

Spirituality for Children

(ages 8 to 14 and all ages everywhere)

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Series I - The Foundation

Unit 1 - The Basics

Lesson 2 - **What is Religion?**

Religion is organized spirituality which is focused on the *Letter of the Law* it establishes as truth. Laws are most often written down in a sacred book or books like the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas, etc. Religions have belief systems which are seen by their members as exclusive and singularly correct. Religions have creeds, or statements of what they believe. (see Reference 1 - 10 Insights) They usually have an historical founder and groups of passionate followers who systematize the Laws of that religion. Christianity has Jesus and his teachings which were then spread by Peter and then by hundreds of others who started different branches of Christianity such as Martin Luther, founder of the Luthern Church, Joseph Smith who started the Mormon Church, Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science Movement and many, many more. All of the other major religions of the world also have several to many different branches or denominations. (Reference 2 - *The Big Religion Chart* shows more varieties of religious divisions.) Lessons about different religions are in Unit 3, Lessons 1 - 10.

The *Laws* deal with things like basic beliefs and ethics and morals such as laws about how a person should live - what a person should wear, eat, drink, how to act with other people, things that are proper to do or not do, say, think, and even feel. They also regulated the proper attitude and relationships with *God*. Usually the Laws are seen as having been written by *God*, so Laws that are broken are considered to be *sins* and can have dire consequences and deserve punishment

both now and often even after death. Where a person's *soul* goes after death, to heaven or hell, is often based on their faithfulness in following the Laws or not during their lifetime. But Law breakers (sinners) can sometimes appease *God* through a *transformation* (a radical change in belief) or by performing specific rituals or prayers or by offering "gifts" of money or things along with the promise that they will not repeat the sin.

The Laws of a religion are strictly practiced and taught by men and women such as priests, ministers, monks, nuns, rabbis, mullahs, gurus, shamans, popes, lamas, etc. These *holy* people decide how the Laws should be interpreted and followed and what punishment should be given to Law breakers.

Some religions also believe in *Karma*, which refers to the principle of *causality* where the intent and actions of an individual influence the future of that individual. Good intent and good deeds contribute to good *karma* and future happiness, while bad intent and bad deeds contribute to bad *karma* and future suffering. *Karma* is closely associated with the idea of *rebirth* in some schools of Asian religions. In these schools, *karma* in the present affects one's future in the current life, as well as the nature and quality of future lives.

For religious people, following the Laws of a religion gives them a code of behavior to follow and an all-inclusive set of beliefs meant to give them security in a chaotic world with the promise of rewards in an after-life. *God* is seen as kind and loving to His believers and hostile and punishing to those who do not believe or obey these Laws. Ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, saved and damned are often mutually exclusive as associated with specific religions.

Religions are spiritual organizations which usually apply to a closed group of like-minded people to the exclusion of all others. A religion is based on the literal interpretation of the Laws (*Letter of the Law*) that it sets for its followers.

Religions are often formed and operated according to the cultures in which they originate with their Laws based on ideas and behaviors accepted as desirable

by that culture. Following the *Letter of the Laws*, religions appear on the surface to be very different. But following the *Spirit of the Laws*, all religions ultimately lead to the same core belief that there is a power that is greater than any individual or group that is ultimately good and is the source of all life and love.

Later in this course we will be examining 5 major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. In addition, we will also look at Paganism, New Age Spirituality, Humanism, Atheism and ancient Egyptian and Greek philosophies.

Reflection For Deeper Understanding

I. Meditation - *Body Relaxation*

Sit on the floor with your legs crossed or in a chair with your feet on the floor. Don't cross your ankles or sit with your feet straight out. Let your hands lie quietly in your lap, palms up. Take a few deep breaths and feel the air move through your body. Continue breathing deeply until you feel your body begin to relax. Now close your eyes and focus on the stillness inside. Let your thoughts glide by when they appear. Don't follow your thoughts, just let them go. See them drifting away like in a bubble or a balloon floating along in the breeze.

Take another few deep breaths and close your eyes. This time let your focus go to your legs. Feel your feet relaxing with each breath, your calf muscles going soft, your upper legs loosen and unwind.

Breathe again and in your mind move up to your stomach. Take a few more deep breaths letting your abdomen (lower stomach) expand and contract with each breath. Feel your lower back and hips also loosen. When this area is soft and relaxed, move up to your upper abdomen (your upper stomach area). Feel the air pushing this area up and down, in and out also. Feel the tension in your middle back letting go. Now breathe into your chest. Feel your lungs filling with air and sending nurturing oxygen out to the rest of your body. Relax your upper back and let your arms release and your shoulders (should-ers) relax and loosen with each breath.

Breathe next into your throat and neck, your face and head - all muscles soft and all tension gone. Take a few more deep breaths and thank your body for feeling so good.

Rest quietly now, relaxed, for a few minutes or as long as you feel comfortable resting. Then gently bring your attention back to your body sitting, back to the floor or the chair, back into the room, and finally, when you feel ready, you can open your eyes.

How do you feel right now? What did you feel during the meditation? Were you able to quiet your thoughts and relax your body? What did each part of you feel like before and after breathing into it?

II. Contemplate and Research the following questions - ask yourself, your parents, other adults, your friends, look it up on the internet or find it in a book. Make sure you understand the ideas:

1. Do you belong to a religion? Which one? (include atheism) What are some of your religion's Laws? What are you required to do and not do to be a good person?
2. Do you have any religious practices that you do daily, weekly, monthly or on holy days?
3. Do people of your religion think that their religion is the only "right" one? What do you think?
4. Do you believe in *karma*? Why or why not?
5. Look up these 15 words in a dictionary:
 - a. Religion
 - b. Sacred
 - c. Creed
 - d. Systematize
 - e. Exclusive
 - f. Denomination
 - g. Ethics & Morals
 - h. Sin
 - i. Sinner
 - j. Soul
 - k. Appease
 - l. Transformation
 - m. Karma

- n. After-life
- o. Code of Behavior

III. Activity

The Characteristics of Spirituality & Religion

Put an X in the boxes that apply to Spirituality and/or Religion

	Letter of the Law	Spirit of the Law	God	Love	Sin	Punishment	Reward	Doing	Being	Creed	Creation	Science
Spirituality		X	X									
Religion	X		X									

IV. Reference Materials

1. The Big Religion Chart - www.RELIGIONFACTS.com

2. 10 Top Insights on Understanding Religions -

From The Everything World's Religions Book

- a. The intellectual is constantly betrayed by his vanity. Godlike he blandly assumes that he can express everything in words; whereas the thing one loves, lives, and dies for is not, in the last analysis, completely expressible in words. -Anne Morrow Lindberg
- b. We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart. -H. L. Mencken
- c. I do not feel obligated to believe that the Same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forgo their use. -Galileo
- d. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blind-folded fear. -Thomas Jefferson

- e. You don't have to be religious to have a soul; everybody has one. You don't have to be religious to perfect your soul. I have found saintliness in avowed atheists. -Rabbi Harold Kushner
- f. The theologian considers sin mainly as an offence against God; the moral philosopher as contrary to reasonableness. -St. Thomas Aquinas
- g. As a man can drink water from any side of a full tank, so the skilled theologians can wrest from any scripture that which will serve his purpose. - Bhagavad Gita
- h. I still say a church steeple with a lightning rod on top shows a lack of confidence. -Doug McLeod
- i. I love you when you bow in your mosque, kneel in your temple, pray in your church. For you and I are sons of one religion and that is the spirit. -Khalil Gibran
- j. Religion is the sign of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. *It is the opium of the people.* -Karl Marx

3. World Religions Terminology - [World Religions Terminology with Definitions - ref. 3 .docx](#)