

KIRKUS

REVIEWS

TITLE INFORMATION

THE SIMPLE LITTLE RULE

Mike Ellerkamp

Balboa (162 pp.)

\$25.57 hardcover, \$13.99 paperback

ISBN: 978-1-5043-8151-2

BOOK REVIEW

A debut self-improvement book urges readers to practice kindness, regardless of faith.

Ellerkamp gives logical reasons why the golden rule—“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”—is beneficial for everyone. Describing himself as “in love with the Word” of the Bible during the 1970s and early ’80s, the author left organized religion after a pastor made an evil comment in favor of apartheid. In the years since, he studied other faiths and Eastern philosophers and now writes that many religions teach a version of the golden rule. Sprinkling in anecdotes from his days as a Ranger instructor at Florida’s Eglin Air Force Base, Ellerkamp discusses five guiding principles—Wisdom, Justice, Moderation, Courage, and Discipline—for following the golden rule. Knowing it’s not always easy to walk in others’ shoes, the author adds some chapter questions and exercises for practical application, such as asking readers to think of behaviors a wise person has taught them. In concluding chapters, the author discusses how people can benefit by rediscovering the golden rule, or “law of reciprocity,” in today’s world. Though he uses Christianity as a springboard in his earnest guide, Ellerkamp’s biblical allusions are sometimes-flawed. For example, in Christianity, the golden rule is not about receiving reciprocity or gaining something here on Earth by doing good deeds. He also tweaks Scripture and adds New Age ideas. For example, when examining Jesus’ call to “Love thy neighbor as thyself,” Ellerkamp writes: “There is an important observation to be made in that sentence; notice that we must first love the self.” Meandering through broad topics—Creation versus evolution; free will; and fairness—several dictionary definitions are given, and the prose becomes a bit eye-glazing. At one point, the author even seems to be aware of tiring the reader: “For this story, I’ll not go too far into detail. If I note major markers, I will make my point. So hang on—here goes. It’s fascinating, I promise.” But his colorful anecdotes can be memorable, like the time a huge, poisonous snake fell into his boat—and his students jumped into the water.

A rambling but heartfelt treatise for sowing and reaping happiness.