



## Making moral decisions

### What ought I to do?

What ought I to do, or not to do, as the case may be? The answer that I give to this question depends very much on the circumstances. 'Ought' questions such as these are answered in relation to certain factors, such as: facts, competence, conscious and moral values. Every day simple decisions can be made purely on facts and competence yet other decisions involve matters of conscious and moral judgement, e.g. the decision or not to support an environmentalist group or an armed struggle depends not only on facts but on conscious and moral values.

'Ought' questions move into areas where facts are helpful but do not always lead to an obvious decision. When I see news coverage of war, what ought I to do? Write to government representatives and leaders? Go on a peace march? Give money to the refugees? Visit the war zone itself to work with one of the humanitarian organizations that are helping the casualties? Or perhaps do nothing. The facts again are relevant to the answer but they do not tell me what to do. I have to evaluate what will be the consequences of any action that I take and whether it is worth undertaking.

### Evaluation and obligation

Moral life begins with evaluation, not simply evaluation of the benefits of a decision for me but also for others. Others can mean family friends, other people, animals or the planet itself.

A sense of obligation and a willingness to do something about it is common to all human beings. Indeed, it marks us out from other forms of life. It is the start of what we call conscience. Yet despite a sense of moral

obligation to act in a given situation, we might still not know what to do.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century philosopher David Hume points out that we cannot observe directly the moral obligation in every situation in the same way that we can see and agree that a circle is a circle and a square is a square.

But where do we find the measure for our moral judgements? Some people consult their own feelings or intuition as they make moral decisions, but these emotions and hunches have varied origins. They may simply reflect the ordinary prevailing local behaviour or norms that differ from place to place and culture to culture. They may be based on strong ethical laws of their nation. They may also be deeply rooted in religious traditions, teaching and sacred writings.

Some codes of behaviour are so basic to both religious and humanistic people that they are considered natural law. But people of a particular religious faith are primarily guided by the teachings of their sacred texts that through prayerful meditation reveal God's will for their way of living. Although some are clear, direct, detailed commands, others are all-encompassing and require careful application (such as loving God and loving one's neighbour as oneself).

Some religious and spiritual teaching is easy to apply to modern life, but some teaching is not. Holy scriptures and sacred texts do not supply direct judgements about genetic engineering, the limits to violence in a nuclear age or the choice between using limited funds for preventative medicine for many and costly technical care for a few. Moral guidance sometimes comes through weighing values in tension with each other and taking into account the interaction between religious

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teaching, the tradition of the Faith, reason and experience. Even then our most faithful attempts to obey God may need God's gracious forgiveness!

### Human morality and religious influence

It may be argued that there are two distinctive features that lie at the heart of human morality and of religion. These features provide the link between spirituality, religion and morality. The first is that human beings seek meaning and the second that they seek moral meaning. We want to make sense of the world and moral laws do just this.

The foundation of moral decision-making lies in the insistence that the recognition of value is universal to all human beings. All religions plus natural law agree that women and men are capable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong and of acting on the basis of those judgements. Anyone can choose to make their own decisions, but there is a code of ethics within a community that has to be respected. Decisions we take can have long or short-term consequences and we carry the responsibility for all our decisions.

### Short-term and long-term consequences

When faced with a moral decision, often what seems to be the easiest thing to do in the short-term, does not work out to be the best action for the long-term. A good example of this is in the area of the environment. Driving a car to work rather than taking public transport may be a short-term solution to getting to work quickly. But the effect of pollution on the environment is such that in the long-term global warming becomes a reality and life on the planet as we know it is under threat.

### Self interest and morality

We have to ask ourselves, both in the short-term and in the long-term, what are the consequences of my actions both for myself and for others? Do I put my needs first, or the needs of everyone else? If I take drugs or abuse alcohol, am I hurting myself or am I hurting others too? If I practice unsafe sex and sleep around, am I putting myself at risk or am I risking the health and wellbeing of others too? This is a difficult question for women in particular because from early childhood women are socialised to negate their own needs in order to please others. In many societies women are second class citizens with fewer rights than men. This makes moral decision making difficult for them since the men take most of the decisions. This is not to imply, however, that within their own sphere of influence, women are not selfish, at times putting themselves first. Age-old conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law show this to be the case.



## Determining a code of ethics

Life is full of ethical dilemmas. So many difficult ethical issues crowd in on us every day. Believers and non-believers alike are influenced by moral codes. Of course, you do not have to be religious to be moral although there is a historic connection between religion and morality. Moral codes are related to natural law – the concern to uphold the survival and the welfare of the human race. Religious traditions have in turn based their ethical codes on the same concern albeit with their own interpretations of how this should be done in the light of their belief system. All religions believe that women and men are capable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong. But each religion determines its own ethical codes. For some believers, these codes are absolutes and have to be followed. Others recognise that life is not about absolutes and that the ethical codes are guidelines that help to guide women and men through the moral maze of daily living.

### Buddhism

It is hard to make generalisations about ethical codes within Buddhism, such is the diversity, flexibility and complexity of moral practice. However, Buddhism traditionally operates with hierarchical and developmental notions of spiritual understanding and moral attainment and the structure of Buddhist ethical teaching reflects this.

This is clearly seen in the *dharma* summary of the structure of Buddhist teaching that is found in the Pali Canon, the basic texts of Southern or Theravada Buddhism. The key is the application of *karma* to the practical implications of ethics, cosmology and spiritual attainment.

The step-by-step teaching is predominantly directed towards ethical concerns. It begins with a monk or a spiritually developed person giving to others (*dana*). Giving is a formal religious act that has the effect of purifying and transforming the mind of the giver. The giving should be in a spirit of care, attention and joy, an attitude that is characteristic of Buddhist ethical teaching and practice. For lay people, the merit (*punna*) that is derived from *dana* is important. *Dana* helps to concentrate the mind, reduces selfishness and prepares a person for undertaking the five Precepts (*sila*), that command refraining from:

- Destroying life
- Taking what is not given
- Wrong behaviour in regard to sensual pleasure
- Untrue speech
- Causes of intoxication

According to Buddhist *karma*, the violation of these precepts will result in unpleasant events.

The second part of the set-by-step teaching addresses the danger of attachment to sensory experience. These dangers include selfishness, violence, dishonesty and theft. The most direct way to counteract these dangers is through meditation of the four *brahmavihara* or sublime states, of loving kindness (*metta*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and calmness (*upekka*).

The notion of *karma* pervades all Buddhist teaching and practice. In the context of ethical teaching, it highlights the act or intention behind the deed. It is this that produces that which determines future states or conditions. What is interpreted as 'good' within Buddhism is understood as liberation or the overcoming of suffering.

## Determining a code of ethics

### Christianity

Christianity inherited from Judaism the belief that morality starts with God and reflects the very nature of God. God is concerned with holiness and justice in the life of the individual and society. The New Testament offers two ways in which a good life is to be lived: by doing good works such as visiting the sick and feeding the hungry and by the acceptance of God's grace in the life of the believer. Failure to do either is known as sin, but due to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, sin can be forgiven and the relationship between an individual and God restored.

The teaching and example of Jesus is key to moral decision making. Love of neighbour and love of enemies is paramount; they reflect God's own moral nature. Moreover, such is the generous nature of God that if people behave accordingly, they will get more than they will give and more than they deserve. A Christian code of ethics is based on these two simple points: the values of generosity and love. Christians believe that these values reflect the nature of God as revealed in Jesus. Ethical decisions are focused on Jesus' example and lived out in social action.

Traditional sources of morality for Christians that shape their ethical codes are the Bible, Church tradition and reason or conscience that is guided by the Holy Spirit.

### Hinduism

Throughout its history, Hinduism has exhibited a diversity of beliefs and practices. However, it is argued that what maintains the unity of Hinduism is *dharma* the normative duties and ethical code that governs all aspects of life. *Dharma* is both eternal and sacred and is illustrated in the Hindu law books, the earliest of which is the *Manusmṛti* (second century AD).

In defining Hinduism, right behaviour is more important than belief. What is important is correct action in accordance with the duties and responsibilities of your caste that is determined by your birth. These duties and responsibilities are incorporated within the Sanskrit term *dharma*. They are concerned with fulfilling social obligations to family and wider society and ritual obligations to household deities and ancestors.

*Dharma* is expressed in ritual actions that produce that which is good. To succeed, the ritual actions must be undertaken in a state of purity achieved through ritual purification such as pouring water over the body and avoiding impurity such as lower castes (*class divisions in Hindu societies*). That which is good is also related to an auspicious time (*subha*) such as a particular configuration of the stars.

Dharma is particular to each situation and the *Manusmṛti* provides many examples. Religious duties are different in each age and according to caste, family and country. *Manu* is specific about moral retribution due to action over a period of lives. Actions originate in the mind, speech and body, all of which have consequences in a future life. A sinful mental act such as being jealous about other people's belonging will result in rebirth in a low caste; a sinful verbal act such as lying or gossip will result in rebirth as a wild animal or bird; a sinful bodily act such as theft or adultery will result in rebirth as a plant or stone.

### Islam

Islam describes itself as God's 'straight path' for the human race and teaches that God has revealed or disclosed his will by giving people a path to follow with clear guidance in all areas of life. Islam is therefore synonymous with ethics. If you are committed to Islam you are committed to an ethical life. What is written in the Qur'an and the life and example of the prophet Muhammad are God's final revelation that provide clear guidance.

## Determining of code of ethics

Almost from the inception of Islam, Muslims have had a nation state, a social, political, economic and religious entity. In its classical formulation, Islam makes no distinction between sacred and secular, or religion and state. Muhammad always encouraged his followers to achieve balance between worldly and spiritual concerns, between *din* (religion) and *dunya* (world).

The most fundamental theological principle in Islam is the concept of unity (*tawhid*): God is one. Balance is a basic concept – balanced people, balanced societies, a balance between justice and compassion, wealth and poverty, the role of women and the role of men. Peace between people, God and fellow creatures lies at the heart of Islam.

Sunni Moslems follow the tradition of Muhammad. They follow an elaborate legal code, their *shari'ah*, that is the official law of Islamic countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia and the Sudan. *Shari'ah* is universal law and covers every area of personal, moral and social life: prayer, fasting, diet, taxation, crime and punishment. The basic source is the Qur'an, supplemented by the example of the prophet Muhammed contained in six sound collections of *hadith*. If no ruling on a particular moral or legal point was to be found, four principles are employed: consensus, analogy, reasoning and rational choice (undertaken by very distinguished religious leaders) and public welfare.

*Shari'ah* legislation divides behaviour into different categories: *Fard* – obligatory duties including the Five Pillars of Islam and their associated rituals:

1. Pronouncing the confession of faith (*shahada*): 'There is no God but the one God and Mohammad is his prophet'.
2. Praying five times daily facing Mecca, the holy city (*salat*).
3. Fasting during Ramadan, Islam's 9<sup>th</sup> month (*saum*).

4. Giving alms to the poor (*zakaat*).
5. Make a major pilgrimage to Mecca once in life (*hajj*).

*Halal* refers to that which is permitted, food, drinks, behaviour. *Haram* behaviour or foods are forbidden except under life threatening conditions. Right action will be divinely rewarded whilst wrong action will be divinely punished. Islam has a high regard for intent. There are four legal schools that differ in their interpretation of *halal* and *haram* although they generally agree on all major points of law.

## Judaism

The Jewish traditions provide a full spectrum of decision making on ethical issues. Orthodox Judaism insists on a literal acceptance of law as contained within the Torah and interpreted by the rabbis in the Talmud, with only a limited opportunity for compassionate interpretation. Yet within Liberal Judaism, conscience is the key factor.

The relationship between the law and morality is a major factor in ethical decision-making within Orthodox Judaism. Jews believe that the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), express what God wants people to do. It is law that is morality dealing with all aspects of life from the most personal to the constitution of the state.

For Orthodox Jews, Torah should be observed *lishmah* (for its own sake) and for the love of God. Jewish ethics emphasises that although a court cannot demand more than is just or lawful, the individual is asked to restrain from making the full legal demand (*lifnim mishurat hadin* – beyond the line of the law).

When Torah offers no clear answer to a dilemma, Jews work through the available judicial process. There are many sources and levels of authority.



## Human Rights

Although there is no single definition of spirituality, spirituality is concerned with the whole of human life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God or a Supreme Being or an awareness of something other than self.

A concern with human rights should lie at the very heart of the spiritual quest. Human rights give value to life. They enshrine the sanctity of life, ensuring that an individual person is valued, respected and accepted. This is clearly seen when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is examined. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. It recognises that the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. It argues that human rights should be protected by law and that rights enshrined in the declaration should be promoted.

All world religions and non-religious groups such as Amnesty International promote awareness of the values contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The search for justice and peace is shared by the major faiths. Amnesty International is probably the most famous human rights non-governmental organization. It encourages all governments to agree to be bound by and to enforce international standards of human rights and to support and to respect human rights. Human rights are both moral and spiritual imperatives:

HUMAN RIGHTS (as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

The right to:

- Life
- Liberty and security of person
- Not to be a slave
- Not to be tortured
- Protection of the law
- A fair and public hearing in the courts
- Be presumed innocent until proved guilty
- Freedom of movement and residence
- Marry and found a family
- Own property
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Freedom of opinion and expression
- Freedom of peaceful assembly and association
- Seek and receive information and ideas
- Take part in politics
- Work
- Fair wages and equal pay for equal work
- Social security
- Join a trade union
- Rest and leisure
- Education

Without distinction of any kind such as: race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national origin, social origin, property, and birth.

## Human Rights

Individuals, groups, businesses, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions are also targeted and made aware of specific abuses of human rights, such as:

- Detaining prisoners of conscience
- Detaining any political prisoner without holding a fair trial within a reasonable time
- Torture of other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment  
Excessive use of force by law enforcement officials
- Use of the death penalty by governments
- Deliberate and arbitrary killings
- Disappearances
- Taking hostages
- Children taking part in armed conflict
- Other severe suffering inflicted because of a person's beliefs or identity
- The return of refugees to countries where they may be at risk of serious violations and abuses
- Military, security and police transfers (including weapons and training) from one country to another where these can contribute to human rights abuse
- The manufacture, use or transfer of indiscriminate weapons of warfare, particularly anti-personnel mines.

There are more than fifty Amnesty International sections around the world all running specific campaigns such as the abolition of the death penalty, protection of children's rights in situations of armed conflict and war, refugees and women's rights.



## Rights of the child

The fact that there is a need for a Convention on the Rights of the Child points to the fact that in all countries across the world, children are subject to abuse and to exploitation. The Convention recognises that children need legal protection. It was adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and has been ratified by the governments of most nations. It is an exciting document in the history of human rights. Based on the premise that 'childhood is entitled to special care and assistance', it says that the family as 'the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of all its members and particularly children' should be given all necessary aid. Traditions, cultural and religious values are respected. International co-operation is promoted to improve the living conditions of children everywhere, especially in developing countries.

Much was made of the Convention in the press at the time. Governments were commended for showing outstanding leadership in promising to ensure basic human rights to all children, poor and rich alike, especially to those with special needs. It seemed as if the world's leaders were committed to eradicating exploitation of children and enacting legislation to guarantee a better life for them. Unfortunately, there has been little substantial change since 1990. Lip-service is given to some of the Rights in some countries. The child mortality rate is still too high, too many children are hungry, too many are exploited for cheap labour, too many are sexually abused, too many are forced into prostitution, too many have limited educational opportunities, too many live as refugees and too many are unloved and neglected. Governments have to make children a high priority on their agendas and be willing to spend the necessary money if the Convention is to live up to its high ideals.

When you consider the immense amount of money that is spent on armaments, drugs, gambling and other life-destroying activities, it is impossible to believe that there is no money in any country's economy to strengthen life-giving endeavours for its children.

We can all be leaders in the struggle to influence governments, other agencies and individuals to maintain their commitment to observe the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Indeed, as Girl Guide/Girl Scout leaders, we have a responsibility to promote the rights of children locally and internationally.

The Rights fall into roughly four areas of concern: Survival, Development, Protection and Participation. Brief descriptions of the Articles follow:

1. A child means every human being under the age of 18.
2. The rights apply to all children irrespective of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion or ethnic origin, property, disability, birth or other status of self or family.
3. The best interests of the child shall always be the primary consideration.
4. The State must do all it can to implement the Rights of the Child.
5. Right to appropriate guidance by parents and extended family.
6. The State shall do all it can to ensure child's survival and development.
7. Right to a name and nationality.
8. Right to preservation of identity.
9. Right to live with parents or maintain contact if separated.
10. Right to family reunification even if leaving a country.
11. The State has an obligation to prevent and remedy the kidnapping of children abroad by parent or third party.

## Rights of the child

12. Right to express own opinion freely.
  13. Right to freedom of expression and obtaining of information.
  14. Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
  15. Right to freedom of association.
  16. Right to protection of privacy.
  17. Right to access of appropriate information and protection from harmful materials.
  18. Right to be raised by both parents with State ensuring availability of institutions for education and services.
  19. Right to protection from, and prevention of, all forms of abuse or maltreatment.
  20. Right to protection and assistance if child is deprived of family with due regard to child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background.
  21. Right to safeguards in best interests of the child in the case of adoption.
  22. Right to special protection for a refugee child.
  23. Right to special care, education and training for disabled child to achieve greatest degree of self-reliance and social integration possible.
  24. Right to highest standard of medical care available.
  25. Right to regular evaluation of any State placement of a child.
  26. Right to social security and social insurance benefits.
  27. Right to an adequate standard of living.
  28. Right to education with primary schooling free and compulsory and further education accessible to all.
  29. Right to development of child's talents to their fullest potential, of respect for human rights and freedoms, in preparation for a responsible life in a free society.
  30. Right for children of minority or indigenous population to practise their own culture, religion and language.
  31. Right to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities.
  32. Right to protection from economic exploitation.
  33. Right to protection from drug abuse.
  34. Right to protection from sexual exploitation.
  35. Right to protection from sale, trafficking and abduction.
  36. Right to protection from all other forms of exploitation.
  37. Right to protection from torture and deprivation of liberty.
  38. Right to protection from recruitment into armed forces of children under 15.
  39. Right to physical and psychological treatment if abused, tortured, neglected or harmed during an armed conflict.
  40. Right to fair treatment and legal assistance if in conflict with the law in order to be reintegrated into society.
- The other Articles (there are 49 altogether) deal with United Nations administrative matters.



## Wars and conflicts

Matters of morality on a national level, such as war, need special consideration. What happens when there is a conflict between two societies? It is easy to write about the theory of ethical or moral codes. But when these clash in real life, reasoned argument can give way to dramatic action, as in the case of war. If one nation sees another being treated badly by a third party, what should it do? Should it respect the rights of rulers to do what they want, or should it take action? When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, was NATO morally right to declare war on the Iraqi regime? When it became apparent that Yugoslavia's programme of ethnic cleansing within Kosovo was escalating during 1999, was it morally right for NATO to declare war on Belgrade? Consider the war between Chechnya and Russia. Why does a third country not intervene? Or consider the civil war within Sierra Leone. United Nations troops support a fragile peace process in that country, yet are not involved in peace making in Northern Ireland, the Congo or Kashmir. Fighting in Rwanda between two tribes, the Hutus and the Tutsis also raised huge questions for the international community in terms of who to support. International peace keeping is a positive departure but the international community is not always united on when and where that peace keeping should be undertaken.

### Reasons given for war

There are political, economic, geographic, military and trade considerations to all wars. These are taken into account when deciding whether or not to declare war. Moral and ethical issues take their place in a hierarchy of values.

### Just War theory

Some religious traditions promote what is known as the Just War theory. Christianity and

Islam are the most notable. The Just War theory is not accepted by all Christians nor by all Muslims, but it forms part of an ethical framework for both religions.

### Christianity

St. Augustine (354–430) developed the idea of the Just War on the basis that war was commanded by God to restore the world to peace and was not to be waged for personal benefit.

In order to accept this argument, two distinctions are made: the distinction between the morality applicable to individuals and the morality applicable to nations and the distinction between love and justice.

Jesus' teaching applies directly to individual morality where love of neighbour implies love of friend and enemy. War is hardly a way to show love of enemy. But the issue of justice takes the personal ethic of love on to another level. If war is waged based on a question of justice, then the Christian tradition argues that it is a Just War.

### Islam

Islam views all life (including animal and plant life) as God-given and its rules governing the conduct of a just war reflect this. They forbid the destruction of crops, injury to animals or to civilians. They also forbid the destruction of places of worship. Given modern weapons of war, many Muslims question whether any war can be just. In classical Muslim thinking, there is no room for war between Muslims unless the majority regards some Muslims as having compromised Muslim principles.

The concept of *jihad* or armed struggle to establish what is believed to be legitimate

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Muslim rule also exists. But it is important to recognise that a minority promotes it. Some Muslims believe that it is not only morally justifiable but also a religious duty to kill any Muslim ruler who is in their view un-Islamic. Some also believe that terrorism against Western interests is also justifiable since they regard the West as being anti the Muslim world.

### Religious wars

It must be acknowledged that religion is often the cause of wars throughout the world. In the Middle Ages the Crusades were justified by Christians. Today fighting between Jews and Arabs in Israel and the West Bank are justified by the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Civil unrest within Northern Ireland is fuelled by Roman Catholic or Protestant beliefs. Of course, the political, economic, geographic, military and trade considerations cited above also play a part. But sadly, religion is involved too.

### Sanctions

It may be argued that international sanctions against a country are a form of war. Sanctions do not necessarily solve a problem. In the case of South Africa, international sanctions did play a positive role in bringing down the apartheid government and ushering in multi-party elections. But in the case of Iraq, international sanctions have failed to bring about the resignation or downfall of the present regime. International sanctions against Iraq have resulted in massive humanitarian suffering for the population, especially women and children.

### War crimes

War crimes are crimes carried out in wars that criminally violate the laws and customs of war and its related principles as contained in the Geneva Convention of 1949.

War Crime trials are a relatively new thing whereby the world holds individuals responsible for their war crimes. The first trials

took place after World War II. The Nuremberg Trials and the Tokyo Trials are the most famous. They charged people with crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

More recently war crime trials have been held to try perpetrators of crimes against humanity in Rwanda. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) was created by the United Nations in 1994. People have been convicted for murder, torture, rape, genocide and the encouragement of others to kill.

On July 17 1998 the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was approved. The court is empowered to try persons accused of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression. Its headquarters are in the Hague, Netherlands. The establishment of such a court is a direct result of the criminal trials following World War I (1914–1918) and World War II (1939–1945), the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the early 1990s and the civil war in Rwanda in 1994. Those involved in genocide and ethnic cleansing in 1999 are also being brought to trial.

War crime trials demonstrate that the world cannot and will not tolerate crimes against humanity. They are a way to avoid seeking revenge for atrocities but to seek justice for the wrongs inflicted on people.

### The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

In December 1995, South Africa established its Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Following the collapse of apartheid, the option of trials to deal with the atrocities of the past was rejected. To those who had committed gross violations of human rights, South Africa offered amnesty in exchange for public disclosure of the truth about their crimes. The victims of crimes were offered the opportunity to be heard, as well as the possibility of reparations. The Chair of the Commission,

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu, described the process as both a spiritual and a judicial undertaking. Extraordinary scenes of forgiveness and repentance were drawn out by the hearings. Reconciliation after conflict is not easy, but the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers the world a pioneering way in which to deal with conflict.

## Refugees

The biggest casualties of war are civilians and it is usually the women and the children who suffer most. The idea of hospitality, sanctuary and welcoming the stranger is common to most faiths, particularly Islam and Judaism. But with the growing number of refugees and displaced people world-wide, the resources and goodwill of local communities can be strained.

Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their country because of a well-founded fear of persecution. Refugees cannot rely on the protection of their own Government and so have to rely on the international community to respond to their needs.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has special oversight of refugees. The most important responsibilities of the UNHCR are:

*'providing international protection... and... seeking permanent solutions to the problem of refugees by assisting Governments....to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of such refugees, or their assimilation within new national communities.'*<sup>1</sup>

According to its Statute, UNHCR will assist any person who:

*'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable*

*or, owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country....'*<sup>2</sup>

Today, UNHCR makes a broader assessment of general conditions in a given country, rather than examining each person's claim to refugee status. UNHCR provides protection and assistance to refugees fleeing persecution, conflict or widespread violation of human rights.

There are over 27 million refugees of concern to UNHCR today and over 80% of these are women and children. From Rwanda to Afghanistan, Somalia to Chechnya, women are fleeing war and repression and are leaving behind husbands, fathers and brothers who are either fighting or are dead.

## WAGGGS involvement with refugees

In December 1993, WAGGGS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the UNHCR as part of a three year Peace Initiative. The relationship between WAGGGS and the UNHCR involved raising the awareness of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts throughout the world to the plight of refugees. Many Associations were involved in "Peace Pack" project – practical assistance given to refugee children. Girl Guide Associations in The Gambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Liberia and Sierra Leone are working directly with refugee communities in skills training and income generating activities. In Uganda, Zambia and Egypt, WAGGGS is involved with the Health of Adolescent Refugees Project (HARP). This programme aims to empower adolescent refugees to improve their health.

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly Resolutions 319 (IV) of 3 December 1949 and 428 (V) of 14 December 1950.

<sup>2</sup> General Assembly Resolution 428 (V), para. 6



## Justice and mercy

Justice and mercy are spiritual values. On a personal and a community level, they imply equality of opportunity, care for individuals and compassion. They do not allow for revenge, yet for some people a lack of punishment for a wrongdoing such as murder is justice denied.

The line between the desire for justice and the desire for revenge can be very thin. The need for mercy and forgiveness in the face of wrongdoing is acute. The work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission was rooted in the belief that our relationship to others is central to our existence as human beings. Reconciliation, not revenge is the key.

All the world's religions encourage their followers to do acts of mercy. Countless people with and without religious affiliation are moved to compassion by human suffering. Acts of mercy are desperately needed everywhere. But they are not enough. Acts of mercy are described as 'band-aid', a temporary remedy for complex and deep seated problems. Issues of social justice, human rights and the inequality of distribution of the world's resources are not easily solved.

### Jubilee 2000

Justice means fairness and equity. The Jubilee 2000 campaign is concerned with both. The gap between rich and poor countries continues to widen and disparities in wealth and income are increasing everywhere. The poorest countries of the world are stuck in debt, debt that they owe to the richest countries like Germany, USA and Britain. The Jubilee 2000 campaign thinks that those debts should be cancelled so that the poorest countries can spend their billions of dollars on themselves

instead of giving it to the richest countries. They desperately need that money for food, education and health care.

- 13 children die every minute in Africa because of debt.
- For every pound received in aid, Africans pay £3.00 in debt repayments.
- Africa spends more on debt repayments than on health care.
- In Jamaica, the national debt is the equivalent of every man, woman and child owing £1000 to western banks. The average wage is £300 per year.
- Effective debt relief to the 20 worst affected countries in the world is the same as the cost of building Euro-Disney. Relief is less than the cost of one stealth bomber.
- The combined wealth of the world's seven richest men could wipe out poverty and provide basic social services for the quarter of the world who live in severe need.
- Nearly one third of the developing world's population live on less than one dollar a day.
- More than 800 million people do not have enough to eat.

### Cancel the debt!

Western governments have begun to announce cancellation of debts to the most impoverished countries provided the money is used for development projects. But there is much more to be done. The Jubilee 2000 campaign is backed by religious leaders throughout the world and by individuals and organizations with no particular faith perspective. The cancellation of third world debt is a moral imperative and a spiritual concern. It unites the concepts of justice and mercy.

## Justice and mercy

### The world of business

Justice and mercy is also needed in the world of business. Fair trade that ensures that people are paid a fair price for the product that they produce, irrespective of fluctuation on the world markets is called for. The World Trade Organization tries to ensure moral fairness in international trade agreements. (See Module Eight).



## Personal dilemmas

### Purpose

To encourage participants to think about personal dilemmas and what they would do.

### Materials

The examples below

### What to do

How do you tell right from wrong? When is a lie not a lie? When is stealing something the lesser of two evils? When is wrong right? These are personal questions and the answers are shaped by many factors: individual circumstance, personal upbringing, cultural expectations, religious belief and moral codes, natural law and the law of the country in which you live.

Some people think that it is fine to do their own thing, so long as they are not hurting anyone else. Is this objectively true? Is there a right answer to these questions?

Moral decision-making requires thought and courage. People need to be encouraged to think about and to analyse the moral frameworks within which they live as individuals. These will be influenced by factors such as culture, religious belief and upbringing. Courage is needed to be true to ourselves but not at the expense of others.

Invite participants to consider the following situations. People should work in groups of 5–6 participants. Encourage people to respect each other's point of view. Group leaders will need to be sensitive in facilitating this exercise.

1. Your friend has become pregnant. She is 16 and now find that she does not love, nor even like, her boyfriend who is the father of the child. What should she do?
2. Your boyfriend is insisting that you should have sex with him to show that you love him. Role play saying 'no'. Discuss what you would do if he persists.
3. An older man that you have known for some years has started to pay you attention that makes you feel uncomfortable. Role play how you could tell him that his advances are not acceptable to you. Discuss what you would do if he persists. Who would you tell?
4. You can tell that your sister is unhappy. She makes you promise not to tell anyone. She then tells you that she is being bullied at school by an older girl. What should you do? Is it ever right to break a promise?
5. Anyone not wearing a cap at roll call is shot automatically. One man steals another man's cap. This man then steals the cap from someone else. Discuss the actions of the second man. Is it ever right to do wrong?



## Personal dilemmas

6. Many people smoke and drink and in most countries this is quite legal. Complete these sentences and discuss:

Smoking:

Yes it's OK when.....

No it's not OK when.....

Short-term consequences of smoking are.....

Long-term consequences of smoking are.....

Drinking:

Yes it's OK when.....

No it's not OK when.....

Short-term consequences of drinking are.....

Long-term consequences of drinking are....

7. You are told that one of your best friend's mothers is HIV+. How would this change the way you feel about:

- your friend
- visiting her home
- your friend's mother?

8. You are going to a party with a group of friends. There are a lot of people that you don't know there including older boys and girls. While you are sitting together someone you don't know comes up to your group and ask if any of you wants to try something that will make you happy. Several of your friends say yes, and then try to persuade you.

What would you do? Make this into a short play.

9. You don't like boys but you do get on very well with your girlfriends. Lately most of your girlfriends have started to go out with boys. You resent this and argue with them about it. They get angry and call you names and say that you are not normal. You think that this might be true.

Discuss these questions:

- What is 'normal' sexuality?
- How would you react to someone who told you that they wanted to have relationships with others of the same sex?
- What has your religion to say about same-sex relationships? What does it say about tolerance?



## Human needs – Human rights

### Purpose

To encourage participants to consider the relationship between ‘needs’ and ‘rights’.

### Materials

Pens, paper, the lists below

### What to do

What do humans need? What are human rights?

Working in pairs, get participants to draw up two lists: one of ‘needs’ and the other of ‘rights’.

Then ask each pair to compare its lists with another pair. What is the same? What is different? What is missing? Who is missing?

Finally, get the whole group to agree a list together and then compare it with the conclusions of the United Nations as listed below:

### Human needs

Physical:

- Clothing
- Health
- Food
- Shelter
- Water

Psychological:

- Achievement
- Challenge
- Creativity
- Friendship
- Imagination
- Independence
- Learning
- Love
- Participation
- Recognition
- Recreation

- Respect
- Security
- Self-expression
- Self-fulfilment
- Self-respect
- Sense of meaning
- Work

HUMAN RIGHTS (as stated in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

The right to:

- Life
- Liberty and security of person
- Not to be a slave
- Not to be tortured
- Protection of the law
- A fair and public hearing in the courts
- Be presumed innocent until proved guilty
- Freedom of movement and residence
- Marry and found a family
- Own property
- Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
- Freedom of opinion and expression
- Freedom of peaceful assembly and association
- Seek and receive information and ideas
- Take part in politics
- Work
- Fair wages and equal pay for equal work
- Social security
- Join a trade union
- Rest and leisure
- Education

Without distinction of any kind such as: race, colour, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national origin, social origin, property, and birth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an exercise in *It's Not Fair!* BCC, London 1985



## Women and human rights

### Purpose

For participants to discuss what they think are the most important human rights for women and to decide to take action in support of each other on one issue.

### Materials

Pens, paper

### What to do

Share the following information with the group:

In 1995 women from around the world gathered in Beijing, China for a major conference sponsored by the United Nations. The purpose of the conference was to look at the position of women throughout the world and to make universal recommendations for further progress towards gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Twelve critical areas of concern emerged known as the *Beijing Platform for Action*:

1. Women and poverty
2. Education and training for women
3. Women and health
4. Violence against women
5. Women and armed conflict
6. Women and the economy
7. Women in power and decision-making
8. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women
9. Human rights
10. Women and the media
11. Women and the environment
12. The girl child

The *Beijing Platform for Action* is one of the most comprehensive articulations of government's commitments to the human rights of women and girls. It is based on the growing understanding in the 1990s that Women's Rights are Human Rights. In June 2000, the *Beijing + 5* Conference was held in New York to evaluate the progress made in the last five years for women world-wide. If spirituality is something to do with a search for wholeness, with justice, with right relationships with each other and a Supreme Being, then women's rights have a spiritual dimension too.

Questions for discussion:

1. Invite participants to decide what is the most important human rights issue for them as a girl/young woman. Brainstorm the responses on a large sheet of paper.
2. Why have people focused on this issue? Is it a key concern in the local community or is it generally ignored?
3. March 8 is *International Women's Day*. It is a day to celebrate the rights of women throughout the world. Why not celebrate together?



### *DID YOU KNOW>>>>?*

- *In the US a woman is beaten every 18 minutes.*
- *In Peru, 70% of all crimes reported to police involved women beaten by their husbands.*
- *In the 400 cases of domestic violence reported in 1993 in the province of Punjab, Pakistan, nearly half ended with the death of the wife.*
- *Violence affects the life of women across the world, regardless of class or education. It cuts across cultural and religious barriers and impedes the right of women to participate fully in society. Domestic violence alone is on the increase.*
- *Sadly, religious communities have often provided no safe haven from violence. Religious leaders have sent women back to violent relationships. This must change.*
- *What is the situation in your own country?*

<sup>1</sup> Source: Internet



## Refugee women

### Purpose

To encourage participants to think about their response to strangers in their communities and to find out more about the situation of refugees, especially women.

### Materials needed

The readings below (optional)

### What to do

80% of the world's refugees are women and children. If there are any refugees in the group, extreme sensitivity is needed in this module. It would be wise to speak with the person in advance to explain the session and to ask if they would be willing to contribute their story.

Questions and activities for group discussion

1. Does anyone have the experience of living in a country other than the one they were born in? What did it feel like? How did you cope?
2. If a stranger arrives in your school, college or local community, what do you feel? What do you do? Why?
3. Imagine that you are a refugee family. Write the story of your life before the war. Write the story of your life now. What connections are there between your old and new lives?
4. Mime how it feels to be a refugee. Use music or rhythm but no words.

5. Find out about refugees living in your area. How are they helped to feel part of the community? Is their culture and way of life respected? What can we learn from them?
6. Can the group think of one way that it might support a refugee family or project?

Read the following *Voices of Refugee Women* (optional activity depending on the nature of the group). After each reading, invite people to respond. How do they feel?

Voices of Refugee Women<sup>1</sup>

*'Men are free to move. If there is a problem in the camp, they can run. But we women are walking with children and we can't run, we can't move, we can't take any decision to travel as easily as men.'*

A Somali woman in Ethiopia

*'We saw another boat approaching ours. It was at least 10 times larger than ours. Then we saw the pirates. They were wielding hatchets and knives. They seemed like wild beasts. I embraced my husband and son for the last time. We tried to calm ourselves and be strong..... They separated me from my husband and my son. They took me to their boat. It began to move....It was difficult to distinguish the shouts of the pirates from the screams of the victims....I don't know how many days passed. Night and day, they violated us. There were three women among us. We were exhausted, we were like cadavers. We weren't strong enough to shout or do anything. I thought of biting my tongue and killing myself. But*



## Refugee women

*every time I thought of my husband and my son, I thought maybe they were still alive and I had to look for them. This hope let me survive.'*

A Vietnamese woman who sought refuge in Thailand.

*'I had to carry four heavy 81mm mortar bombs, even though I am very small. They were so heavy I almost couldn't hold them on my back, but the soldiers made me carry them over high mountains. They didn't give us food very often, and when they did it was just some rice which had gone rotten. Going over the mountains, there was no water for the porters either, and every day we got weaker and weaker....'*

*We had no blankets and only the clothes we were arrested in, so it was very cold at night and easy to get sick. But I didn't have much time to think about the cold because the soldiers always came for me at night.*

*Because I was young and single, they all wanted to rape me and every night I got raped more than most of the others.... You could always hear women's screams at night, if they were strong enough to scream. Then in the morning, they made me carry the bombs again.*

A woman who escaped brutality in Myanmar.

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR *Refugee Women*



## The rights of the child where you live

### Purpose

To encourage participants to think about the rights of the child in their own communities and nation and the responsibilities that go hand in hand with those rights.

### Materials needed

The table below, pencils

### What to do

How are children treated in your locality? All children have rights, but with those rights there are responsibilities too. For example, if all children have the right to ten years free education, they have the responsibility to study and to go to school.

Invite participants to complete the questionnaire individually, then discuss in small groups.

Brainstorm a list of organizations and individuals that provide care and protection for children in your locality. How can you take part in this work?

	YES	NO	RESPONSIBILITY
<i>All children have at least ten years of free, compulsory education.</i>			
<i>All children enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and religion.</i>			
<i>All children are protected from physical and verbal abuse.</i>			
<i>All children with disabilities are given special care, education and training to enable them to achieve as much social integration and self-reliance as possible.</i>			
<i>All children enjoy an adequate standard of living.</i>			
<i>All children belonging to an indigenous population or ethnic minority can practise their own culture, religion and language.</i>			
<i>All children are protected from sexual abuse or exploitation.</i>			
<i>All children have access to the highest possible standard of health care.</i>			