring Goodness-Truth-Source-God-the One Thing to its proper, primary place. We need to re-orient according to the two directions on the spiritual compass.

Many people want other people and the world to re-orient first. They point to all the systems to which we are subject that reward selfishness and greed, and they only want to change when the external systems change. This renders them dependent and impotent, unwilling to contribute to our collective improvement. It is individuals who make up our world, and it is when individuals orient toward Goodness and stand strong that systems change.

We must be careful not to equate the two directions on the spiritual compass with specific physical actions.

There is no outer action that *always* moves toward Goodness, or *always* moves away from it.

Usually it is good to refrain from killing. However, on some rare occasions, like if someone or something is about to kill us and our children if we don’t disable it first, killing can be a good action. Such circumstances are indeed rare, but even the possibility illustrates the importance of not relying on outer rules.



At the end of his life, the Tibetan Buddhist ascetic Milarepa was asked for his advice. He replied, “If you find a certain practice increases your evil passions and tends to selfishness, abandon it, though it may appear virtuous; and if any line of action tend to counteract the five evil passions, and to benefit sentient beings, know that to be true and holy *dharma*, and continue it even though it should appear to be sinful [to those bound to worldly conventionalities].”² What wonderful common sense, this rejection of rules and reliance on our two primary directions!

We’ve been taught to conform to and rely on outer rules and codes of behavior. Yet we have all experienced that these are often faulty. Regulations cannot possibly identify all situations that can arise in the future. People are different, circumstances are different. People change, conditions change, customs change, cultures change, technologies change. Guidelines can be useful, but codes are inherently inadequate.

2 *Tibet’s Great Yogi Milarepa: A Biography from the Tibetan*, W.Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 261.

Box-checkers, computers and artificial “intelligence” can never substitute for human wisdom, or for human justice.

It’s important to realize that a benevolent intent, which is often conscious, is not sufficient to discern whether an action goes in one of the two directions. We humans have much motivation that is subconscious. Looking honestly and deeply is imperative.

It is also important to realize that the two directions on the spiritual compass have nothing to do with beliefs, opinions, religion, faith, or dogma. Believing something does not make it true. Opinions, however expert or universal they might be, are not necessarily correct.³ Perspectives are different, but there is only one spiritual compass.



How can we sense the two directions of the spiritual compass clearly? The easiest way to begin is to recognize what is **not** toward Goodness, **Not It**. The calls and cries of what is **Not It** are much louder than the soft whispers what **is It**. What **is It** does not attempt to dominate.

3. Reading the Spiritual Compass: Not It

As we learn to recognize more and more clearly the “fake self” and its sneaky, deceptive, selfish ways, we are better able to distinguish the motives and sneaky, deceptive ways of external enemies. We can also learn to recognize these ways through experience, and better recognize our “fake self.”



Common vices are almost always in the direction of **Not It**. The only real internal enemy is our “fake self,” the housing, the vehicle of our soul. In its effort toward permanent survival, it is vulnerable to all vices until our soul becomes strong enough and wise enough to recognize the two directions and reject what is not toward Goodness.



Arrogance—pride, self-aggrandizement—is fairly easy to identify. Pride is based on an exaggerated sense of self-importance or self-worth, and thus untruth.⁴ This is a clear example of the fake self inflating its image and trying to sell it to our mind as reality.



3 For more detailed discussions, see *Real Intelligence*, p. 4-6 or video/audio 2 Opinions, https://wisdom2joy.com/Real_Intelligence; *Truth First*, p. 1-5 or video/audio 1-2, https://wisdom2joy.com/Truth_First; *Heal Thyself*, p. 8-10, or video/audio Key Three: Find the Root, https://wisdom2joy.com/Heal_Thyself.

4 For a more detailed discussion, see “Power, Pride and Spirituality,” *Confidence and Pride*, p. 5-6 or video/audio 3, https://wisdom2joy.com/Power_Pride_and_Spirituality.



When someone tries to motivate us through flattery, pampering our fake ego self, it smells of **Not It**. When someone praises our intelligence or special abilities, enticing us with secret knowledge, immortality, or magical power to dominate others or get our way, it's a sign of **Not It**. Seeking secret knowledge or magical abilities is not wrong—the warning sign is flattery, seduction into gaining power for selfish reasons, and temptation to misuse it.



Greed, a willingness to exploit others for personal pleasure or gain, is certainly **Not It**. Theft, lust, a desire to use or take from someone by force or trickery, is certainly **Not It**. Anything rooted in jealousy or envy is **Not It**. Putting people down simply because they have different customs or are not in one's tribe or group, is **Not It**. Recklessness is **Not It**. Indolence is **Not It**.



Not It usually involves deception in one form or another. T ruth is the goal; untruth is in the opposite direction. Truth can be painful, but untruth is a **real** enemy. Deceit is a real enemy. Delusion is a real enemy. Willful blindness is a real enemy.



Illusion is not an enemy when it is made clear that it is an illusion. Storytelling, futuristic thinking, art, and humor are immeasurably valuable in childhood, social interactions, and in creative endeavors. Only when illusion is not identified as such but is presented as truth or possible truth is it harmful.

Vices are not vices just because someone says so—they are vices because they cause hurt and harm—to others, to ourselves, and to society. Vices are internal enemies.

Most people don't harm others deliberately, and often not even consciously, but we all get hurt anyway! People addicted to alcohol or drugs are often extremely kind and don't wish to hurt anybody—but they do. It's difficult for people who identify with the fake ego self to admit to themselves their weaknesses, mistakes or negligence; instead they ignore, rationalize, concoct excuses, or make themselves blind or confused. People often deceive themselves with a false self-image rather than maintain honesty and integrity.



Sometimes an outer enemy is a reflection of an inner enemy. If we are secretly arrogant, we can be fooled by flattery. If we are secretly greedy, we can be enticed into programs that exploit others and profit unjustly. If we are inclined toward anger and combat, we can be easily incited toward violence against a supposed enemy—even if it is not really hostile. If we are cowardly, we can be easily induced to be passive in the face of gross injustice.

A desire to lead or be famous can arise from a selfless desire to help others, or from a soul desire, but often such a desire arises from **Not It**. Wanting to be liked and accepted, and wanting public recognition for achievements, are normal human desires, but if they overwhelm one's honest focus on Goodness they become vices.



Any desire can become a vice if it outweighs one's motive toward Goodness, if one becomes willing to ignore the spiritual compass and turn a blind eye to harmdoing, or to rationalize or excuse it away.

This is why some religious teachings advise followers to “kill desire.” Desires are not intrinsically bad; many of them are good. People have natural desires to be productive, care for their children, learn, and see justice. Eliminating our good desires is obviously not good. It is only when a desire overwhelms our wish for Goodness that it leads toward pain and suffering.



**The fewer and milder our desires,
the easier it is to read
the spiritual compass,
the easier it is to feel resonance
with Goodness, Truth, and Joy.**

In addition to internal enemies, external enemies also exist—wild animals, wild human beings, demonic spirits. Some natural phenomena are also enemies, although we don't attribute motives to them—poisons, earthquakes, lightning, hurricanes, meteors.

The presence of an external enemy does not imply the presence of an internal enemy. People are not responsible for the will of Nature or of other beings. If one is facing an external enemy, it might possibly reflect an internal one, but external enemies still exist on their own.

Some external enemies are invisible—radiation, high voltage, poisonous gases, subliminal audio, visual and electromagnetic signals, as well as entities that are visible only to clairvoyants. All cultural traditions include such entities: mogwai of China, dakinis of Tibet, asuras of India, gorgons of Greece, jinn of the Middle East, tzitzimime of the Aztecs. Jesus frequently drove demons out of people.⁵ Invisible enemies are very real.

Facing an external enemy challenges us to use all of our skills, capabilities, strength, intelligence and ingenuity. We grow stronger, we invent, we develop patience, strategy, discipline—and confidence when we are successful.

5 Matthew 8:16, 8:31-32, 9:33-34, 12:28; Mark 1:34, 1:39, 5:8, 7:26, 9:25, 16:9; Luke 4:35, 4:41, 8:29, 11:14, 13:32. "Jesus" is the English translation of the name in the original language.

Often it's not even necessary to engage in battle. Sometimes we can go around the enemy, forge a new path, surprise or distract the enemy, or even win the enemy over.

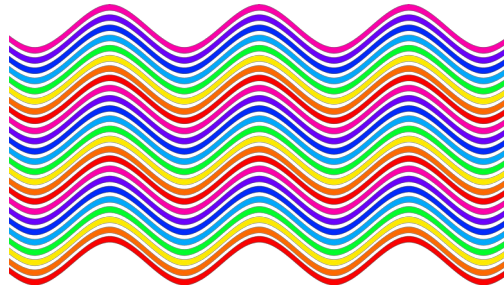
Confusion is never in the direction of our aim. Uncertainty—often. External disarray may occur for a short time, but if internal commotion and confusion reign longer, we're looking in the direction of **Not It**. Better to wait for clarity.

Enemies are usually deceptive, in one way or another, whether internal or external. Sniffing the **Not It** of deception is an excellent clue in recognizing potential danger, and in reading the spiritual compass.

Appearance, words, conscious intent, rules, and other people's opinions do not contribute to either needle on the spiritual compass. A special inner feeling, with experience, is our true guide.

4. Reading the Spiritual Compass: Resonance

When we intentionally focus on Goodness—not on rules or words but on the essence of Goodness, Truth, our Source, God, the One Thing—we become more and more familiar with its higher frequencies. This helps us to read the spiritual compass.





We can compare a possible action with this higher frequency and see if it resonates, if its frequency aligns with the One Thing. We **feel** this resonance. It is not a thought, or an emotion. Feeling this resonance is not an intellectual process, or an intuitive one. It does not require deep meditation or study.

It does require that we be peaceful inside, and that we be without bias regarding our question, either hope or fear one way or the other. It requires that we don't have desires that overwhelm our desire to recognize the truth. It requires that we be without pride, for pride results in faulty perception.

Peace, a sudden inner peace, is a strong indication of resonance with the One Thing. Not the peace of deadness where nothing is happening, but a peace that arises spontaneously with an idea. Often the feeling in the air noticeably lightens up when considering a particular possibility, even if we don't know why. The **It** direction always comes with an inner peace, even if it involves rapid, vigorous action.



Joy is another indication of resonance with the One Thing.  Not giddy, ungrounded frolic, but a certain inexplicable joy of spirit. It might not make sense from a common point of view to be happy about a situation, but when reading the spiritual compass, a quiet, inner joy resides in the direction of our goal.

Truth always resonates with the **It** direction on the spiritual compass, but oftentimes we don't actually know all the facts and information. Still, one's body feels an immediate release of tension when truth is thought or spoken, even if the information itself results in tension afterwards. 

The less dominant our “fake self” is, and the better our true **Self** is able to direct our **ego**, our vehicle, the more quickly and easily we can read the spiritual compass.

To read the compass, we focus on the One Thing until we resonate with it. Then, we turn our attention to our proposed action until we resonate with this possibility. Then we turn our attention back to the One Thing and feel whether the two resonate with each other or not.⁶ We can go back and forth and fine-tune our perception of specifically what resonates and what doesn't. Sometimes we can adjust our idea, altering any aspect that feels “off,” and suddenly feel an “Aha!” moment of truth, joy and inner peace.

When we have read these two directions on the spiritual compass, we simply have an “inner knowing.” This knowing is not intellectual. It is not only the result of facts, experiments, and logic. It is not a certainty that comes from education, reading, information, faith or belief.

This knowing is not provable by mountains of facts, experiments, or logical arguments, yet it is not fantasy or delusion. When two people who are equally clear, equally free of bias and paradigms, fears and desires, ask the same question inwardly, they come to the same inner knowing.

This inner knowing has nothing to do with religion, faith, belief or opinions. In fact, religion, faith, belief and opinions tend to block this inner knowing.

This knowing is accompanied by a confidence, and also by a certain humility. It does not boast or show off, but is more likely to be understated or even silent. There is certainty, yet not dogmatism; sureness, yet also openness; it is not bound or locked in. One knows that there is always a bigger picture, a bigger story.

This inner knowing cannot be transferred to another person. An idea, insight, conclusion or decision can be communicated, but the sense of inner knowing cannot be given to anyone else. Others can often feel it from the one who has it, but they can only acquire it through their own inquiry.

6 Resonance occurs everywhere in Nature. Certain frequencies of light resonate with certain cones on our retina and we “see” colors. Animals and plants emit chemicals which resonate with specific receptors, and thus recognize friends and competitors. Physics experiments bounce one thing onto another and measure what bounces off where; the measuring process involves resonant frequencies.

Everyone has a capacity for this type of knowing. However, the more educated and indoctrinated one is, the more difficult it is to drop beliefs, opinions, bias, egotism and desires, and thus to come to this quiet, inner knowing. If an overactive intellect asks incessant questions, it swamps the quiet of inner knowing.

Reading the spiritual compass is easy—it is dropping beliefs, opinions, bias, egotism and desires that we find difficult. In the process, we realize more and more to distinguish between the true Self and the fake ego self.

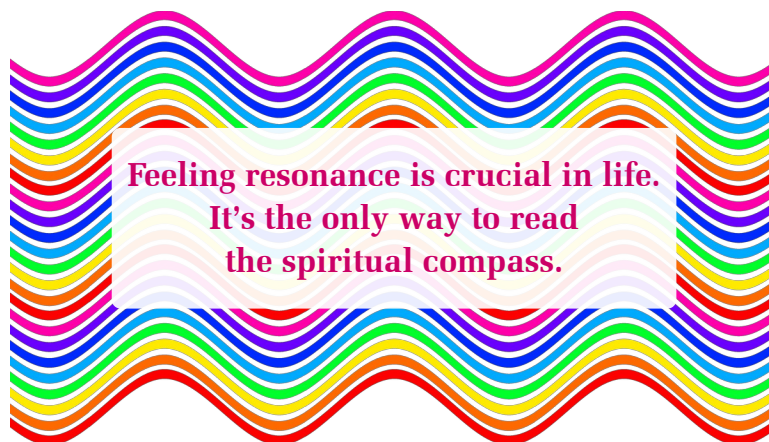
It is an amazing experience that when we resonate with the One Thing, Goodness, we feel no need for combat or conflict. There is only One will. If we choose this One will, the way is easy. Even if the next step is to engage in an outer battle, we somehow feel that it is not personal. Tension and stress diminish; awareness and strength remain. Our experience is, in the words of Jesus, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁷



If we insist on overlaying our personal desires, we immediately feel tension and conflict. When we surrender to the One Thing—not to anyone or anything else—we feel lighter, freer, peaceful, stable. Perhaps this is why one of the greatest prayers ever spoken says, “Thy Will be done.”⁸

Life does not have to be regarded as a succession of battles. Having such a paradigm causes one to fight on every count, following strategy like Sun Tzu or Machiavelli. An equally plausible paradigm is that most people are cooperative,⁹ especially when approached as friends rather than as enemies.

Coming into resonance with the spiritual compass looks like it is restricting from the outside, but from inside, it is freeing. Beforehand it looks conflicting and confusing, but afterwards it is calm. To the fake ego self it is frightening, but to the real Self it is enlivening.



7 Matthew 11:30.

8 The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:10. The Gayatri mantra also invokes surrender to the Divine: “May we be inspired by the Source which is to be held sacred.”

9 *Humans Prefer Cooperation*, https://wisdom2joy.com/Humans_Prefer_Cooperation.

5. No Real Enemies

Children feel that the person who won't give them all the candy in the store is a demon, but it's really an angel. People might feel that a dentist is a demon, but it's really an angel. Sometimes when we look back years later, we see that something we thought at the time was absolutely awful was actually an angel in disguise.

Terrible problems occur in life. We often didn't cause them—other people did. However, we have to work and work, spend time and energy and money to fix these problems, and it's not fair. We suffer all kinds of great injustice, from many enemies, day in and day out. Life is challenging here on Earth.



Yet when we meet these challenges, we get stronger. We grow—physically, mentally and spiritually. Even if we seem to fail in some way, we learn something from it and are better prepared in the future. Often we contemplate happenings in life over many years, gain greater perspective, and glean wisdom. We can also learn from other people's adversity when we feel their experiences as our own. Just as necessity is the mother of invention, adversity is the starting point of wisdom.

Strength comes only through resistance.

Confidence comes only through challenges.

Knowing comes only through resonance.

Wisdom comes only through adversity.

It is said that a soul can make more spiritual progress in one lifetime on Earth than in a thousand elsewhere. Few of us would disagree, if indeed we have options. In any case, whatever we learn belongs to us forever. The more challenges we face aiming toward Goodness, the more value we own forever after. No one can take away our experience, or our wisdom.

Only when we meet resistance, whether we invite it or not, do we grow. When we don't anticipate a resistance we often label it as a problem or an enemy. We often attribute malevolent motives to problems and what we imagine as their sources. We treat them as enemies, applying battle tactics.

Sometimes we wish problems to go away, to just disappear. But what if they all did disappear? We would become lazy and complacent. Our growth on all levels would slow down and stop. Would we **really** want that? Would it be good?

When we are born, we have forgotten our past and why we're here.¹⁰ It's reasonable to postulate that we are here because, in our soul, we wanted to meet some of the

¹⁰ We can remember the reasons we're here through resonance.

resistance and challenges that exist here. We want to grow. We probably knew it would be difficult; we might not have realized **how** difficult it would be, but we probably wanted to meet some difficult challenges.

The problems, adversity, and enemies we meet on Earth stimulate us to grow stronger. They motivate us to grow in whatever directions we choose. From the point of view of physical or emotional pleasure-seeking, they may appear to be enemies. However, instead of simply looking at problems as enemies we wish would go away, we can choose to look for how we might be able to change our selves, our minds or actions, to think of new ways of approaching the “problems.”

When we do, very often the “enemy” doesn’t look like an enemy any more. It is not threatening. It may even present an exciting challenge. With hindsight, we can often see how problems and enemies turned out to be valuable gifts.

With farsight and insight, we can see and feel that everything that appears horrible or malevolent ultimately serves to inspire or propel us towards Goodness, toward the One Thing. All enemies are disguised opportunities to grow. If we choose, both inner and outer enemies help us get closer to our Source, and to pure joy. What looks malevolent with shortsighted vision actually serves a benevolent purpose.



From a spiritual point of view, problems, challenges and what appeared to be enemies serve a good purpose—our own soul’s desires, and perhaps the desire of our Source, our Creator Itself, that we grow closer to It.

Beyond duality,
everything, at its root, is benevolent.
There are no real enemies, and no real malevolence.

In Truth, everything is benevolent.

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