

Guidelines for Golden Rule Workshop

Why Create a Golden Rule Workshop

At a dramatic pace, more and more regions of the world are becoming environments of multi-culture and multi-faith. This trend is having a profound effect upon public education, religious education, ethical education and education for social justice. Growing numbers of educators are discovering that religious and ethical education can no longer be conducted from the perspective of only one religion or culture. Indeed, religious educators of the future will call upon the wisdom and teachings of numerous religious and humanist traditions.

These guidelines are meant to be a small step toward this now-and-future direction. In this proposed workshop or group discussion experience, participants will be invited to reflect from the perspective of a universal moral principle - the Golden Rule - in its many and various expressions across the world's religions.

People are often surprised and pleased to discover versions of the Golden Rule in so many religions and secular philosophies. In this workshop, you will be working with 13 expressions of the Golden Rule. It should be noted, however, that researchers have discovered versions in numerous other religious traditions. Because the Golden Rule crosses so many traditions and philosophies, it possesses tremendous moral authority and indicates a profound human unity.

This workshop has been tested in a number of environments and has consistently generated great enthusiasm, reflection and discussion. Any group or individual who decides to sponsor it can expect rich and varied responses. This workshop also aims to provide tools for reflection and action in terms of the great ethical and social issues of our time.

Preparation

This is a do-it-yourself workshop. The guidelines that follow are meant to equip an individual or group to sponsor, create and facilitate a Golden Rule Across the World's Religions workshop. Any group interested in sponsoring this workshop would benefit by first forming a planning group.

The planning group can review the range of choices and options outlined in these detailed guidelines. Again, these are just guidelines. The planning group may want to change, adapt or shorten the proposed program. For example, the guidelines contain

suggested time frames for various sections of the program. But these are just suggestions and can be varied.

You will note that there is a good deal of time allotted for the participants to do private reflection during the workshop. The developers of these guidelines have learned that the process of individual reflection deepens the experience of the participants. Again, the planning group may want to vary this component of the process.

The target audience for this workshop is both adults and youth. It is hoped, for example, that this program will be utilized in adult and youth education programs in mosques, temples, gurdwaras, synagogues, churches, meditation centres, spiritual fellowships, etc. In fact, on a given day, an adult workshop and a children's workshop can be offered simultaneously in the same locale.

Please note that the constituency for this workshop can be a single-faith or a multi-faith audience. This workshop is also relevant to audiences that do not define themselves as "religious" or "spiritual" because the workshop content deals largely with ethics.

What you will need for the workshop

- Paper and pens for journaling
- Flip chart for use in Steps 4, 5 & 9 below
- Questions selected for use in Step 4
- Preparatory questions for small group discussion (Step 5)
- Questions about the learning and experience of workshop participants (Step 9)
- Evaluation forms (Step 11)
- A copy of the 13 Sacred Writings for each workshop participant
- Golden Rule poster featuring a symbolic and written depiction of the Golden Rule in 13 religions. The poster is not necessary for the workshop but is a helpful visual aid.

Workshop outline in 13 steps:

Here follows a framework of 13 steps to guide the planning group in developing and presenting its workshop. As an aid to the planning group and facilitator, these steps are listed in both short form and long form:

Step 1 - Welcome & Introduction

Step 2 - Distribution of Sacred Texts

- Step 3 - Silent Meditation
- Step 4 - Individual Reflection
- Step 5 - Preparation for Group Discussion
- Step 6 - Group Discussion
- Step 7 - Plenary Discussion
- Step 8 - Appropriation of Learnings
- Step 9 - Sharing of Learnings
- Step 10 - Facilitator's Comments
- Step 11 - Evaluation
- Step 12 - Next Steps
- Step 13 - Closing Prayer/Meditation

Step 1 - Welcome & Introduction

Facilitator welcomes the participants and outlines the program and process of the workshop. If the group is not too large, participants can be asked to introduce themselves and comment on what attracted them to this workshop.

Step 2 - Distribution of Sacred Texts

Facilitator provides each participant with a sheet containing the 13 written versions of the Golden Rule.

Step 3 - Silent Meditation

All participants are invited to spend a few minutes in silence, reading and reflecting on the 13 Sacred Writings. Facilitator can explain that the practice of reflection and meditation on sacred texts in silence is common to many religious traditions.
Suggested time frame: 5 to 7 minutes

Step 4 - Individual Reflection

Workshop participants continue their private and silent reflection in response to two or three questions provided them by the facilitator. The questions can also be listed on a flipchart. Participants may wish to journal their reflections. Suggested time frame: 7 to 12 minutes.

Prior to the workshop, the planning group prepares two or three questions appropriate to its audience, to stimulate private reflection and group discussion. The planners may want to provide just one question. On the other hand, they may choose

more than two or three questions, perhaps as many as five or six. By increasing the number of questions, the planners are able to provide more rich material for reflection. However, more questions may lead to overstimulation of the individual reflections and of the subsequent small group process and plenary. So again, this is a decision for the planning group.

If the constituency is a specialized group (e.g. hospital chaplains, teachers, teenagers, social justice activists), questions can be geared to its specific needs. If the constituency wants to deal with a specific issue (e.g. ecology, social justice, violence, compassion), the questions can likewise be oriented to such.

Numerous sample questions are listed below, by clicking each of the three categories:

- a) the message of the Golden Rule
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/workshop_guidelines.php#golden_message
- b) the message of the Golden Rule for you
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/workshop_guidelines.php#golden_message_you
- c) the Golden Rule and its implications for society
http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/workshop_guidelines.php#golden_rule_society

Step 5 - Preparation for Group Discussion

Each participant prepares for the small group discussion by quietly reflecting for a few minutes on the fruit of her/his meditation in Step 4. To stimulate this reflection, the facilitator provides each participant with the following questions (please note that the purpose here is not to repeat or rehash the reflection of the previous step but to prepare the participant for the small group discussion.):

What new insights, thoughts, questions or good ideas do I have as a result of my reflection on these Sacred Writings?

What feelings surfaced in me as I perused these writings?

What would I like to share with my small group?

How will I share, briefly, but completely?

Journaling is optional. Suggested time frame: 3 to 5 minutes

Step 6 - Group Discussion

Participants break into discussion groups (4 to 7 persons per group). The planning group may want to designate group leaders in advance. Suggested time frame: 20 to 45 minutes

Step 7 - Plenary Discussion

Facilitator convenes all participants into a plenary. Participants are invited to give feedback by way of either group reports or spontaneous comments. It may be helpful to record key elements of the feedback content on flip chart paper. Following the feedback, the facilitator stimulates discussion within the plenary. Suggested time frame: 20 to 45 minutes

Step 8 - Appropriation of Learnings

Facilitator asks each participant to take some quiet time (4 to 7 minutes) to reflect on her/his experience of and learnings from the program (journalling is optional). Some of the following questions can be used to stimulate private reflection:

What have I learned during this workshop?
What new insights have surfaced for me?
What is coming clearer to me, now?
As a result of this workshop, I feel moved to.....

Step 9 - Sharing of Learnings

Facilitator asks some or all of the participants to share one learning from the program. These could be recorded on a flip chart. Alternatively, these learnings could also be shared in groups of two.

Step 10 - Facilitator's Comments

At this point, the facilitator may want to share some specific or general comments on the notion of The Golden Rule Across The World's Religions. The facilitator may also want to comment on the feedback reports and plenary discussion and make a summary statement.

Step 11 - Evaluation

Participants are invited to evaluate the workshop process. The planning group may design evaluation forms in advance.

Step 12 - Next Steps

The facilitator and participants take some time to determine if they want to do any follow-up to this workshop. For example, would it be helpful to organize additional workshops? Or to integrate the themes and learnings of this workshop into other projects that the participants or planning group are involved in?

Step 13 - Closing Prayer/Meditation

Workshop could close with an experience of prayer/meditation/liturgy/song/poetry/chant related to the theme. One option is to have people meditate quietly for a minute on the Sacred Writings. Following this, 13 individuals can recite, one-by-one, in a rotation fashion, the individual sacred texts.

Sample questions for use in step 4

In Step 4, the participants are invited to do individual reflection in response to two or three questions provided by the facilitator. The planning group is responsible for creating these reflection questions. To aid the planning group in this task, numerous sample questions are listed below, divided into three categories:

- a) the message of the Golden Rule
- b) the message of the Golden Rule for you
- c) the Golden Rule & its implications for society

a) The message of the Golden Rule

- What is the message of the Golden Rule?
- A similar moral principle is expressed in the Sacred Writings of these 13 religious traditions. What conclusions can you draw from this fact?
- Can you see differences and similarities among the 13 Sacred Texts? What are they?
- Virtually all religions and spiritual traditions emphasize love and compassion for neighbour. How, in your opinion, does this universal teaching relate to the message of these Sacred Writings?
- Are you aware of the title or message of a TV program, book or popular song which expresses the same idea as the Golden Rule? Explain.

b) The message of the Golden Rule for you

- Which expression of the Golden Rule do you like the best? Why?
- How would you express the Golden Rule in your own words?
- Think of one occasion when someone treated you in the spirit of the Golden Rule. When was that? Who was involved? What was that like for you? How did you feel? How do you understand the behaviour of the other party involved in this incident?
- Think of one occasion when you treated someone in the spirit of the Golden Rule. When was that? Who was involved? What was that like for you? How did you feel? What is your sense of the other party's reaction to your behaviour in that situation?
- Think of one occasion when someone treated you in a manner that violated the Golden Rule. When was that? Who was involved? What was that like for you? How did you feel? How do you understand the behaviour of the other party involved in that incident?
- Think of one occasion when you treated someone in a manner that violated the Golden Rule. When was that? Who was involved? What was that like for you? How did you feel? What is your sense of the other party's reaction to your behaviour in that situation?
- Did anything in these Sacred Writings get you thinking? Identify it. Did it interest, stimulate or energize you? Or, did it irritate, challenge or bewilder you? Why?
- What surprises you about these Sacred Texts? Why? What challenges you? Puzzles you? Why?
- What insights or good ideas come to you as you reflect on these Sacred Writings?
- What doubts or questions are raised for you as you ponder these Sacred Texts?
- Has anything in these Sacred Writings so caught your interest that you might want to investigate it more fully? What? Why?
- Is there something you can name within your workplace (or school, family, city, etc.) that promotes or prevents the practice of the Golden Rule?
- If you were to live by the Golden Rule each and every day, what would be different in your life? Your personal life? Family life? Work Life? Community Life? etc.
- Can the Golden Rule be realistically applied in day-to-day life? Why or why not? Can you think of a good example from your experience? Describe it.
- Do you belong to one of the 13 spiritual traditions represented in this collection of Sacred Texts? If so, how do you understand your tradition's version of the Golden Rule in light of the other 12? And how do you understand the other 12 in light of yours?

- Some people argue that the Golden Rule contains a profound call to solidarity with neighbor, a profound call to empathy and compassion for all. As you read and reflect on these 13 Sacred Writings, do you believe it is really possible for you "to get inside another person's skin", "to walk in your neighbor's moccasins", to feel the joy and pain of another person? Explain.
- In light of these 13 Sacred Writings, what is your reaction to the following statement: "my search for happiness, meaning and freedom has everything to do with my commitment to bringing about your happiness, your meaning and your freedom"?
- Do you see ways in which these Sacred Texts could be helpful to you in terms of prayer and meditation? Explain.
- As a result of my reflections on these Sacred Writings, I feel moved to.....

c) The Golden Rule's implications for society

- What could things be like if everyone behaved according to the Golden Rule? Why is it that sometimes we don't behave according to the Golden Rule?
- Do you think that people generally live by the Golden Rule? Why? Why not? If not, what Rule do you think many people do live by?
- How do people usually treat each other at work (school, home, etc.)? Why is that so? How might the Golden Rule make a difference?
- To what current issue in your city or country might the Golden Rule offer a solution? How so?
- Do you think that these Sacred Writings could be helpful in promoting conversation, communication and harmony within a family? Why or why not? Do you think that these writings could be helpful in promoting such communication among families, including families of various faiths? Why or why not?
- Select a social, political, economic or religious issue that interests you. How might these Sacred Writings contribute to your thinking about or acting on this issue?
- How, in your opinion, do these Sacred Texts challenge us in terms of our relationships with people who are hurting e.g. the hospitalized, the imprisoned, the abused, the homeless, refugees etc.?
- Do you think that these Sacred Writings could be helpful in bringing about equality between women and men? Why or why not?
- Do you think that these Sacred Texts could be helpful in healing a societal disease known as racism? Why or why not?
- Taoist Golden Rule in Chinese language. English translation: 'Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss.' Taoist Golden Rule in Chinese language. English translation: "Regard

your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss.”

- Do you think that these Sacred Writings could be helpful in promoting a deeper appreciation of racial, cultural and religious diversity? Why or why not?
- From the domestic to the international level, there appears to be a growing reliance on violence to resolve conflict? Do you think that these Sacred Writings could be helpful in promoting a non-violent approach to conflict-resolution? Why or why not?
- For all beings on this planet, ecological destruction is a threatening development. Do you think that these Sacred Texts could be helpful in efforts to protect and heal Mother Earth? Why or why not?
- Do you think that these Sacred Texts could be helpful in efforts to promote social and economic justice for all? Why or Why not?
- Do you see any connection between the message of these 13 Sacred Writings and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Why or Why not?
- Across the planet, thousands of people including educators, humanitarians and religious people are working to develop a Global Ethic (www.global-ethic.org). This effort to develop a universal ethic, which calls upon the wisdom of the world's many religions, considers the Golden Rule to be a key reference point. Here, the Golden Rule is not just a moral ideal for relationships between people but also for relationships among nations, cultures, races and religions. Do you think that the development of a Global Ethic is important? Why or why not? If yes, do you think that the Golden Rule could make an important contribution to this universal ethic? Why or why not?
- Do you think that these Sacred Texts could be helpful in efforts to promote interfaith dialogue? Why or why not?
- Where do you think there is a special need for these Sacred Writings today? Why?

Other helpful hints for the planning group

1) Ideal number of participants for workshop: This workshop could be conducted with a handful of participants or with as many as 200 participants. Larger audience sizes will necessitate more sophisticated planning and more skills on the part of the facilitator.

2) Estimated time frame of workshop: A trimmed-down version of this workshop could be conducted in an hour. On the other hand, the workshop could be a day-long event.

3) An extra step: In Step 6 of the workshop outline, participants are invited to break into small groups (4 to 7 people). An alternative to this is to have participants work in groups of two.

4) Using the arts: To enrich the workshop, the planners may want to integrate music, art, dance, culture, etc. into the program.

5) Breaks: The number, positioning and duration of breaks are left to the discretion of the planning group and facilitator.

"We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings. . . . We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception."

--from Towards a Global Ethic - An Initial Declaration, signed by 300 representatives of the world's religions at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago

Resources

The Scarborough Missions website features a Helpful Resources section that contains one of the most comprehensive collections of Golden Rule resources in the world. Most of these resources are free. Many are oriented to youth. Some are interfaith-related. Also included is a listing of Golden Rule websites. Here is the link: http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/made_of_gold.php#11

Authors

The guidelines in this document were developed by Paul McKenna; Paul collaborated with a number of individuals in creating the Scarborough Missions Golden Rule Poster. Currently he functions as Interfaith Co-ordinator for Scarborough Missions. The quality of this document is also largely the result of consultation with a number of individuals, all of whom are committed to interracial, intercultural and interreligious cooperation. These persons are: Joel Beversluis, Ellen Campbell, Gerald Filson, Fr. J.P. Horrigan S.J., Leslie Mezei, Tony Muhitch, Paul Nazareth, Patricia O'Connor, Fr. Ray O'Toole SFM, Charles Purdy, Joseph Romain, Ted Slavin, Kathy VanLoon, Beverly Vantomne, Sharon Willan, Larry Windland.

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These Golden Rule workshop guidelines were inspired by the Golden Rule Across the World's Religions poster.

How to Order the Golden Rule Poster

This striking and beautiful four-colour poster (22" X 29") features a symbolic and scriptural depiction of the golden rule in 13 religions. Produced by Scarboro Missions, the poster is now being used in schools, homes, hospitals, prisons, universities, workplaces and congregations.

Order the Poster Now!

http://www.scarboromissions.ca/Golden_rule/poster_order.php