

What do religions say about human rights? (KS4)

Key words and concepts

- **Human Rights:** those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to develop fully and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience.
- **Universal:** in relation to human rights they are conceptually possessed by all people in the world, by virtue of being human.
- **Inalienable:** again in relation to human rights it is the idea that what we possess should not be taken away from or given away by the possessor.
- **Responsibilities:** In relation to human rights it is the idea that those who are in possession of their human rights have a responsibility to help those who do not. In respect of religious teachings, it is common to all the main religions that followers are taught they have a responsibility for those in need.
- **Needs:** as a variation on the concept of rights they are those things required by human beings because they are essential and not merely desirable. In Simone Weil's work needs are both needs of the body and needs of the soul.
- **Obligations:** acts or courses of action that a person is morally bound to carry out. In relation to human needs they are the things human beings are required to do for other human beings to ensure their needs are met.
- **Promised Land:** The land that God promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:7), a land said to flow with milk and honey.
- **Jerusalem:** A holy city for Jews, Christians and Muslims. The name means 'city of peace'. Israel claims it as its eternal, undivided capital, while the Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Today Israel controls the whole city, and its ongoing status is disputed.
- **Homeland:** a person or a people's native land.
- **Palestine:** Often called the Holy Land. Historic region on the east of the Mediterranean Sea, comprising parts of modern Israel, Jordan and Egypt.
- **Zionism:** The belief that Jews should have their own nation. Zionism gained much support in the first half of the twentieth century, leading to the founding of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1948.
- **Diaspora:** the dispersion of the Jews beyond the borders of their country. In general a diaspora refers to any more or less homogenous group of people with a shared heritage or homeland who have moved out to other parts of the world.
- **Shoah (The Holocaust):** a biblical word meaning destruction which has come to stand for the mass murder of European Jewry by the Nazis and their associates during World War 2.
- **Angel of Death:** The figure that appears in the animation is taken from the reference in the Old Testament Book of Exodus Chapter 11 and 12 to the angel who delivers the tenth plague upon Egypt – the death of the firstborn which the Jews are warned to protect themselves against by marking their doors with lamb's

blood. In Judaism the angel of death is known as Samael, Sariel or Azrael, in Islam as Malak Al-Mawt. The visitations of the plagues upon the Egyptians is also described in the Qur'an in Surah al- A'raf 133.

Pupils will need some background information that puts both the animation and the Israeli – Palestinian conflict in context so that they can make sense of it and begin to articulate their responses which will then lead into the rest of this resource.

The song 'This Land Is Mine' is taken from the 1960 Hollywood film *Exodus*, which is about the founding of the state of Israel following World War 2 and in the aftermath of the Shoah (Holocaust). The film focusses on the life of Ari ben Canaan ('ben' means 'son of') and his attempt to create a peaceful Jewish homeland in Palestine. It is a tale of struggle which does not question the underlying assumptions expressed by the central character and places his actions in an heroic light. Nina Paley's animation challenges the absolute nature of the statement that 'This Land is Mine'. Nina Paley is an American Jew and so the animation should be seen as a critical American response to what the Palestinian scholar and writer Edward Said called 'the main narrative model that dominates American thinking' with regard to the foundation of Israel, that the Israelis have a God-given right to the land of Palestine. Paley's film brings out the contrast between the absolute claim to land based on holy scripture and the historical reality of a land that has been fought over by many different peoples for thousands of years. It introduces us to human rights and the complex relationship between religion and politics in the modern world.

This is a stimulus resource that can be used for a range of different pedagogical outcomes. It is used here to facilitate discussion of human rights but it could also be used to explore issues of peace, conflict and reconciliation, the relationship between art and religion, the different ways in which individuals express their beliefs, values and commitments and the conflict between personal and religious/cultural values.

You will need to find 'This Land is Mine' by Nina Paley. It is available online.

You will also need to find the following texts online:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Draft For A Statement of Human Obligations by Simone Weil
- Luke 10: 25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.

Learning activities

Activity 1: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

(adapted from Susanna Hookway's 'Conflict: Jerusalem' in *Questions of Truth*)

- Before introducing **Nina Paley's 'This Land Is Mine'**, split the class into four or five teams. Each team is presented with five statements about Israeli/Jewish claims to the land and five statements about Palestinian/Muslim claims to the land. Remind pupils that not all Israelis are Jewish and not all

Palestinians are Muslims. The following statements are simplified for this activity – not all Jews or Muslims believe exactly this!

○ **Israeli/Jewish**

1. Our history is one of suffering and persecution, especially in the Holocaust. We have been and still are, badly treated and regarded with suspicion by other cultures. We need to establish our identity, freedom and national development and we need to secure the land to do that.
2. God made promises to Abraham which included that we would live in the land forever.
3. The Jews are now a political nation with Israel our historic homeland.
4. For centuries we have prayed that we would celebrate the Passover 'next year' in Jerusalem. Now our prayers are being answered.
5. Our ancestors have lived here since the twentieth century BCE.

○ **Palestinian/Muslim**

1. Our ancestors have lived in the land for at least thirteen centuries.
2. Jews and Palestinians are blood brothers. We share the same father, Abraham, and the same God.
3. The 1922 mandate said the rights of non-Jews should be protected. American presidents promised to consult Arabs. These promises have been broken and continue to be ignored, creating suffering and misery.
4. We have a stake in Abraham's heritage. Abraham himself never tried to take away anyone's land. The only land he owned was the field he purchased in order to bury his wife Sarah.
5. We have suffered greatly and been cruelly treated. We need to establish our identity, guarantee our basic human rights including our right to respect, our freedom and our right to self determination as a Palestinian people.

- Ask the teams to group their facts under three headings: Religious, Historical and Political. Explain that there will be overlaps but the teams should aim to recognise the close connections between the three.
- Encourage the pupils to develop their reasons for their groupings. Do they find any of the statements more persuasive than the others?

Activity 2: 'This Land Is Mine': the song and the animation

- Bring up the lyrics of the song on a whiteboard. [These can be found on several lyrics websites, but note that although Nina Paley freely shares her material, the lyrics of the song are copyright and should only be used for educational purposes within your class. Use the information provided in the *Key words and concepts* section above to provide the relevant context but take care not to reduce the impact of the animation by saying too much about it at this stage.]
- Ask pupils for their initial impressions of the lyrics – the thoughts and sentiments expressed, images invoked, the tone of the lyrics.

- In small groups, ask pupils to make a list of all the positive words, phrases and images in the lyrics. As a follow up ask them to consider whether there is anything negative in the lyrics.
- Play the song (it can be found on You Tube and is the version sung by Andy Williams). Did the music bear out their thoughts? What words would they use to describe the mood or feeling of the song?
- Tell the class they are now going to watch a short animation in which the song is used. Play the animation.
- What are students thoughts about the animation? Were they shocked?

Suggested questions:

- What kind of images do the words of the song evoke?
- What kind of feelings/emotions/thoughts do they express?
- What were your reactions to hearing the song?
- What kind of impression did the song and the music make on you?
- How surprised or shocked were you by the video?
- What images were memorable?
- How has it changed your understanding of the song?
- Leaving aside the violent action of the animation, how is the land represented?
- What is the position of the film-maker in relation to conflict in general and the Israeli – Palestinian conflict in particular?
- Does she favour one side over the other?
- Is this a biased or unbiased video?
- What is the film maker saying about the conflict?
- How does the film help us understand the religious nature of the problem?
- The animation has been described as 'facile'. This means it is too simple and avoids the complexities of the conflict. Do you agree?
- How is the artist using the figure of the angel of death in the animation?
- Which people did you recognise in the animation? [It might be worth identifying the section from the appearance of the British onwards as the important one for the discussion of human rights.]
- The animation uses stereotypes to make a point. Which stereotypes did you recognise?
- The animation is both shocking funny. Why do you think Nina Paley has used humour to make a serious point?

Activity 3a: What is human in 'Human Rights'?

(adapted from the Human Rights Resource Centre)

- Write the words 'HUMAN' and 'RIGHTS' at the top of chart on a Smartboard. Below the word 'human' draw a circle or the outline of a human being. Ask pupils to suggest what qualities define a human being and write the words *inside* the outline. For example, 'intelligence,' 'sympathy.'

- Next ask pupils what they think is needed in order to protect, enhance, and fully develop these qualities of a human being. List their answers *outside* the circle.
- and ask participants to explain them. For example, 'education,' 'friendship,' 'loving family.' [Note: save this list for use in Activity 3b.]
- Explain that everything inside the circle relates to human dignity, the wholeness of being human. Everything written around the outline represents what is necessary to human dignity. Human rights are based on these necessities.
- Explain that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) sets the standard for how human beings should behave towards one another so that everyone's human dignity is respected. Display these two sentences from the UDHR and ask pupils to read and reflect on them for a few minutes:

...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of the freedom, justice, and peace in the world...

Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Activity 3b: What do we mean by rights?

- Ask pupils to suggest different meanings the word 'right' can have (e.g., 'correct', 'opposite of left', 'just'.) Ask them to consider common expressions like 'We're within our rights' or 'You have no right to say that'. Record these different meanings on the board. What is the meaning of 'right' when we speak of a human right?
- In small groups, ask pupils to suggest a definition for human rights: write these possibilities on the board. Negotiate a definition that gains class consensus and write it on a chart sheet by itself.
- Write on the whiteboard this definition of human rights:
- *Human rights belong to all people regardless of their sex, race, colour, language, national origin, age, class, religion, or political beliefs. They are universal, inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent.*
- Ask the pupils what they think is meant by: 'universal', 'inalienable', 'indivisible', 'interdependent'? and then to look up these terms in a dictionary and to write down their meaning.
- Write 'SURVIVAL/SUBSISTENCE,' 'HUMAN DIGNITY,' and 'CONVENIENCES AND LUXURIES' on another part of the whiteboard. Discuss the meaning of these terms, then remind pupils of the list of things needed in order to protect, enhance, and fully develop the qualities of a human being that they created in *Activity 3a*. Ask them to place each item under one of the headings. For example, is education necessary to survival? To human dignity? Is education a convenience or a luxury?

Activity 4: Ranking rights

- Provide pupils with a simplified version of nine of the articles from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They are:

- No one should be held in slavery.
- No one should be tortured.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression of that opinion in any way they wish.
- All human beings are born free and equal and should treat all people as if they are brothers.
- Everyone has the right to a standard of living that allows for good health.
- Everyone has the right to be taken care of if they are unemployed, sick, disabled, widowed, old or unable to look after themselves.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
- Everyone has the right to education.
- Using the Think-Pair-Share strategy, encourage pupils to decide on what they think is the most important human right from the list provided. As a pair they then rank the others. A good approach to the second part of this would be to do it as a Diamond Nine activity. Where does freedom of thought, conscience and religion figure in their ranking?

Activity 5: What Is a Universal Right?

- Show pupils the comments of Eleanor Roosevelt, Chair of the UN commission that drafted the UDHR, on the importance of universal human rights standards:

Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.

Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

Eleanor Roosevelt: The Great Question

- Engage pupils in some reflection on Eleanor Roosevelt's words.
- Ask them then to suggest examples of how someone's human rights might be infringed on a local level and to identify which article in the UDHR is being infringed.
- Encourage pupils to work in small groups to develop and role-play a scene in which they show the infringement of the right. Techniques such as *marking the moment* and *thoughts aloud* can be employed to explore the significance of the moment and the thoughts of those involved. Who does the person appeal to in order to redress the wrong? Are they taken seriously?

Activity 6: Religion and human rights

- Explain that in order to gain a full picture of human rights they will now have the opportunity to investigate teachings from Judaism, Islam and Christianity about the importance of social justice, our responsibilities for others, particularly looking after the most vulnerable in society and to compare the

teachings with the Declaration of Human Rights. They will be making decisions about which article best matches the religious teaching.

- Provide pupils with the following quotations and give them time to read and reflect:

Islam

It is righteous to ...spend of your substance out of love for [Allah], for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves (Surah 2:177).

And of his signs is this: he created you of dust and you are now human beings dispersed everywhere (ar-Rum 30:20).

You who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of any one lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious. (Surah 5:8).

Judaism

[The Lord]... secures justice for those who are wronged and gives food to the hungry (Psalm 146:7).

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' (Genesis 1:26).

If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: (Leviticus 25:39).

Christianity

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (Matthew 25: 35-36).

Human life is precious (Luke 12: 6-7).

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

- Explain that the three religions here do have much more to say about rights and responsibilities, but that these verses are a focus for the current investigation.
- Ask pupils to decide in pairs which articles of the UDHR may be linked to different quotations and to offer some analysis of how religious teachings such as these, which predate the UDHR by hundreds of years, may have been influential in the formation of the Declaration.
- Encourage them to make some notes on the similarities and difference they have noticed in the statements.

Activity 7: Comparing Simone Weil's idea of needs and obligations with human rights via the parable of the Good Samaritan

- Explain to pupils that they will have the opportunity now to gain some real depth in their understanding of the possible relationship between religion and human rights through a 'triangular activity' in which they compare versions of two texts through the medium of a third:

The two texts are extracts from the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **Draft For A Statement of Human Obligations by Simone Weil**

Mediating text: **Luke 10: 25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan.**

- Introduce pupils to Simone Weil's work in the context of human rights and the period in which she was writing and provide them with copies of (a) the UDHR .
- Remind pupils of the Parable of the Good Samaritan by reading Luke 10:25-37 and encourage them in twos or threes to read through the UDHR and Simone Weil's essay, picking out features that could be related to the Parable. Ask them to share their connections in a brief class feedback session.
- Ask the pupils to then imagine that following a human catastrophe that has wiped out most of humanity, they have been tasked with providing guidance in the setting up of a new human community. Working in two groups or in larger groups that are then split into two, ask one group to draw up a set of *ten fundamental rights*, and the other to draw up a set of *ten fundamental needs and corresponding obligations*, with justifying wording in the appropriate language. Encourage each group to then decide on recommendations for ensuring the guidelines can and will be met, how they are to be kept under review and a mechanism for revising them.
- Provide an opportunity for the groups to relate their proposals, e.g., as posters displayed on the walls, or as a digital presentation, and ask the class to work out how they will decide on which set of proposals would be the most effective.
- Set pupils an evaluation questions, such as, 'How far do you think some Jewish, Christian and Muslim teachings are consistent with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?'