



RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

and the

Golden Rule

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Study Guide

Primal and Indigenous Religions

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franparkcenter.org/golden-rule-2024

agnosticism	polytheism
animism	prophetic
atheism	ritual
belief (system)	sacrament
ethics, values, and morals	sacred
life cycle (rites of passage)	shaman
monotheism	symbol
mystical	taboo
myth	time (linear and cyclical time)
non-theism or nontheism	totem
oral tradition (not written)	transcendent
pantheism	

Various expressions of the Golden Rule by other indigenous peoples:

- Great Spirit, help me to never judge my neighbor until I have walked a mile in her/his moccasins (Sioux/Lakota/Plains Indians)
- Do not wrong or hate your neighbor. For it is not he who you wrong but yourself. (Pima Indians (Arizona))
- Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the sons and daughters of the earth. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand of it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. (Chief Seattle (Salish Nation))
- All things are our relatives. What we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really one. (Black Elk, Oglala/Sioux Elder)
- The hurt of one is the hurt of all; the honor of one is the honor of all. (Traditional First Nations code of ethics, Assembly of Manitoba (Canada) Chiefs)
- Each should do unto others as he would have others do unto himself. (Manco Capac, Inca Leader, Peru)



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The following statement grew out of an interview conducted with Frances Sanderson by Mark Hathaway. Here Sanderson reflects on Chief Dan George (Salish Nation) Golden Rule statement – “*We are as much alive as we keep the Earth alive.*”

Mother Earth

Our life depends on the life of Mother Earth. If Mother Earth gets sick, so shall we. So, we must keep Mother Earth, including all her people, healthy – the creatures who crawl, the ones who swim, the ones who fly. The trees, the bushes, the waters, the air, and the rocks, all of these are part of Mother Earth. If we do anything to harm the balance that has been created for us – if we do anything that shows disrespect – then we are going to become sick, too.

Mother Earth supports all life, and all things on Earth are alive – not just plants and animals – but also the rocks, the air, and the water. Consider the water. Water is so important! It makes up so much of our being. We begin in the water of our mother’s wombs. We need water each and every day. The Creator gave us water to care for. In caring for the waters, we are also caring for our own well-being. Yet, we are not listening to the Creator’s instructions. We are not looking after the waters.

All of the Earth is alive. The Earth is not simply “dirt”, much less a storehouse to be robbed and pillaged. Earth is alive. It is a community of living beings. The word “Mother” must be linked to Earth because all we need, all that sustains us, comes from Mother Earth – the water, the air, our food.

Humans often see themselves as superior to other creatures, yet we are really the weakest link. We depend on all the other creatures of the Earth for our survival. If we killed all the animals, if we fouled all the water, what would we do? We would not be able to exist. It is our responsibility to keep Mother Earth healthy.

The great Lakota Elder, Black Elk, taught that, “All things are our relatives; what we do to everything, we do to ourselves. All is really One.” Native people speak of their brother wolf or their sister loon. We are related to all creatures and we all – quite literally – form a single family. We are related to the trees, to the waters, to other humans. How could we think of doing harm needlessly to any of our sisters or brothers?

If we start to kill Mother Earth, we also start to kill ourselves. We are only alive because of Mother Earth. We are only alive as long as we keep looking after these things.

“We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive”. In many ways, then, this statement of the golden rule by Chief Dan George is absolutely basic. It is the foundation of all. It includes all of creation, not just human beings. It is a simple statement, but also a very broad one. We must treat people, animals, trees, mountains, rocks, and waters with respect.



Respect

Another way of stating the golden rule can be found in the (Iroquois) Six Nations' Great Law of Peace where it says, "Respect for all life is the foundation". We must respect all of creation. Everything made by the Creator – rocks, insects, birds, animals, people, and trees – has a spirit. Each has a reason for being here. The Creator gave instructions to every creature according to the Creator's plan for the world. The pine and birch tree follow the Creator's instructions each day. It is their duty. Even the tiniest flowers bloom and pass away according to the Creator's plan. The birds nest, fly south, and sing according to the Creator's instructions.

People are the only ones who harm each other, and think of ways to do it. Animals don't do that. Yes, animals have to eat, so they do kill for that reason, but they do so in accordance with the instructions given by the Creator. The lion would never eat all of the antelopes or kill them needlessly, because the lion follows its instructions; it takes only what it needs to sustain itself. Why should we humans be any different? Our instructions are very simple: Respect Mother Earth, respect each other, and respect life itself. Respect is the law we must live by. Respect means making room for others, looking out for them, and watching over them. Each of us must be the caretaker of others. Respect, then, means not to abuse any of the Creator's creation.

We must think, not only for our present time, but also for those who will follow us seven generations from now. Seven generations ago, our ancestors thought of us. They were watching over us, making sure that there would be a place in the world for each of us.

We must do the same. We build momentum toward the seventh generation. We can see the eyes of our future in the Earth, and we must look into them. The Creator gave us the Earth to sustain us for all time. Our responsibility is to ensure that the Earth – including all that is part of the web of life – is there for those who come afterwards.

If we respect the animals, we will not abuse them. We will make room for the grass, the insects, and birds. We will only chop down a tree if we truly need to do so, but we will never cut down all the trees. We may kill a deer for food because the Creator put the deer here for that purpose, but we will never harm a deer without reason, and we receive the life of the deer with gratitude.

Respect also means respecting the decisions of others. You do not have to agree with the other person's point of view, but you must try to understand it and treat it with respect. The Lakota have a teaching that says, "Great Spirit, help me to never judge my neighbor until I have walked a mile in his moccasins." We need to know where people are coming from; we need to walk their path before judging them.



Each time we pray, each time we make an offering, each time we speak to the Creator, the bottom line is respect. If we live with respect, we will care for the life of Mother Earth both now and into the future. We will be fully alive because we are keeping the Earth alive.

Frances Sanderson is Ojibwa. The Ojibwa population is equally divided between Canada and the United States. Currently, Frances functions as executive director of Nishnawbe Homes, a non-profit housing provider in Toronto, Canada. For several years, she has been sharing the Native teachings with non-Native audiences.

Mark Hathaway lives in Toronto where he works as a freelance writer and website designer. He also works half-time as South America Program Coordinator for The United Church of Canada. Mark has a special interest in themes related to ecology, spirituality, social justice, and transformative action.

To view recordings of the classes, please visit: franparkcenter.org/golden-rule-2024



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