

UNIT II: INTRODUCTION TO FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

LESSON 4: INTRODUCING THE 1981 UN DECLARATION ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

OBJECTIVES:

- To introduce the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (DROB), especially Article 1, paragraph 1.
- To clarify the distinctions among *worship*, *observance*, *practice*, and *teaching*.
- To understand the definitions of **religion** and **belief** in the Declaration.

TIME: 50 minutes.

MATERIALS: Chart paper and markers or blackboard and chalk; definitions developed in Lesson 3, "Defining *Dignity*, *Religion*, and *Belief*", p. 16.

To the Teacher:

Depending on the knowledge base of the class, you may wish at this point to introduce a brief explanation of the significance of a UN document and the process of consensus it represents. This topic will be introduced again and developed thoroughly in Unit III, which discusses human rights. See Appendix E for the full and summarized text of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (DROB).

I. INTRODUCTION (2 minutes)

Explain that the UN spent more than twenty years debating and defining the meaning of the right to freedom of religion or belief before adopting the **UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (DROB)** on November 25, 1981.

Explain that this document not only establishes a recognized definition of religion and belief, but also includes eight articles that further define and clarify this freedom.

II. ACTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF (18 minutes)

Step 1:

Write Article 1.1 of DROB on the board or give it to students as part of a handout. Ask someone to read it aloud.

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have a religion or whatever belief of his [or her] choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching

*Article 1.1
1981 UN Declaration (DROB)*

Step 2:

Ask students to compare this definition of freedom of religion with the definitions of religion or belief they developed as a class or individually in Lesson 3, “Defining Dignity, Religion and Belief”, p. 16. Could their definition(s) be substituted in this definition of freedom of religion or belief? Why or why not?

Step 3:

Encourage reflection on the significant differences between the terms **religion** and **belief**.

- *Why did the drafters of the Declaration choose to use both terms in the title of the Declaration: “...Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief,” rather than any single one of them?*
- *What important areas might have been left out if only one term had been used?*

Remind students of the definitions of **theism**, **non-theism**, **atheism** and **agnosticism** used in Lesson 3, “Defining Dignity, Religion and Belief”, p. 16, and repeat that the word “belief” as it is used in the 1981 UN Declaration includes all of these views.

Step 4:

Ask students to paraphrase key phrases from this article:

- *freedom to have...a religion or whatever belief of his [or her] choice*
- *either individually or in community with others*
- *in public or private*
- *to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in worship*
- *to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in... observance*
- *to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in...practice*
- *to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in... teaching.*

Step 5:

Combine these paraphrases to form a plain-language restatement of Article 1.1. Write it below the formal definition.

Alternative Method: Have students paraphrase these phrases and develop a paraphrase for Article 1.1 as a written assignment.

To the Teacher:

- Where appropriate, lead the discussion to the relationship between conscientiously held beliefs and action based on those beliefs.
- You may wish to challenge students' definitions by asking them to put the terms "thought, conscience and religion" in the context of terms such as "ethics," "values," "belief," "culture," "cult," etc.

III. ACTIVITY: WORSHIP, OBSERVANCE, PRACTICE, AND TEACHING (30 minutes)

Step 1:

Remind students of the final sentence of Article 1, Paragraph 1, by reading it aloud: *This right shall include freedom... either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [or her] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*

Step 2:

Ask for some illustrative examples from their experience of each word, (i.e. *worship, observance, practice and teaching*), used as a form or manifestation of religion or belief. List responses on a chart like that below.

WORSHIP	OBSERVANCE	PRACTICE	TEACHING

Step 3:

Discuss different manifestations of religion or belief:

- *How is each of these manifestations relevant to their respective different religions and beliefs?*
- *Why is the phrase "in public or private" important? Are some practices acceptable in private but unacceptable in public?*
- *Are the manifestations mentioned equally acceptable to the local community?*
- *Are there ways of manifesting religion or belief that are or might be unpopular or unacceptable to their community?*
- *Are there ways of manifesting religion or belief that are in conflict with other human rights? How are these conflicts usually resolved? Are there other or better ways to resolve them?*

Step 4:

Discuss why the right to "manifest ... religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching" is important to the freedom of religion or belief.

Step 5:

Ask for examples of cases in which people have been discriminated against because of the way they manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, or teaching. Encourage examples of both historical and current discrimination, as well as local, national, and global examples.

To the Teacher:

- *Encourage students to distinguish between worship, observance, practice, and teaching and to examine how each can be significant to a belief system.*
- *You may wish to set aside a bulletin board or wall space in the classroom for students to bring in articles from the media or written descriptions of their personal observations of manifestations of religion or belief in the community. You might list the number of different examples of religion or belief represented.*

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LESSON 5: FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

OBJECTIVES:

- To create awareness of the paradoxical relationship between freedom of religion or belief and discrimination based on that freedom.
- To introduce the idea that responsibility for protecting and promoting human rights, especially freedom of religion or belief, rests alike with governments, public and private institutions, and individuals, including young people.

TIME: 50 minutes.

MATERIALS: Chart paper, markers, cards, and glue or tape; chart of Needs and Wants Cards developed in Lesson 2, "Introducing Human Rights", pp. 5-7.

I. ACTIVITY: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES* (30 minutes)

Step 1:

Ask students to divide themselves in the same groups that developed the charts of Needs and Wants in Lesson 2, "Introducing Human Rights", pp. 5-7. Remind them of the purpose of that activity to show how **human rights** are based on **human needs**.

Step 2:

Give these instructions:

1. Divide the chart paper into two columns. Label the right-hand column "HUMAN RIGHTS" and the left-hand column "RESPONSIBILITIES." (See sample below.)
2. Take each of the original items listed under "Needs" and express it as a human right. Start with the word "Everyone." For example, "Education" might be expressed as "Everyone has the right to education." Write each right on a separate card. Place the card in the "Human Rights" column of the chart.
3. Then take each right and try to think of three responsibilities that are linked to that right. This might be a responsibility for the government, community institutions, and/or the individual. For example, the

* Adapted from Susan Fountain, *It's Only Rights: A Practical Guide to Learning about the Convention on the Rights of the Child* (New York: UNICEF, 1993), 46-47.

responsibility for education might be expressed as “The government has the responsibility to provide everyone with education”, “The community has the responsibility to see that every child goes to school”, or “I have the responsibility to make sure that everyone enjoys the right to education.”

HUMAN RIGHTS	RESPONSIBILITIES
Everyone has the right to education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The State has the responsibility to provide everyone with education. • The community has the responsibility to see that every child goes to school. • I have the responsibility to make sure that everyone enjoys the right to education.

Step 3:

Discuss this activity:

- *Which rights have very clear governmental responsibilities related to them?*
- *Which have clear individual responsibilities?*
- *For which rights was it most difficult to decide on three responsibilities? Why?*
- *Do you think your family places more emphasis on your rights as a young person or your responsibilities? What about your school? Your community? The government? Why is this so?*
- *What makes it easy to fulfill your responsibilities as a young person? What makes it difficult?*

II. PRESENTATION/ DISCUSSION: THE PARADOX OF FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF (20 minutes)

Step 1:

Point out that this freedom of religion or belief, which is recognized in international legal documents, such as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** and the **UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (DROB)**, is paradoxical: While this freedom can be a source of hope, consolation, and healing in community with others, it is also the course of tension and conflict that can lead to intolerance based on religion or belief.

Step 2:

Ask students for examples of freedom of religion or belief and also of tension, conflict, and intolerance based on religion or belief. Remind students of the examples they gave in Lesson 2, “Introducing Human Rights”, p. 5, and ask if any of these cases of discrimination led to activism for change and ultimately resulted in greater freedom of religion or belief.

Step 3:

Ask students what people or institutions they think are responsible for protecting and promoting the freedom of religion or belief.

Encourage them to understand that the government has responsibility to protect the rights of all citizens, but that other social institutions, including the organs of civil society, educational and religious institutions, and individual citizens themselves also bear this responsibility.

- Pursue this line of questioning, continually asking *“Does anyone else have responsibility to protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief?”*
- After each suggested body that bears responsibility, ask in what way they can act to uphold this freedom.
- Ask what happens when a person or institution does not meet this responsibility, either by active denial of the freedom or by failing to prevent violation of the freedom.

*To the Teacher: You may wish to introduce the word **secular** and clarify that a “secular government” is not “godless” and not in favor of religion. A secular government has the same responsibility for protecting and ensuring freedom of religion or belief as any other government.*

Secular <i>Worldly rather than spiritual; not related to religion.</i>

Step 4:

Finally ask the class directly, *“Do you too have a responsibility to protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief?”*

- Ask how young people, who are still legally children, can meet this responsibility.
- Encourage students to make the connection between this universal freedom guaranteed in international law and their personal behavior in their own community.

Going Further:

Have each group draw up a list of the ten most important responsibilities they have as members of their families, school, community, or country.

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LESSON 6: UNDERSTANDING RELIGION OR BELIEF

OBJECTIVES:

- To examine common meanings of **religion** and **belief**, especially those used in this curriculum.
- To emphasize common principles shared by most religions and beliefs.
- To introduce the concept of Master Stories, which provide a model for making sense of human existence.
- To suggest how different world views contribute to conflicting moral standards, which in themselves can contribute to **intolerance** and **discrimination**.

TIME: 50 minutes.

MATERIALS: Handout 6: The Golden Rule Expressed in Many Traditions

To the Teacher: Be aware that some students may have little or no conscious familiarity with any tradition of religion or belief. Others may believe that only one belief is valid and feel hostile to other views. Be sensitive to emotional responses to the subject matter and do not allow dispute to develop during class discussions. Emphasize that the purpose of the lessons in Lifting the Spirit is to foster acceptance and respect toward different religions and beliefs.

I. PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Step 1:

Remind students of the initial discussions they had on the meaning of religion or belief (Lessons 3 and 4). Explain that this lesson will go deeper into the meaning of this term and examine different ways that religion and belief are defined and manifested.

Step 2:

Using the material provided in Appendix A, Part 2, “An Introduction to Freedom of Religion or Belief”, pp. 98-103, explain the general understanding of the meaning of religion or belief, including these points:

Religion

- Is sometimes described as “an emotion of reverence, wonder, and respect tinged with fear.”
- For many people religion is a way of expressing praise for the gift of life given by God.
- For some people religion includes a divine scripture or divinely inspired creeds and standards for living. For example, Jews, Christians, and Muslims recognize the same sacred texts contained in the **Pentateuch**,

the first five books of the Bible, along with other texts. Ask students for examples from their experiences of other sacred texts.

Belief

- Remind students of the definitions of the terms **theistic**, **atheistic**, **non-theistic** and **agnostic** introduced in Lesson 3, “Defining Dignity, Religion, and Belief”, p. 16. Ask students for examples that differentiate and illustrate these terms.
- Explain that the term **belief** is more accurate in some cases rather than **religion**. In other cases some people prefer to be described as non-believers. Give examples that differentiate belief from religion. Ask students for further examples from their experiences that differentiate religion and belief.

Step 3: *

Display the quotations on Handout 6: The Golden Rule Expressed in Many Traditions, for all to read, without the religious and cultural affiliations included.

- Ask students to read each statement aloud and then guess which religion or culture might have expressed such a thought. This process will educate you about students’ prior knowledge, including their spiritual traditions. Once their ideas are exhausted, reveal each affiliation.
- Ask students to identify the different religions mentioned, providing them with definitions where they are unfamiliar.
- Ask students, “What is the point or theme reflected in all of these quotations?” Discuss how the same idea – the **Golden Rule** – has emerged in multiple cultures.

To the Teacher: You may wish to have students study further about the different religions represented.

Step 4:

Use student responses to the final question in Step E above to make a transition to the three common principles of religion and non-religious beliefs: life, expression, and justice. Explain these principles.**

- **A principle of life:** All religions agree on the sanctity of human life. Some religions extend that life principle to include other creatures that share this universe with human beings, while others apply it to the earth itself. Festivals celebrating birth are universal, as are those that honor and mourn the dead. In the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), “Thou shalt not murder,” the tenth commandment on Mount Sinai, clearly prohibits murder, which is defined as taking human life without a cause.

* Lesson adapted from Jane Dalton’s Lesson on Morality.

** Dr. Fatma Reda, a Muslim psychiatrist at the University of Minnesota, developed these principles for inclusion into *Lifting the Spirit: Human Rights and Freedom of Religion or Belief*.

- **A principle of expression:** All religions recognize the human need to express deeply held beliefs. Expression can take many forms, including speech, worship, observance, practice, and teaching. However, expression of belief can have both positive and negative outcomes, often leading to bitter conflict, violence, and suffering. The human right to freedom of religion or belief has the potential to reconcile such conflict in a spirit of mutual tolerance and respect.
- **A principle of justice:** Human beings will always have differing and conflicting interests. Religions seek to resolve such conflicts through agreed upon rules. However, such rules and concepts of justice are themselves often in conflict.

Ask students to explain these principles in their own words and give examples of each from religions or non-religious beliefs with which they are familiar.

To the Teacher: Lesson 13, "Worship, Observance, Practice and Teaching", pp. 50-51, focuses on expression of religion or belief in detail.

Step 5:

Point out the definition of religion developed by Professor Leonard Swidler of Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA:

Religion: An explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly.

Professor Leonard Swidler

Discuss and ask for examples of what these phrases mean.

- What is meant by *"the ultimate meaning of life"*?
- What is the relationship between *the "ultimate meaning of life"* and *"how to live accordingly"*?

Step 6:

Explain the concept of a "Master Story" as defined by Rabbi Michael Goldberg: *a central narrative of a belief or religious tradition*. Common to almost all belief systems, Master Stories provide an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life and often affirm the principles of life, expression, and justice. Examples of such stories include the Bhagavad Gita for Hindus, the Exodus from Egypt for Jews, the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus for Christians, and the Israa'and Mi'raj for Muslims.

- Ask students to supply specific examples of such stories.
- Ask students to identify the principles of life, expression, and justice in these stories.

Homework Assignment

Ask students to identify and copy or be able to retell any central narrative from a religion with which they are familiar and explain in writing how this story helps

people to make sense of human existence. Where students are unfamiliar or unable to identify such a story, provide them with examples from a variety of traditions, including Indigenous religions. Some examples might be stories about creation, national phenomena, birth, reincarnation, and the origins of law.

Going Further:

1. Mapping World Religions and Beliefs: Keep a wall map during the course of studying *Lifting the Spirit* on which the class records the principal locations of different religions and beliefs. Add to it whenever a new concept, religion, or belief is mentioned that has a geographic focus.

HANDOUT 6

The Golden Rule Expressed In Many Traditions

Bahá'í:

And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself.

Buddhism:

Make thine own self the measure of others.

Christianity:

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would have done to you, do ye even so to them.

Confucianism:

What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others.

Hinduism:

Do not to others what ye do not wish done to yourself.

Islam:

None of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself.

Jainism:

Treat all creatures in the world, as they would want to be treated.

Judaism:

What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor.

Sikhism:

As thou deemest thyself, so deem others.

Taoism:

To those who are good to me, I am good.

Zoroastrianism:

That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.

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LESSON 7: ANALYZING MASTER STORIES AND CONFLICTING STANDARDS AND BELIEFS

OBJECTIVES:

- To follow up on the assignment of interpreting Master Stories from Lesson 6, “Understanding Religion or Belief”, pp. 25-29.
- To solidify students’ understanding of the concept of Master Stories and their function as a model for making sense of human existence.
- To review the definition of religion and common principles of religion introduced in Lesson 6.
- To review the ways in which different worldviews affect moral standards and can lead to **intolerance** and **discrimination**.
- To introduce the conflicts arising from absolute truth claims and between sacred and secular beliefs.

TIME: 50 minutes.

MATERIALS: Master Stories from Lesson 6, historical and current examples of “absolute” truth claims and conflicts between sacred and secular beliefs.

I. SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (20 minutes)

Step 1:

Divide the class into small discussion groups of students who received the same Master Story. (Where the alternative assignment was given, asking students to bring in their own stories, assign students to groups so that different stories are presented.)

Step 2:

Ask students to share their individual interpretations of the assigned story and come to a consensus about its meaning:

- What does each member of the group think the meaning of the story is (i.e., the model it offers for making sense of human existence)?
- Can the three common principles of religion or non-religious beliefs (i.e., life, expression, and justice) be identified in the story?
- How does the story relate to Professor Swidler’s definition of religion? (See Lesson 6, “Understanding Religion or Belief, p. 27 for definition).
 - How does the story convey an “ultimate meaning of life”?
 - How does the story convey “how to live accordingly”?

II. FULL-GROUP DISCUSSION (15 minutes)

Step 1:

In a full-class discussion, compare and contrast the world views reflected in these stories.

- Ask a member of each group to read or retell his or her story for the whole class.
- Ask another member of each group to give his or her interpretation of the story, acknowledging any conflicting views.

Step 2:

Point out that these stories represent a wide variety of interpretations of the ultimate meaning of life and serve as the bases for differing moral standards. Ask for or give a few examples of how such a concept or worldview can lead to a moral or ethical bias.

Step 3:

Emphasize that such conflicting moral standards often lead to **intolerance** and **discrimination**. Ask for or give real and/or hypothetical examples of this conflict.

Step 4:

Conclude the class by discussing what individuals, institutions and governments can do and are doing when intolerance based on differing conceptions of the “ultimate meaning of life” arises. Emphasize that every individual and organ of society have responsibilities to help prevent such intolerance and discrimination.

III. PRESENTATION (15 minutes)**Step 1:**

Using the material provided in the text of Appendix A, Part 2, “An Introduction to Freedom of Religion or Belief”, pp. 98-103, explain that several factors usually contribute to this conflict of worldviews and resulting moral standards, especially “**absolute**” **truth claims** and the conflict between sacred and secular beliefs.

Step 2:

Explain and illustrate “absolute” truth claims and explain how people, who believe these claims, may coerce others to accept their truth claims.

- Provide historical and current examples.
- Ask students for additional current examples of how “absolute” truth claims manifest themselves in community conflicts (e.g., debates over pornography, reproductive rights, gender roles, use of alcohol).

Step 3:

Define secular beliefs and explain the conflict between sacred and secular beliefs. Provide some examples, both historical and current, and ask for other examples from the class.

Step 4:

Re-emphasize that although these conflicts are prevalent in modern society, they have existed throughout human history and have been the source of intolerance and discrimination.

- Ask students how such conflicts are usually resolved.
- Emphasize that laws usually reflect the prevailing power in a society but that minority points of view must also be respected.
- Ask students why diversity of religion or belief can be valuable to a society.
- Remind students that religion is a basic human right guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international instruments.

Step 5:

Conclude on these points:

- The importance of respecting a diversity of religion or belief.
- The responsibility of all citizens to creating respect for a diversity of opinions.
- The critical value of freedom of religion or belief in creating global stability and peace.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Research: Ask students to research historical and/or contemporary examples where “absolute” truth claims were coercively imposed on a society. Especially ask them to analyze the power relationships involved in this coercion. In historical cases, ask them to evaluate the ultimate result of this religious coercion.
2. Research: Ask students to research historical and/or contemporary examples of conflict between sacred and secular beliefs. In particular ask them to analyze how these conflicts were resolved and the power relationships involved in the solution.
3. Reflection: Ask students to reflect in writing on the importance of freedom of religion or belief in creating global stability and peace.
4. Reflection: Ask students to observe in writing how their community deals with differences in religion or belief and evaluate whether they find these methods in keeping with freedom of religion or belief.

Going Further:

1. Ask students to find out more about the moral standards of the religion who's Master Story they analyzed in Lessons 6 and 7. Compare and contrast these standards, pointing out ethical differences that could lead to conflict.
2. Encourage students to find out about the variety of religions and beliefs represented in their own community. Consider inviting outside speakers to address the class, field trips to attend worship ceremonies, and research projects to learn more about different communities of faith or belief.